

TOM MORRISON

WHERE I WENT WRONG



The mistakes I made, so you don't have to.

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INTRODUCTION

Hi Guys, Tom Morrison here! The movement and mobility expert, the legendary sex icon, but I wasn't always that way. Everyone has to start somewhere, even the sexiest man alive.

I've wanted to write a book for a while, but I was never sure what it should be about. I wanted it to be useful, not just another "Here are my training methods and they really are the best ones" ... because the truth is, most training works for most people. It doesn't really matter what you pick to do as long as you enjoy it and you actually show up and work hard.

Instead, I thought: what do I hope to accomplish with this book? Fame? Fortune? Sexy ladies? Mainly, I don't want people to live a life of fear of their own body and be scared to do anything. I want them to know that if they run into a roadblock there's always alternatives to stopping doing what they love. Making your own mistakes is a great way to learn, but if you can avoid some very silly ones that I made, you'll have more time to pursue your training.

When the experienced and the wise say that "basics are key", they really mean it. Unfortunately it is very hard to convince someone, especially beginners (myself included!) to just work on the foundational stuff before getting stuck in, so I hope to meet people in the middle.

Just do the baseline mobility work you know you need, and hold off doing the more advanced movements you want to try - even for a few weeks. Small daily habits go a very long way and giving your body some nice movement that it enjoys first thing in the morning just makes sense.

Nowadays it's great that most people are aware of eating healthy and sleeping well, and understanding why they're good for you - but remember that moving well is just as important to your physical health. All your training doesn't need to be smashing yourself into the ground! Enjoy practicing how you move and remember you can always get better at anything; it just takes a little practice.

So here we go: the training & injury history of Tom Morrison.



CHAPTER 1

Nothing to Everything



Unlike a lot of coaches, I didn't have a sporting background or any interest in health, movement or fitness.

As far back as I can remember I HATED sport, running, or any form of exercise you could think of - I even begrudged walking to the shop; my life consisted of computer games and dodging school.

When I did go to school, I would lie through my teeth about how bad my asthma was just to get out of doing PE (Physical Education). I had no coordination or confidence with anything physical, and I didn't know you could get better at those things.

I thought you were either clumsy or you weren't - and I was clumsy.

The way other kids acted made me cringe, I just wanted to be at home playing my Sega Mega Drive (later, PlayStation). I liked being by myself. The single hero in role playing games. When online games came to the scene and you could "Share your gaming experience" with people around the world... I hated that.



Over the years, the more people I've met the more I realise everyone has different backgrounds, some you wouldn't expect. I was always quiet in school. We were always moving home so I was always the new kid. Children that feel safe in their environment love getting stuck in to new things, games & sports and don't worry what anyone else thinks of them. They'll often come out of school with good coordination and developed social skills - this confidence translates to how they move for the rest of their life.

Spend some time watching how people walk (in the least creepy way possible) you can tell if someone is confident by how they carry themselves. You can tell by someone's posture and movement if they look after themselves or not... plus you'll discover you can throw the "age" excuse out the window. Yes, it is more common to see older people moving slower, but you will notice people in their 20's and 30's walking around like someone has put their brakes on, AND you will also see Super-Grannies striding down the street carrying two dozen bags of frozen peas and cat food. There are some handbags you wouldn't dare try to steal...

Alas, my developmental years were spent hunched over a game's controller staring at a TV. The most movement I did was moving from the edge of my bed to a chair... occasionally walking to my friend's house to play their games.

Life goes on and I found the beauty of booze, cigarettes, losing the plot, and alcoholism.



I lived for weekday day-drinking and going out at weekends with my friends (it was more socially acceptable to be drunk with other people). The weirdest is how on earth I afforded to smoke 40 cigarettes a day!? Super kings too! But the one good thing to come out of those years, was discovering guitars.

Writing music, being creative and getting to scream into a microphone actually built my confidence and made me a better speaker. My newfound swagger and strut was being counteracted by 5 hours a day hunched over my guitar, but hey! At least I was sticking with something and it wasn't computer games anymore. I was getting some form of movement in at band practice... but I'm not sure how much head-banging is a "mobility drill" ...I guess the right movement is there, but the speed it is done at is an issue that needs addressed... there's an idea for a program! Neck Mobility for Head Bangers!

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By the age of 24 somehow my personal life managed to sort itself out, I had a steady job, bought my first house and had met the love of my life. However, I was over 100kg (220lb) and couldn't walk up the stairs without getting out of breath. I couldn't bend down to tie my own shoelaces, instead having to pull my leg up so I could reach my feet - don't even talk to me about the socks ! I'd hold an open sock and throw my arm at my foot in the hope they'd successfully connect. I'd have to wash myself afterwards from the exertion and walk around with no shirt on for 5 minutes before leave for work because I'd be sweating from trying to get my trouser button done... I still feel sorry for that button.

With my life finally feeling like it was going well, I knew I needed to get my ass in gear

and shift some of this weight before I started spiralling again. So, I roped in a friend to train with at the local dirt-cheap gym.

We had our induction, our cardio warm up and our fixed program of 3 sets of 10 reps on everything (to make sure you don't take too long on the machines).

For a year or so we went on-and-off in bursts of a few months. By the end, my friend and I could do the heaviest weight on every machine for 10 reps, but we didn't look or feel any different to when we started.

Knowing what I know now, each of those machines was grinding our joints to oblivion:

- The Shoulder Press deliberately made you press out in front to "avoid" shoulder mobility issues... basically if you didn't have any to start with, you do now.
- Treadmill belts pull your legs back for you, resulting in underdeveloped glutes and tightened hip flexors - which was great for me with a 40 hour a week desk job.
- The Leg Machines, (which we used because we feared the squat rack) weren't teaching us how to use our legs as a whole - not to mention a complete lack of core engagement.

These machines are great for a specific type of training, or for accessory work to a more complete program... but for someone with ZERO athletic qualities and no concept of mind muscle connection it is a BAD idea to let them do bodybuilding isolation training: you're confusing an already confused body. But no one pointed that out to me.

LIFE LESSON

Cheap gyms are cheap for a reason

So, first year wasted. I had to decide what was next.

Naturally after watching a few fights on TV I thought I could win the UFC, so why not sign up to the local martial arts club. Turns out... that shit was hard.

I was captivated though; I was fascinated at how someone could move so well and completely control another human being! Not only did I fall in love with MMA, but I also became infatuated with the traditional martial arts, especially Wing Tzun which means 'Beautiful Springtime'; how someone could move with such grace and flow while destroying another human was like watching something from 'Dragonball Z'.

Martial Arts first introduced me to the idea of 'where your weight is' and balance, the most significant thing about this was that I finally realised that it was TRAINABLE.

