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Feel good workouts

By Louis Hayes

I assume most of you will read the title Feel Good Workouts and say, “Hey, I want to do feel good workouts! What are they?” Well, a “feel good” workout is a fitness session in which almost nothing is accomplished, but during (and following) the motions of exercise, you feel good. Your guilt-ridden conscience gets miraculously cleared, as if guilt is discarded with the few sweat droplets that managed to squeak out of your pores. “Feel good” workouts find a home in that wasteland between doing absolutely nothing, and doing just enough to fool yourself into thinking your body exercised. Still want to hear more?

I’m not sure about you, but my time is precious. I have to make serious compromises in life to accommodate my time spent in a gym or on the track or trail. I cannot afford hours each week wasted in mindless, thoughtless, low-intensity workouts that do little for me except make me feel good. I need sessions that actually make me good.

“Feel Good” History

A couple of years ago, I was introduced to police and military trainer Henk Iverson. His company STRIKE Tactical (www.striketactical.com) has turned police firearms and tactical training upside-down here in Illinois, and has now spread across the country. I attended my first class and, within minutes of its start, the students were being challenged! Not what I had expected from someone who depended on our registration money to pay his bills. Henk claimed that we as students participate in “feel good training.”

He went on to explain how American police officers and trainers develop courses and scenarios that are only difficult enough to give the perception of a challenge. Henk said we spent too much time on drills at which we already succeed. Where is the challenge in that? He insisted that truly effective training demanded that officers



Photo courtesy of FIAT SWAT Taskforce



find their failing point and work through it. Officers must replicate reality by pressing the demands of speed and accuracy of weapon fire. And officers must do all this while moving, communicating, and processing new information from the surroundings. This was a tall order—not what I was used to.

Henk's statements resonated immediately. He was absolutely right when he said each string of fire should be carried out with the intensity of a life-and-death battle. I made a commitment to myself not only as a student, but also as a trainer, to discard all "feel good" training.

Ties to Physical Fitness

As I shared in previous writings, I recently transformed my own personal physical fitness program. Being a competitor in SWAT competitions, adventure races, and a myriad of other challenges, I realized I needed to change my previous workout routines. I recalled some of Henk Iverson's principles of "feel good" training, and thought to myself, "Am I doing "feel good" workouts too?" The answer was a regretful "yes."

I had not focused on performance. I had instead been doing just enough to fool myself into believing I accomplished something. I saw relatively little (if any) increase in measurable ability...speed, strength, or endurance. But I did leave the gym knowing I did a little something. Only later did I learn how "little" it actually was.

I had subscribed to a traditional weightlifting and running routine. I took advantage of mandated resting periods between sets of bench presses and curls. My running pace was a comfortable one, usually just fast enough to struggle with breathing. Looking back at these routines is somewhat humorous. Then I think about how fit I could have been now if I had learned the theories behind functional fitness fifteen years ago!

The Challenge

For some of you, jumping onto an elliptical machine at the health club is your workout. Others have a favorite trail to run while talking to a running partner. Yet others subscribe to a weightlifting routine that requires specified times of rest between sets of repetitions—rest

periods that frequently surpass the time spent lifting weights. And while you're working out, you feel good. That's crap! If you were truly working out, you'd be dreading it, hurting, gasping for air, feel like quitting. And when you finish, you might feel a sense of accomplishment, but the "feel good" emotion should not be felt during the workout. If you do feel good during the session, your body is not being pressed enough. If you can carry on a conversation or follow a TV program, you need to boost the intensity. Do not be misguided by a little sweat on your shirt...it's a poor indicator of work.

In my past, my so-called "feel good" sessions were making me do just that...feel good. They were helping me deal with the natural stresses of life (probably like most of you out there). I enjoyed the pump in my muscles. I liked having a routine and leaving the gym believing I did something positive for my body. But I kept being pestered by a truth that my efforts were not yielding quantifiable results. Two years ago, after I began my slow transition into a functional fitness system, I realized how much time I had been wasting with only small results. Now, my sessions are shorter in duration, but higher in intensity, and combine a resistance and cardio workout into one.

Functionality

During a true functional fitness workout session, you do not feel good. The exercises and workouts are very challenging. They press your body to its limits of speed, power, and strength. This can only be accomplished with a physical effort beyond feeling good. For me, what feels great is when I review my past journal entries and see how much faster, stronger, and powerful I have become. But during the workouts, I feel awful...constantly forcing myself to ignore signs to rest, relax, or slow down. Those are voices only the mediocre listen to. I refuse to be mediocre.



SWAT Officer takes a much needed breather after a great performance during a group Prison Workout

I set aside physical goals for myself. Sometimes I reach them on time. Sometimes I do not. When I fail at reaching a goal, I reset it: new date, new goal, new plan, new strategy, and new effort. One of my goals is to reach twenty pull-ups. Another is to complete a 100 Day Burpee Challenge. I've been sticking to a plan. It seems to be working. What are your personal goals?

The next time you are working out, think how you can add intensity to your session. Shorten your rest periods. Add a few more repetitions before you put the weight down. Do the movements faster. These few suggestions will help break the routine of a "feel good" workout, and begin flirting with a functionality yielding results both in the mirror and



in your workout journal.

The same old routine is like the same courses of fire on the pistol or rifle range: boring, static, and just going through the motions. You must learn new exercises and movements that shock the system into learning a new motion, develop coordination, and fine-tune agility. Learn and practice full-body drills. You must also discard old exercises with a limited scope of practicality: the triceps pushdowns, lat pull downs, and leg extensions/curls are some of those "limited" movements.

Summary

We all have a desire to succeed and an aversion to failure. Yet there is a very real risk of failure when one tries to become the best. Does your fear get in the way of your potential? I myself hate to fail. But I do it all the time. I cannot reach all my goals on time. I skip a workout session every now and then. But I'm proud to say I get back into the swing and drive on. Because for every failure I endure, I know there is a victory...a reached goal, a great performance, or a fast run. Those successes make it worthwhile

to bounce back from the letdowns. The sweetness of accomplishment trumps both the bitterness of defeat and the tastelessness of mediocrity.

Challenge yourself to practicing a few new functional exercises and reading about the theories. Anyone can get onto an elliptical machine or stationary bike and figure out how to use it while watching TV or reading a magazine. It takes someone with a bit more drive and desire and courage to make that conscious decision to work out. Look at the motto of Trinity Training Group: Committed to Excellence in Mind, Body, and Spirit. It's not about simply going through the motions of a workout. It's not about "feeling" good. It's not even about "being" good. It's about being the best you can be! 🌟

Prison workout: 30 days in the hole

Trinity Training Group had developed a 30-day bodyweight-only workout program for those looking for a "no equipment" transition into functional fitness. Most daily workouts take less than 30 minutes and can be completed at home, work, or in a hotel room. Visit <http://trinitytraining.blogspot.com> for more information.

*Note: This article is an expanded version of a posting on the Trinity Training Group weblog in April 2008.

About the Author

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