

Balance is an important quality of healthy living

“If mind and body are one, a true physical education should at the same time be a proper mental education, and vice versa” (Alexander Lowen, in *Bioenergetics*).

Though the content of this course is primarily based on physical fitness concepts and exercise protocol, we encourage you to consider the possibility that skill acquisition, standard exercise techniques, and all other bodily improvements are not simply body-related constructs. We invite you to entertain the idea that any positive change which occurs in the body has an immediate, direct, and equally positive impact on the psyche. This is the precept which underlies the realm of holistic-fitness (also known as mind-body fitness). From a mind-body perspective, balance and re-orientation are considered to be fundamental attributes of holistic fitness.

From a mind-body perspective, **balance** is the ability to remain upright, attentive, and to present one's self with equanimity, equipoise, and equilibrium. Balance allows movement to be free, flowing, and performed with ease. Balance is intuitively linked to the concept of freedom. Balance could be described as a fluctuating, moment-to-moment sense of equilibrium. Balance is non-static because it is largely driven by circumstances.

From a mind-body perspective, **re-orientation** is the ability to successfully deal with change by re-creating the optimal alignment, placement, or position with respect to a given reference system. Re-orientation is used to regain balance, placement or position. Re-orientation is dealing creatively and successfully with change. Re-orientation is tolerating and addressing uncertainty. Re-orientation is adapting and persevering. Re-orientation is about falling down and getting up again.

Why are balance and re-orientation considered to be fundamental attributes of holistic fitness?

To answer this question, let's look at the example of how the concepts of balance and re-orientation relate to fear. Fear stifles or inhibits the state of balance, thus creating a need for re-orientation. Fear is the affective (emotional) response to an uncertain, uncomfortable, or unsafe situation. Though we are seldom exposed to situations that produce extreme fear (and associated body symptoms such as tachycardia, stifled respiration, confusion, dissociation, or lack of consciousness), most of us regularly experience a low level of fear and anxiety that is related to the stress response. Even mild or moderate levels of fear can shake us up, make us feel uneasy, *and knock us off balance*.

To this end, the process of re-orientation requires the learned ability to temporarily tolerate the *uncertainty* associated with fear, and to overcome the state of imbalance by producing wise solutions that are creative and practical. Uncertainty is related to discomfort and inconvenience, both of which we naturally dislike and prefer to avoid. However, discomfort, inconvenience, and uncertainty are not life-or-death issues. The issues that they are attached to tend to be much less important than we make them out to be. Bothersome situations need not evoke strong feelings of fear, anger, anxiety, grief, or frustration. For example, a long red light is an inconvenience, but it is not an emergency. If the grocery store has sold out of your favorite bagels, it is a disappointment but not an emergency. For successful re-orientation you must learn to tolerate uncertainty while you seek a workable solution that requires redirection, relocation, or re-assessment. Whether you want to retain your balance or regain your balance, you must learn patience and acquire tolerance. *If you can learn to keep (relatively) calm in spite of discomfort, inconvenience, or uncertainty, you have already begun the journey toward a healthier and more balanced existence in body and mind.

Introduction

Who isn't in awe of the amazing feats that world class female gymnasts can perform on the balance beam? Though we all know that this level of expertise and accomplishment on the balance beam requires infinite hours spent in practice coupled with a youthful body, a high degree of natural flexibility, drive, and *courage*, what we might not understand is that expertise is the result of long term practice (cumulative effect) and ongoing daily practice (regularity) to achieve and to maintain any skill that is to be executed with a high degree of perfection on the balance beam. After all, it's not called the balance beam for nothing. Balance is the primary requirement for success on this apparatus.