As far as athletic qualities go, being able to not fall over is an important one. When I'm working people with severe back, knee or hips pain, the majority of them struggle with simple balance exercises. The importance of balance was never mentioned when I was growing up (not even in those few PE lessons I did attend), so it never seemed like a big deal to me. Even when I started at the gym there was no talk of it. In fact, when you search YouTube or ask advice for something pain related you are barraged with hundreds of super-fancy-precise movement drills to do 7.5 times per day while drinking lemon water... but how often does someone just say, "Are you crap at balancing? You should probably start there".



Your body is controlled by your brain & CNS (Central Nervous System), if it thinks you're not likely to cope if you start to fall over (i.e. your reactions are slow, coordination poor and joints lack stability), guess what it is going to do? SLOW YOU DOWN! No.1 by making your muscles not move efficiently and No.2 by giving you pain.

Learning how to punch and kick and being shown how to use my body in unison to create power was just mind blowing! Sure, the membership was 5 times more expensive than the gym I was training at but being watched and taught how to move better and seeing physical and mental progress pretty much every month was worth every penny!

I started doing multiple private sessions every week with my martial arts teacher, and two sessions a week with a Strength & Conditioning coach! Even learned about the old diet and whatnot - my pot noodle sandwiches became steak, broccoli, and rice. The

guidance and support was just so helpful and I can't imagine where I would have ended up trying to figure out things on my own; there's a certain stage you reach that you can start to look after yourself but at the very, very start? If you missed out on being coached at a young age you are basically a taller, more coherent toddler - you need your hand held.

LIFE LESSON

"Expensive" gym memberships can be far more valuable

Now I had training that really motivated me: let's start doing it 6 times a week, twice a day! Yep. I went from doing nothing to doing absolutely everything. If there was a class on in my martial arts club I was there; it didn't matter what it was, if I was learning, I was happy.

I had never felt so confident before, I felt like I was gradually losing that clumsiness. My weight was dropping, I was looking better, and you literally could not stop me!



With my extra private training I was soon overtaking other people in the classes and progressed to the seniors... which meant even more classes! I would do the Beginners Classes first and then stay on for Senior Classes, then sparring afterwards - getting punched in the face was my weird new-found form of fun.

I was practicing forms at home and during work I had dumbbells in the bathroom, which is pretty much how I kicked my smoking habit, I had built little routines for anywhere I was. Little did I know I had become addicted to training, and that isn't always a good thing. When you're sore and really don't feel like going but are so scared to miss something you go anyway, you're on a slippery slope.

Enthusiasm can be your downfall, I was over-training and worst of all I still had no idea about what flexibility was or how bad mine was. My Martial Arts technique was improving like crazy - I couldn't kick you in the head, but I could take both legs clean out from under you. Lifting weights and general training though? My form kind of looked ok, but my squat depth was terrible, and I would compensate all kinds of ways.

I really shouldn't have been trying to press anything over my head with my concrete thoracic spine movement and limited shoulder flexion. But it really can happen to anyone: you see people squatting up and down, you're going up and down - same thing right? Exercise isn't that complicated, right?

It's supposed to hurt.... right?

Constant DOM's is normal... right!?

LIFE LESSON

Never assume you're doing everything correctly. Ask about how something should look, AND how it should FEEL



CHAPTER 2

Immediate Warning Signs



When people get injured (if it wasn't an obvious fall-on-a-spike injury) I think to some degree they felt a bit "off" for a few weeks, like something wasn't quite right.

Doing what I do now, I am just stunned I that I never thought anything was wrong with me, like, not even a tiny bit! I just thought, "That's the way I am" and laughed at my own inflexibility. When I looked around the class at the difference between how I was moving and how other people were moving I just thought it was because I didn't learn as fast, or because I was new... not that I was host to some major joint limitations.

In grappling classes I couldn't sit my butt down on my heels if I was in someone's guard, my knees didn't flex enough and the pressure actually felt like my kneecaps were going to pop off and shoot through anyone obstructing them. Any kind of submission involving legs made me feel like my knees were going to snap, especially my right one.

This didn't mean I was completely useless at martial arts. I was great at other things and could tap people out as much as they could me, but anything that required any hip flexibility left me coming up short; I always preferred to be on top, punching.



My shoulders didn't appear to have any issues, my overhead press looked "okay" to me and I was "good" at pull ups... but my elbows cracked constantly and my shoulders did feel a little bit out of place, especially my right one. Little did I know, my lack of thoracic spine extension was putting my shoulders in a bad position. My shoulder blades didn't move freely the way they should. Although my shoulders and elbows feel great today, I am fully aware of wear and tear inside, almost like the paint's been chipped.

When I think back, my neck was ALWAYS tight and cracked like crazy. Even though I could bully my way through submitting people my own level, as soon as I went up against someone who could leverage your posture against you, I would be tapping out faster than a drunken gambler claiming a free bet promotion (an old Bookies reference there for you).

My right shoulder started to play up first, it began feeling weak and sore all the time. Grappling one night I tried to roll out of a submission, and it didn't work, my arm went too far up my back and felt like it really over stretched. A few days later during drill practice I put my hand on the floor and it felt like my shoulder came out of the socket and popped back in, I lost all power in it.

Did I go to the doctor?

No, of course I didn't.

LIFE LESSON

If something feels like is damaged, get it checked out

My right scapula started to wing and got worse as time went on. It was sore if I didn't move it and it was sore-sore-sore(!) if I did... I'd messed something up for sure, but as I never got a scan I'll never really know what.

I spent weeks unable to lift my arm up above shoulder height until I eventually cracked and went to a physio. They gave me the usual band exercises, light dumbbell drills and stuff to do with a ball but said I would "never have the same range of motion again" and that I would have to come back for 8 more sessions.... even then with my limited knowledge at the time my "bullshit" sense starting tingling.

I went to a different Physio the next week who was recommended to me by a friend. He was twice the price, but he helped me restore my ability to reaching up behind my back and overhead in one session, he said I shouldn't need to come back. There's a reason why he was twice the price.

I had decided my lack of flexibility was actually a learning problem. I genuinely thought I just couldn't perform techniques well, that it was nothing to do with lacking the required range of motion and that my body physically did not move that way.

LIFE LESSON

Don't decide you just "can't do" a basic movement without genuinely working on it

Through sheer repetition I was starting to be able to sit on my heels though through repetition, and I could hit the odd triangle choke (legs around the persons neck). Despite this apparent progress, my knees started to hurt constantly. I was just forcing them into these positions I wasn't capable of which caused them to lose stability. Yet... I just thought the pain would just go away - it was just part of the process, right?

If I'd have just known to incorporate lunge variations, split squats and balance work I could have actually benefited from my new found range of motion by adding strength & stability along the way... but no, my loose knees took constant beatings, until one night hopping around with kick drills in a Muay Thai session - CRUNCH! I couldn't put any weight on my leg - my knee was in pure agony! Tom Morrison: taken out by a hop.