Learning to balance is a skill that must be acquired and carefully nurtured or it will be lost. Finding balance, maintaining balance, moving with balance, losing and regaining balance, and shifting balance are all functional components of the 'balance-experience' that must be addressed by the gymnast as part of her training. The height of the beam being 120 cm up off the floor provides an additional psychological obstacle (fear of falling) coupled with the obvious and *real* possibility of severe injury. In a specialized situation like this, mastery occurs step by step through an artfully designed program of sequential progressions. When the gymnast has achieved a 90% success rate performing a skill on the floor, floor beam, or low beam, the coach believes that she has attained the appropriate degree of mastery, and is ready to perform the skill on the high beam.

The Floor Beam apparatus and the FLOOR BEAM FITNESS training program provide an efficient and effective way for the Personal Trainer and/or other fitness professionals to help their clients improve balance, coordination, somatic awareness and core stability. Supine and standing exercises performed on the Floor Beam are a simple yet practical training method for improving specific anatomical placements and movement sequences that support good posture and optimal physical use. The FLOOR BEAM FITNESS exercises incorporate slow, mindful movement, kinesthetic-based learning, and a series of skill progressions that are highly manageable for general fitness populations.

- There's a good reason why female gymnasts are extremely small in stature. The surface width of the beam is a narrow 10 cm (4 inches)!



About FLOOR BEAM FITNESS

FLOOR BEAM FITNESS Training

- The Floor Beam is a practical and portable accessory for the Personal Trainer or fitness professional and/or their clients who are interested in scientific core stability training methods and standing balance work.
- The Floor Beam technique is a simple, straightforward technique that provides a positive and practical approach to identifying, activating, and balancing the use of local core stabilizing muscles.
- Floor Beam is an efficient and effective way to help your clients understand the difference between global stabilizers and local stabilizers.
- Floor Beam works by providing immediate sensory feedback regarding how the body balances itself in both supine and standing positions.
- Floor Beam trains core stabilizers during relaxation (calm stillness), in anticipation of and preparation for movement (activated stillness), and during movement.
- The Floor Beam program is built on a system of achievable skill progressions. It is an exploratory, kinesthetic-based technique that is designed so that the participant uses a minimal number of repetitions (in many cases, a single repetition) to produce maximum results.
- The supine exercises of the Floor Beam technique can be considered an all-purpose training protocol in which positive results are easily transferable to upright activities. This is why the supine exercise program is presented first.
- The Floor Beam effectively demonstrates that stability, which requires proper and appropriate strength, is a prerequisite for and an essential component of any movement-based skill. This makes Floor Beam training very valuable for all types of athletes and dancers.

FLOOR BEAM FITNESS – Part 1

Supine Exercises for Core Stability

In terms of core stability, what we are essentially training in the supine FLOOR BEAM exercises is proper body mechanics. This includes the ability to produce and maintain an accurate positioning of the spine in the supine position, especially the lumbar region, during stillness and movement. It also includes the ability to produce efficient movement in the hip joint that occurs freely, without interference or compensations in the lumbar placement. During all of these exercises, the student should attempt to maintain the integrity of the lumbar and sacral areas. In fact, he or she will *need* to maintain the integrity of these areas if he wants to avoid rolling off the side of the beam.

The ability to sustain balance on the beam in a supine position requires the activation of deep core muscles in the abdomen and alongside the vertebrae. The beam is only four inches wide, so the majority of the body's balancing efforts must occur along the central channel of the body.

Recognizing proper placement and proper use - How does it look? How does it feel?

The supine FLOOR BEAM FITNESS exercises make it pretty easy to recognize the feel (sensation) of proper placement, because feedback is immediate. You will fall off of the beam if you don't do the exercise correctly. It's as simple as that!

- ❖ One of the best exercises for eliciting an obvious sensation of activation within the 'core unit' muscles is the *Flex and Lift both legs* exercise.
- ❖ In this exercise, the student will *feel* the necessity of bearing down in the abdominal muscles and at the same time firming the whole waistline girdle inward.
- ❖ In this exercise, the trainer will be able to *see* the student's body make the preparatory adjustment prior to lifting his legs and feet up off of the beam.