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This was the start of me self-labelling "my dodgy shoulder" and "my bad knees" and writing it off as me getting "too old" ...in my mid-twenties... now that makes me cringe as bad as when I thought I was cool and good at singing because I played guitar in a band.

A big part of the problem was the narrative I was surrounded by: people of the same mindset that injuries are just part of the training process, "no pain, no gain", and that after resting I'll "come back stronger".

... eh no, you don't come back stronger until you address the reasons you got hurt in the first place. Sitting and resting just leaves you getting weaker, then you go back to doing what you were doing beforehand, repeating the process again and again until something eventually gives up for good.

Around this time, I had taken up CrossFit. My physio (who I'd now become a more regular customer of) called it "CrossShit", and he immediately warned me that I was "not built for it" - and though I disagreed and figured he just had something against the sport...

He was right.



At that time, I had no hope of doing an overhead squat with a stick, let alone barbell, and my squat was so horrendous that you could have given me a weightlifting shoe with a 12 inch heel and I still wouldn't break parallel without rounding my back.

Every week I felt like I hurt something but tried to push through without saying to any of my Coaches. Some weeks it would be worse, and I would just have to sit at the side and watch the class. I was starting to feel exhausted all the time, no matter how much I ate or how well I slept, I was just always stiff and sore, and it really does take it out of you. My borderline-obsessive enthusiasm for training and the pressure I would put on myself for "missing out" just made me miserable.

I really began to hate my body and be envious of the other people around me who didn't seem to have any issues.



CHAPTER 3

Initial Pains & Ignoring Them

That knee injury was a painful one.

I rested, iced, compressed, elevated and gradually the pain got less, but it was always there and always swollen. So, I did what anyone would do - strapped it up and did martial arts anyway! Kicks, grappling - I did everything. It would get really, really painful if I pushed it too far, but I just didn't want to miss any training. The limp I was developing was epic. Depending on the class the night before I'd often be almost dragging my leg behind me on the way to work the next day; luckily I just had to sit down all day so I counted that as my recovery.

My lower back and hip were starting to feel really "off".



I recall a holiday in Amsterdam with my Wife where I complained the entire trip about how sore my right hip was. I didn't have the slightest suspicion that it could be to do with my constant limp. I just thought: "My physio will sort that out!" I was building quite the relationship with him, every session he would start with, "Have you given up CrossShit yet?!". No matter how much he told me that I needed to work on my flexibility I was so obsessed with chasing numbers that I would never take time off lifting... just in case I "lost my gains".

It was taking so long for me to get a scan for my knee that I just started throwing money at sports massages, getting my quads "stripped out", and getting my back worked on almost every week. I thought that was normal for the training I was doing, and I believed it was the only

way for my body to tolerate training as often as I wanted.

It eventually turned out that I had torn meniscus. In isolation this isn't too much of a big deal, but after assessing my MRI they thought I'd done extra damage by continuing to grind away on it, though it had healed by the time I was scanned.

My right shoulder became an issue again.

I couldn't lift my right arm past shoulder height without it nipping; my occasional bad shoulder had become my constant bad shoulder. Once when I tried to overhead press I badly sprain my neck - like bad, scary bad, I wasn't able to turn my head for a week at a time, even with treatment.

With a good old Google search I self-diagnosed that I had Shoulder Impingement and a Winged Scapula, which I got confirmed by professionals and chiropractors I knew. One more thing to add to my list of woes, I told myself.

Now, this is where people go wrong with Physical Therapy: just because my pain went away after a few treatments, it did not mean that my shoulder was working properly. My upper back moved like a brick and even though I was able to press heavy weights, my shoulders had no stability or control - hence the constant neck issues - and my right shoulder blade just had a party any time I tried to do anything.

When you get an injury the surrounding muscles chip in to help, so my shoulder had reorganised itself. On top of my winged scapula, my right shoulder was rounded forward (protracted) more than my left. With what I know now, if I presented these shoulder problems, I would have it completely sorted in a few weeks or months and I have done so for many other people. How the hell did it never occur to me that something might still be wrong!? My entire body was twisting in front of my very eyes!



Every few appointments with my Physio he would stand me in front of the mirror and say "Look at the state of you! ... CrossShit!". He was doing the best he could, but it didn't stop me. I kept going back to movements I just shouldn't have been doing at the time. I wanted to weightlift. My positions were getting a bit better, and my numbers were going up - that meant I was getting stronger, in my mind.

Despite this, I'd often be quite grumpy at the gym. When someone would ask me what's wrong I would reply, "Awk, it's just my bad shoulder, it's fucked" or "Stupid knee is playing up again" or "My back's really tight today". I'd say it like it was just normal, while sitting on my foam roller, just, "Ah well, such is life". You have no idea how annoyed I get when I think back to this time, there are so many things I should have been doing at this stage it's not even

funny. The only information I would come across that made sense to me was "roll this", or "attach a band to that".

My body was speaking to me, it was telling me something was still wrong, that it needed something, and I was completely ignoring it.

LIFE LESSON

It's not normal to be in pain all the time

I had resigned myself to a life of having a bad shoulder purely because I didn't know there were techniques out there that would help; ones that actually improve your range of motion and build stability and strength, rather than just temporarily make the pain go away. This uninformed and unaware state I found myself in is a big motivation for what I do what I do now, and why I give so much information away for free.

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Fast forward a bit and I went to a Martial Arts seminar by Master Paul Whitrod. Here I learned Indian Wrestling techniques ...and my shoulder got better... my shoulder got a lot better... fast. In fact, my "bad" shoulder got better than it ever was... they both did.

The techniques I was introduced to - the techniques I needed - had existed for over 100 years, I just didn't know how to find it (or, more honestly, too lazy to look for it). The benefits I got were purely from building rotational strength in my shoulders before I even understood how to open my thoracic spine. Most of my neck issues and pain was resolved so quickly.

Originally done with Indian Clubs, I adapted the movement slightly to work with dumbbells and I just call them Dumbbell Shoulder Rotations (Search: "Dumbbell Shoulder Rotations Tom Morrison" on Youtube for a demo). I get messages all the time from people it's helped: their shoulder issues, neck pain, upper back pain, arm tingles, grip weakness - you would be shocked how many other things can be corrected as a by-product of doing rotational exercises like these.

The first time I tried it the crunches and clicks that came from my shoulders nearly made me sick - but it was a good kind of weird, y'know? It was uncomfortable but felt better at the same time. After a few weeks



of consistently working on them I was able to add more weight and those noises all stopped. As weird as this sounds, I felt like my shoulders felt like shoulders... instead of the original rust buckets that were attached to my torso. And I really, REALLY don't miss the neck spasms.

LIFE LESSON

If something is always hurt, find out what it needs. Never be ok with losing function in any body part

So now my right shoulder actually worked again, I began to learn some pretty fancy gymnastic stuff now especially with the gymnastics rings. My Martial Arts was really taking off and I was asked to be an Assistant Instructor.



Training was going well! I was also forced to eat well because an Autoimmune disorder I have suddenly increased in severity, so my body fat was lowering, and I finally got that pesky bit of meniscus removed from my knee too. Even though my back and hip kept annoying me, things were looking like they were on the up... as long as I kept skipping leg day.

There was a catch though. Despite feeling so confident, my warm ups were becoming ridiculous.

I was spending more time rubbing things and trying to activate things than I was actually training some days. If I didn't do my full routine it I would feel rubbish and convince myself that the session wouldn't be good because I didn't prepare enough. Yet, nothing I was doing was addressing

my thoracic, hip or ankle mobility, I was just beating the crap out of all the tight bits I had; I was trigger happy for trigger points.



CHAPTER 4

Gait Pattern & More Injuries



Back before the knee surgery to remove the floating meniscus, I must have walked with a limp for the best part of a year; in my wedding video I walk as if I have a peg leg.

The little bit of constant knee pain was changing how I walked and stood. I was slightly leaning more on my left leg, causing my left obliques to shorten, my left hip flexor to tighten and my left glute to lose power - keep in mind that my left was my 'good' side.

At the time I had a reason for moving like this (my knee was injured and my body was trying to reduce the risk of further damage by taking pressure off my knee) but think about the daily habits you have: Do you always stand on the same leg when waiting in a queue? Always sit with the same leg crossed? Always lean to the same side at your desk or on the sofa? The things that were happening to me are happening to everyone else daily - it's just so easy to slip into bad habits.

LIFE LESSON

**There are a lot of hours in the day.
Imbalances can be created outside the gym**

Even after my knee recovered and I didn't have any pain anymore, my hip flexibility was still terrible, and the way my body moved didn't adjust back. Out of habit I still stood on mostly on my left leg, I still walked with a subtle limp, and my hips were out of alignment with very, very different strength and tightness levels - but I had no idea.

One quick test to see if you have a bad hip shift is to close your eyes and try to walk straight for 10 paces or so. If you have a shift, you'd most likely go off the straight line, and you'd probably have (or soon will have) severe back pain.

I had a shift, but no pain yet, just this tightness that I would get on and off... but I could foam roll that out.

In fact, at this point I considered my back to be very strong because my deadlift weights were high. I prided myself on having really good technique, but I look back now with my "coach eyes" and can see I was so sideways, but at the time no one I was training under thought it was an issue (or was even looking for it) - as long as your back seemed straight.



I did deadlifts as often as I could, especially as my squat was so terrible. I always felt far weaker under the bar than pulling it. I was hitting the standard strength programs, 5/3/1's, 5x5's, push/pull superset workouts, etc. My numbers were going up each cycle (if I got through injury free) and I dare I say even becoming stronger & fitter than other people. I was actually getting competitive and enjoying challenging people!

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The thing about having an "off" gait pattern, such as the limp leftovers I had at that time, is that every step you take is reinforcing your imbalances and making them worse. A lot of people I work with who have similar issues simply need their symmetry restored to an acceptable level for their

body to stop freaking out, then they can get back to their normal training... but I was blissfully unaware of what was happening. As I walked, my built up compensations caused me to completely shift my weight from leg to leg in a very different way to normal, the bottom of my shoes would be worn out in weird places, and every time I ran I felt like I was running with one leg while the other one dragged behind me.

Your body wants to walk, run, climb, swim, eat and sleep... it doesn't want to pump its muscles till they feel like they're going to burst, or throw heavy objects above its head. As fun as deadlifts, handstands, heavy squats and Olympic Weightlifting are, they're relatively unnatural movements that require a good level of body symmetry, which I was massively lacking in.

I may have been fine... if I wasn't pushing my body to its limits. If I wasn't blindly following strength program after strength program without addressing my weaknesses.

Being overly dominant to one side will cause your body to twist or rotate when you do bilateral movements (movements using both sides, such as deadlifts or squats). Sometimes individual joints become annoyed and you could experience knee pain, hip pain or neck pain, but long term, if you don't address your full body and keep chasing individual problems as they come up, you could be setting yourself up for a more serious injury.

I was following percentages and I was taking rest days, but my other daily habits were just contributing to my lack of flexibility. I sat, hunched over for 11 hour days at a desk, always crossing one leg over the other and never doing the other way around.

Your body has a consciousness of its own and its job is to protect you: I was walking funny, sitting crooked all day, needing a crazy self-massage and activation 30 minute warm up... then I tried to lift heavy stuff... so, who's the stupid one?

LIFE LESSON

**Give your body what it wants & needs first
and then it will allow you to play**

I was beginning to develop a weird nipping feeling at the front of my left hip, squatting was becoming even more uncomfortable and I developed Patellar Tendonitis so I avoided lunges, as putting my knee on the floor was too painful... "Ignoring that for a while should help." I thought, "Let's crush some deadlifts instead!"

I felt something that I could only describe as a rip on the left hand side of my lower back... Holy fuck it hurt.

It was enough to take my breath away when I stood up. I didn't have a hope of doing anything in the gym.

Apparently, I had torn fascia and that was exactly how it felt: like I had been ripped open, but inside.

A quick initial appointment followed by three consecutive weeks with my physiotherapist and I was pain free. But, predictably by this point, I didn't address my overall movement. I gave no thought as to why it may have happened, just maybe I hadn't warmed up enough that day, just unlucky I suppose. My technique appeared fine. I know, I'll foam roll more next time (more on this later...).

It's only now after years of dedication to movement have I developed my eye to spot subtle warning signs, if I could only look back on myself.

A few months later I did a heavy clean and BOOM: completely twisted my pelvis in one jarring bad movement.

Well fuck... that was really sore.

I could not stand up straight. If I tried my hips pointed one way, my torso pointed the other and one knee was noticeably bent while the other was locked out; my physiotherapist had his work cut out for him once again.

At this point he playfully suggested I should consider stopping heavy lifting, and that I was pretty much paying his mortgage; but I didn't care, I had the money, and my training was the most important thing to me.

Three weeks of treatment and resting went by and I was back lifting, again, building back up, again... coming back stronger *rolls eyes*. But this time would be different. I didn't want to hurt my back ever again; to be honest it was getting kinda expensive. When even your physio is telling you that you shouldn't need to be seeing them that much, you do start to think maybe it's something you might be doing wrong.

My brief era of feeling like a beast in the gym had come to a disheartening halt, again.

I was determined to start taking my mobility seriously, I knew I'd been neglecting it and I athletes I followed and admired did go on about it a lot. I had strength to build back, lost time to make up for, and a nemesis I needed to conquer: my Squat.



CHAPTER 5

Half-Rep Morrison

Ah, my squat... I hated it.

It made no sense to me how people could sit in a squat and just stay there - I would just fall backwards, my knees would cave in, my back would look like a question mark, and if I stayed down there too long it would take me a good grunt and groan with my hands on my knees to get back up.... yet I would still throw my lifting shoes on and do my half-rep heavy-ass barbell Back Squats.

When I'd workout with my training buddies they'd say things like, "Are you going to do the other half of those squats later?!"

I had serious squat envy. How they would just be able to sit down like they were just resting, and I would feel like I was made of rusty door hinges that had been lubricated with rough sand.



Experts always talked about ankle issues, or hip issues, or thoracic issues, or knee issues, but for me it was ankles AND hip AND thoracic AND knee issues. Remember my lack of knee flexion from my Martial Arts days? Yeah, that wasn't helping either.

The problem was that I was now in control of my own training. I had just qualified and started to work part-time as a coach, so I just started doing the things I liked doing all the time. No coach to take orders from, no one to force me to work on things I found difficult.

I could Deadlift and Power Clean & Jerk heavy so I wanted to be seen to be doing them as often as possible, for my own sense of credibility... it was embarrassing to be caught trying to do an Overhead Squat with an empty bar and not even be able to get half way down - my ego just couldn't take it.

When you aren't flexible and just train the things you're good at and if you avoid your end range positions for a long time, you just start to strengthen limited ranges, reinforcing your lack of movement. The more weight you start to add the less range your body will allow because it just knows you won't be able to cope with it.

Those less-than-ideal positions become stronger and your body will become even more reluctant to give you range of motion outside of these positions. Every rep you do is teaching your body to stop where it stops; you are literally training yourself how to be inflexible. This is fine if you are aware of it, acknowledge it and want to train a stiffer sport such as Powerlifting (and accept the wear and tear on your body that this brings), but if you want to train more varied sports, try more advanced bodyweight movements or flexibility-demanding sports like Olympic Lifting then that type of inflexibility training will be detrimental.



There was a time that I was able to Power Clean a considerable amount more than I could Clean - that is not normal. In a Power Clean, you don't squat down to catch the barbell, you just pull it higher up to your shoulders. If you squat down, you don't have to "pull" the bar as high, instead you rely on your (theoretically) stronger legs to stand up with the weight, rather than relying on your (theoretically) weaker arms to pull it up high.

Still to this day it's a running joke to call me chicken legs. I would never have admitted it at the time, but it used to really upset me: laughs about my "half squat", every time I tried to do a full Clean into a squat people would shout "Power Clean!" as I couldn't squat down below parallel, I just got stuck! My joints just didn't move that way. I was getting

shown up by women in their 50's who had better positions than me!? Like what the heck!! I had big muscles!? How dare they be better than me!!!! (Obviously, I was being very supportive of said women, but I am human and squat envy is a terrible affliction)

This the first time I had ever felt embarrassed about my training: fair enough when I couldn't do something whenever I was just a gym goer, just a member, learning alongside everyone else... but now I am supposed to be a coach, I should be able to do these things.

I didn't want to be a "those who cannot do, teach" type of coach; I wanted to be stuck in with everyone, to inspire them.

It really started to get to me when I had to teach the Snatch; I avoided it at all costs. I couldn't Overhead Squat with an empty bar, how was I supposed to teach someone how to pull themselves under a bar and swiftly catch in an Overhead Squat?! I had no idea what that even felt like. Wanted to learn how to deadlift? Lift kettlebells? Push ups? Muscle ups? Power clean? Press overhead? Handstands? Foam roll? No problem! Squat.... Snatch? Emmm, the other guy is in tomorrow, I'll get him to go through them with you.

My years of not addressing my flexibility had caught up with me. Not only could I not do certain movements, I couldn't even teach them. It didn't feel right to even bluff it, I was just prefixing my teaching with, "Yours will probably look a lot better than mine, I have 'this-and-that' wrong with me so don't try and replicate my demonstration"

LIFE LESSON

Don't wallow in the past, focus on what you can do now

It really was a turning point for me. I had to do something about this. So, squats it was. I squatted every day, I did as many different variations as I knew. I did programs with squat tempos and pauses in the end positions, I practiced my overhead squat every day, every session. My numbers were going up with it and my squat getting pretty damn strong! Over time I could even Overhead Squat with weight on the bar, and although it still looked terrible, I was making progress!



Cleans became my favourite movement; I was finally catching the bar (just) below parallel! The gap between my Power Clean and Clean had started to close, I felt like I was on the right path! It was awesome! Weights were being chucked around every day, my shoulders felt good too, and my workouts were getting better! Months were passing by and I was getting more and more confident with my coaching and people were always saying how much they enjoyed how I explain things to them; I had so much patience for beginners because I knew how hard it was when you just weren't natural at learning new things.

I was starting to feel more confident as someone that could actually teach people how to get stronger and move better, I was working with anyone that I could and trying to spread my newfound love for working on weaknesses.

Watching videos of myself however, I saw my squat still wasn't quite low enough, my chest dipped loads in the snatch and I was a million miles off even being able to watch a pistol squat, let alone do one! I needed some extra assistance; I had a taste of things getting better - I had to step it up!

Let's get back to that mobility stuff that I kept hearing so much about...



CHAPTER 6

The Foam Rolling Fiasco

So why does Tom Morrison hate Foam Rolling so much? Because Tom Morrison used to love foam rolling.

I taught it to my clients and even at seminars I devoted entire sections to it. Doctors, Physical Therapists, and highly respected athletes were making video demonstrations on it, there were books, programs and all kinds of rollers, balls and peanuts available to buy.

Every seminar & workshop I attended both the instructors and people there were using rollers and lacrosse balls. During my weightlifting certifications it was just the normal to show up early to get your foam rolling in before the session. All your favourite athletes were being sponsored to post about their self-massage recovery as often as possible, why would you question it? The biggest and best were doing it, surely, it's the right thing to do?

LIFE LESSON

**Just because everyone else is doing it
doesn't mean it'll be right for you.**

Back when it was called 'Body Rolling' I took a few classes to learn more about it, as well a Kundalini Yoga and Thai Floor Massage. With my knowledge as a Coach growing with experience and qualifications, plus the research I was putting into massage, I developed better rolling styles to simulate professional massage techniques. After all, I had hurt everything there was possible to hurt; I knew the exact pressure, locations, and directions to replicate with the roller or ball to relax any muscle. I could get rid of any pain very easily!



My foam rolling technique knowledge was amazing, if someone had a pain, they came to me and I would have a technique to help them out. I was starting to be known as the 'Mobility Guy'... but little did I know then, for all the wrong reasons. Well, maybe I'm being too harsh on my past self, 50% the wrong reasons, I was starting to develop some good movement drills alongside the rolling.

I wanted my deep squat, I wanted to go ass to grass - it was time to address my joint restrictions with my new mobilisation techniques. I started doing banded ankle distractions, deep hip distractions, rolling my quads, smashing my calves until I couldn't take it anymore, getting the ball into my Piriformis, stretching, stretching, stretching and guess what! It was working! My squat was getting lower! So much so that people were noticing and commenting! I was the Mobility Guy!!

On the back of this progress I started squatting every day again, but this time incorporating unweighted, relaxed squat work as well. I would use a band to hold me up while I sat in a bodyweight squat for extended periods of time, I even tried doing a squat challenge that required you to sit in a squat for an accumulated 30 minutes per day for 30 days. Unfortunately, I had to give it up after my left hip pain came back, but it was ok! I could roll that out now. Once I'd got the pain to go away, I would train.



When I think back to the initial changes in my shoulders and squat mobility, I would have 100% put it down to the release of my lats and glutes and calves and quads on the roller... even though what actually happened was I was practicing squats more frequently, bringing attention to the bottom position more, and actually improving my form. The big thing I was still missed was using lunge variations to improve the strength & stability on one side at a time and using better thoracic spine movements - I would learn about these later.

I was training my body in the wrong way: I was hurting my muscles with rollers/balls until they stopped restricting my movement, I was loosening things while teaching my body to relax into a squat, not to brace, and I still hadn't addressed the stability issues or imbalances that were there.

I was making changes to my flexibility but I still had no idea of the differences in my hip flexibility, position or strength between my left and right sides. I was just rubbing things blindly and getting what I thought were "results", which were really just bad in a different way.

After a while I started to become one of these elitists who refused to wear weightlifting shoes to squat, "you should be able to squat in your bare feet" I would say through my monocle and upturned nose. Yet, my squat at the time had a big forward lean, a butt wink (rounding of the lumbar spine) and a wonky drive up to standing.

If I'm honest, compared to what I do now, the amount of time and effort I was putting versus the progress I was getting out was ridiculous.

I was becoming more reliant on the roller and balls. I was feeling stiffer every day, especially my upper body, my aches and pains were starting to bounce around my body, it was actually as if I was craving the pain of poking myself just for the relief when you stop. I kept training through it; I was getting more flexible so clearly I was doing the right thing?

LIFE LESSON

Pain is trying to tell you something. If you poke it until it goes away, you've just told your body to shut up

Even though my warm ups were taking even longer, and I seemed to start from zero each session, I'd be damned if I was going to lower my weights. I was getting more flexible, that was what I wanted, that was how you got a better squat... so I kept lifting the same weights without any consideration that these new ranges might actually be weak.

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Nowadays I have a lot of one-on-one sessions where I find myself explaining that rather than someone being inflexible, some of their joints are actually too mobile... but weak & unstable. This comes purely from misinformation and exercises being used out of context. Passive stretching... and even foam rolling... have their place, but they should not be used in isolation without movement and stability being addressed too.

When I get someone to stop stretching & rolling and instead get them to regularly do lunge variations, thoracic rotations and some balance work they'll send me a message a few weeks later in pure disbelief of how good they feel - and almost feel as if they have converted to some new form of religion. It's strange when you have been working hard

on something for so long, then you are finally shown a better way, you're rushed with that "Where have you been all my life" sensation that you really do just want to share it with everyone.

Most people I meet will have unstable shoulders, or maybe one of their hips, which is quite easily rectified through movement. But what happens when the person has actively loosened both hips, when their hips were uneven to begin with? If the constant extra attention they were giving to their "bad shoulder" was actually causing it to be too mobile? If they spent no time building any stability in their new ranges of motion whatsoever? Ignored warning signs of spinal disc issues such as drop foot (inability to dorsiflex your foot)? Had constant groin pain which required daily resistance band and roller attention and then decided to do a 3 Rep Max Back Squat in flat shoes after 100 pull ups?

I'll tell you what happens... Pop... pop, pop.



CHAPTER 7

Lieutenant Dan

I had gotten so used to hurting myself that after my dodgy sounding squat with those pops I laughed it off.

I thought I'd be stiff the next day and have to make an appointment with my physio (again) to sort it out. I wasn't worried, my back was tightening up as it had many times before, so I just made sure not to sit still and kept moving until I got a hot bath that night and went to bed.

I'll never forget that next morning.

I woke up and felt so stiff, I tried to rotate and sit up out of bed as normal and could barely tense my abs without my back going into a painful spasm. What had happened?

After some careful and cautious manoeuvring, I made it to the least painful seated position that I could, practically taking all my weight through my arms.

Then, I tried to stand.

My legs came from under me and I hit the floor screaming. I can't even say it felt like I'd been shot, I would imagine being shot is much more pleasant than that.

It felt like the nerves in my left leg were being grabbed, twisted and yanked out from the base of my spine. The pain was shooting up and down, up and down, burning, twinge after twinge, spasm after spasm; I would have been sick... if I could breathe.

The first two times I twinged my back I swore and cursed my body, but this was so painful I couldn't even comprehend it; there were no words for this, clean or dirty. I was biting down on the blanket screaming as my wife was next to me crying, asking me over and over what could she do, all I could shout back was "I don't know!".

Agonizing centuries went by before the pain subsided just enough for me to limp/fall downstairs, and I made an emergency appointment with my Physio. I knew that he could help me, but after how bad getting down my own stairs was, getting up the stairs to his practice was going to be a major problem. I was almost crawling instead of walking, trying to stay upright made me feel like I was going to snap in the middle.

As my wife drove me to the Physio I had to lie down in the back of the car, I couldn't flex my spine at all or sit. It was so embarrassing trying to get out of the car and my wife had to walk me to the door, holding my hand and supporting my physically the best she could as I somehow managed to clamber up the stairs into his office.

I stood there in silence as he told me: no, he couldn't help me. That he thinks I have done something proper bad this time, that he wasn't willing to touch me at this stage and said I had to go to hospital.

I felt like I was standing outside myself listening to someone else talking. We'd known each other a long time by that point. Normally he would be messing around and calling me Lieutenant Dan (from 'Forrest Gump') saying I'd be in a wheelchair soon if I didn't stop doing stupid heavy lifting in the gym, but that day he was being deadly serious; not joking around with me at all, and kept apologising - he looked really worried. I couldn't understand why. He had fixed me so many times before, my shoulder, my knee, and my back the other times it was injured, what can be so bad now that he won't even try to work on me?

But with the symptoms I had, it's best not to touch until getting a scan.

LIFE LESSON

Don't hurt your back. No really, don't

Off to A&E I went, greeted by an unsympathetic Doctor that made me feel like I was being a Drama Queen. He lifted my leg about 3 inches saying I had "good range of motion". I was dismayed. After all my flexibility progress I could normally put my palms flat on the floor with straight legs, but in that Doctors office I couldn't even tilt my head forward without my lower back SCREAMING, let alone try bending.

A big box of painkillers was prescribed. No answers, no exercises, no "do this" or "don't do that." Nothing.

The extreme pain went on for weeks, and I was in bits.

If I sneezed or coughed, I hit the floor. I became genuinely terrified of sneezing, and I had bad hayfever. If I tried to turn too fast I hit the floor, if sat down for too long the pain would be ten times worse when I got up - it felt like my spine was being sucked out my butt. Car journeys were a nightmare, even a 15 minute trip meant I wouldn't be able to walk upright for an hour.

Sometimes I would be having a slightly better day, and then step down a step or the curb too fast and be crippled again for the rest of the day.

I hated everything, I couldn't concentrate, I couldn't breathe... at one point when I went to sleep and I wished that I just wouldn't wake up, I even voiced that out loud to my wife. My mood and the way I had to live my life was putting a massive strain on our relationship. We were expecting our first child, and all I could do was think about myself. I felt like a massive selfish prick and fell into a deep depression.

I was so angry! It wasn't fair! How could I know what I know and be as careful as I was and get this badly hurt?! I was making a name for myself as being an amazing coach that "really knows their stuff" and THIS happened?! Was I unlucky? Was I stupid? Did I actually know anything? I couldn't bear the pain, but the embarrassment was almost as bad... my coaching career was over, who would listen to the 'mobility guy' with the broken back?

I hounded my Doctor, how could I just have been sent home? I'm in my twenties and I can't even put my socks on?!

Eventually I was passed onto a specialist, a consultant who referred me for an MRI scan. Due to the healthcare system in the UK, MRI wait times can be unpredictable.

He told me that in the meantime I should consider a career change. That I would never lift again.

But it turns out, I'm stubborn.

No, I will lift again.

I had to do something.

I got sick of waiting for it to go away.

I was no closer to getting an MRI scan or any further help from my Doctor so I started doing a routine of rolling and stretching in the mornings. If I did my routine, I could move a bit better for the rest of the day, if I didn't, I would be forced back in bed by the afternoon.

My body was hyper aware of everything, I started to notice just how twisted I was, all the anomalies in my body that I've told you about... I could actually



feel them now. It was horrible! How did I not notice before? All my pain was on my left side, but my right hip was so tight and the amount of flexion & rotation I had in it compared to my left was laughable. I thought back and I started to realise the times this had cropped up, from my dodgy martial arts right back to not being able to sit crossed-legged in school.

With this heightened awareness I started to notice that the foam rolling didn't have an effect on the tightness I was feeling... at all, like, none. It genuinely felt like it did nothing anymore. I decided to try not using the roller in the mornings, instead spending more time stretching and moving. My relief wasn't diminished - if anything I felt better for it.

I started to think about all the people I knew who used foam rollers: they really relied on them. They all had movement issues and seemed to be hurt a lot. I finally realised I had been wrong all this time and it was amazing, everything started to make sense to me all at once. Everything I had studied about movement and the body clicked at once, I knew what I needed to do to stop my symptoms. I altered my morning routine and got to work.

I had to spend a lot more time stretching my right hip to bring it closer to the range of motion of my left hip, but the closer they got and the more balance I had between sides, the less intense my back pain was.



Eventually, I got to the point that when I woke up (before my stretches) I could bend forwards and reach down to my knees before pain forced me to stop. After working through my hip stretches, I was actually able to touch my toes... cautiously.

I was still really, really nervous even after I started feeling a little better. I had a few flare ups throughout my experiments and recovery, and the thought of going back to beginning terrified me, but I persevered, and each flare up lasted for less and less time. I realised that having dominance over my movement was going to be the key to stopping this ruling my life.

I started to notice patterns, when my pain was bad and things that my body wouldn't let me, for example if I did a side plank on my right side and attempt to lift my left leg up, I would just fall down, but as I worked on it and regained the ability to do it I'd immediately see a reduction in my pain & symptoms. My left glute felt like it wasn't

there, not like it was numb, but as if a shark had just taken a bite out of that side of my body. From this I discovered I had an over-developed left erector and my left hamstring would always feel tighter than my right to try and compensate for my lack of glute awareness.

But, I was slowly getting back to training.

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By the time I got my MRI appointment I had made myself completely pain free, but I had waited that long I thought I may as well get it anyways. After being told I wouldn't be able to lift again and have to consider a career change by a specialist I kinda wanted to see it all healed up. I had gone back to heavy lifting and even hit new personal bests with multiple lifts, my mobility was the best it had ever been, and I felt strong!

The MRI results came back with an L4, L5, S1 disc protrusion and extrusion with nerve impingement on my left side. A relatively serious injury. It hadn't "gone away" but I had no pain.

I had suspected something like this through my research, although when I saw a picture of my leaky spine I felt a panicked, knee-jerk tingle in my back that I literally had to tell to stop – your brain can be a nervous nelly sometimes. Nothing had changed, I had to remind myself that the words on the page and the black and white photo of my spine didn't change what I had achieved.



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On the next page is a shortened version of the routine I did every morning; it has reps for you as a guide. Then the next chapter is dedicated to more details of my recovery.

If both sides feel similar, do the same number of reps per side, but if you feel more like the way I did, with one side much tighter/weaker than the other, spend a bit more time on the ones you feel the difference in:

Tests:

Neck

How does it feel? Tight, shortened?
Maybe only on one side?

Overhead Reach

Can you comfortably lift your arms overhead? Do your ribs flair up? Are your arms both at the same height?

Toe Touch

How close are you to your toes? Do you feel a stretch in your hamstrings or back?

Squat

Can you easily sit in a squat? Or is it uncomfortable? Do your ankles roll, knees cave, or back round?

Glutes

Squeeeeeeeze! Do both cheeks have the same power? Can you isolate your glutes, or do your quads/hamstrings join in?

Straight after the routine, retest!

Does your neck feel better? Has your toe touch improved? Does your squat feel more comfortable? And can you crack walnuts with your glutes now!?

The Routine: (Video: <https://youtu.be/-oYKSXyDOEY>)

5x Levator Scapulae Stretch + Shoulder Flexion (per side)



Deep Lunge Position:

5x Knee Pry (per side)



5x Elbow to Floor + Thoracic Rotation (per side)

5x Pigeon Stretch with Reach (per side)



Downward Dog:

10x Alternating Heels to Floor



5x Bent Knee Shoulder Press Through



Couch Stretch Position:

5x Grab Elbow & Lean Away (per side)

5x Hip Circles (both directions, per leg)



15 second Forward Fold Rebends

15 second Thoracic bridge (per side)

5x Standing Hip Circles (each direction)





CHAPTER 8

Reclaiming My Body & Building Habits



So how did my pain go away?

Since my revelation of what was not working, I started to experiment with things that I hadn't tried yet. Not only was I stretching, I was also starting to use movement drills and balance to make my body react and brace correctly.

Gradually I started to remove stretches from my routine in favour of addressing joints via moving! For years I didn't train full range joint movements because they didn't look cool or feel "hard enough", I was only interested if there was weight involved or if I had a specific reason for stretching a specific muscle for a specific exercise I was struggling with... but I started to realise the benefits of relaxed joint movement; sitting into the deepest positions I could and just literally having a wiggle. What muscles was I specifically targeting? Who cares!



By doing this, the range of motion in my hips was improving and I finally felt like I could "sit" into my own hips and like the muscles were doing something rather than just hurting my joints.

The more I wiggled, the more I noticed how much tighter my right hip was compared to my left hip, like 1000 times different. All the issues with my right knee was coming from this, even after the operation it had never felt 100% right, but when my hips felt more even the difference in my knee was like night and day.

LIFE LESSON

**If you practice moving better all the time
you'll automatically exercise better**

I couldn't believe how I wasn't aware of any of this AND how it had never been pointed out to me before. I had been seen by so many people at this point and spent thousands on treatments and I was never once shown that my hip rotation and flexion on each side was completely different. My right shoulder was noticed because it was obviously lower & more rounded to the front and the lateral hike of my hip was pointed out, but the lack of attention to how simple movements FELT was a massive light bulb moment for me.

Not only for my own personal gain but also as a coach - someone could look like they are doing something 100% correct but it could feel completely wrong, and they might not even know or understand that!

I was noticing all of these little micro shifts in my body as I moved, the better I got at controlling them the more confident my body started to become. I was feeling muscles the way they were supposed to feel, I was able to generate tension using my better flexibility. My pain started disappearing in conjunction with this growing confidence. Every morning I took myself through my new morning routine. By working on relaxing my right hip and forcing my left glute to do things (that "shark bite" feeling meant I had zero awareness or sensation in my glute) I was able to take myself from agonising pain to being able to move for the rest of the day, generally feeling ok.

LIFE LESSON

Getting up earlier & moving immediately is the best thing you can do for your body

One of the biggest factors in the effectiveness of this routine was WHEN I did it. I woke up at 5am every morning, the days I slept longer my pain was always much worse. Getting up that bit earlier, gritting my teeth and getting stuck into my routine straight away reduced the amount of pain at a much faster rate. Little did I know I was finally retraining my body! I was rewriting bad habits. I was changing how I moved with proper consistency, I wasn't giving my body a chance to stay stiff and sore anymore. I started my day moving well, and it carried over.

The stairs became a great friend of mine, I couldn't walk past without swinging my leg up and stretching my hips and upper back a bit. I did that multiple times a day and not thought anything of it, it wasn't a big inconvenience to do - I still do it, and I got my Wife and Mother in Law doing stair stretches too. It's not about getting a sweat on or doing intense stretches for the splits, more just like a "Hello joints! How are you?".

Think about how often you're waiting for someone/something, or standing as the kettle's



boiling or how often you check your phone? All these opportunities are there to do a little bit, it's just teaching yourself how to do it, main thing is to keep it simple. If you have children encourage them to move, get down on the floor and play around with them - try getting them to balance too! It's an amazing thing to share with each other and you'll be shocked to see how much they can just naturally do.

A few weeks went by of building good habits and doing my routine every morning, then something incredible happened: one day I woke up feeling completely fine, no pain but also no stiffness at all; my flexibility was increasing.



One movement in my routine were Deep Lunge Rotations that I promote a lot. Up until this point I had failed The Deep Lunge Test miserably, but it was finally working for me! I could get my elbow to the floor and my squat felt better! I felt I could not only sit in the bottom of the squat, but I also felt stronger in the drive up. My body felt amazing. When you wake up and force your body to move, eventually it wakes up willing to move, whereas if you don't train until the evening and spend your entire day sitting down, then you are allowing your body to get away with feeling stiff or sore.

Even though I had started squatting again, there was one thing I hadn't attempted yet. The back-pain-nemesis: I hadn't deadlifted yet. I'd needed to pick up barbells in the gym while coaching people, helping them lift bars back into the rack after squats etc. but they were always light; as long as I was careful, it wasn't an issue. But I didn't want to be stuck lifting 40kg for the rest of my training career.

For my first true post-injury deadlift I decided to try 60kg. For me with a 200kg+ deadlift this should be simple, no more than a warm up rep, but I was petrified. What if I was going to take myself right back to the start? Hurt myself even worse than last time? Should I listen to the Doctors and never lift again? I wasn't sure if I was ready, and I had a mental image of discs in my back exploding.

After some internal conversations and psyching myself up I decided to go for it.

It felt... amazing!

It was like someone had finally plugged my charger in, everything was working again - it was the best deadlift I had ever felt! My hips were aligned properly now and I was straight! This was the key! It wasn't rolling, it wasn't stretching, what worked was taking my joints through a full range of motion, first thing in the morning, constantly being ruthless with my left & right sides to make them feel more symmetrical and then training so that my body actually felt strong rather than nervous.

After that deadlift I decided to do 5 sets of 5 reps with the 60kg and it all felt fine, my core felt like it actually had to do something and my hamstrings were on fire, I had never felt them like that before - it was kind of harder but easier in a weird way. I hear that all the time from people I meet that struggled with muscle activation: when you don't know, you don't know... but when you know... you KNOW that you didn't know.

That night after my first deadlifts I went to bed nervous, really panicking about waking up the next morning. I wouldn't really know if I'd aggravated anything until then.

When I woke up... I felt absolutely fine!

In fact, better than fine, I felt like my hamstrings had been used! I felt like anyone would after training, even though it was a light weight, I hadn't done anything for such a long time it was enough to make me aware. My straight legged toe touch was a little bit shorter, but my new morning routine habit had me back to normal within a couple of minutes.

I went back to the gym and started retrying everything with light weights again: back squats, front squats, pressing, lunges, adding pauses everywhere, and using of slow tempo reps. Over the next few weeks, I went over every exercise I had ever done and just felt mind blown each time of how different they felt, even push ups!! Exercise could feel nice? Who knew?!





I started pushing my flexibility further into more advanced things, like back bends. I went from non-existent thoracic extension to being able to do a full bridge fairly comfortably, which made my shoulders feel even better. I got myself from not having a snowballs-chance-in-hell hope of doing pistol squats to being fairly capable at them in two weeks with my new methods of learning, building strength and balance in the bottom positions in the most assisted way possible.

(Side Note: On reflection I built my Pistol Squats too fast as my ankles felt weird for a while and I had to spend extra time building

stability back. I would have been better doing this over a few months while keeping a better balance with ankle rotation instead of just straight dorsiflexion)

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Throughout my recovery and my learning, I realised that I wasn't just "unlucky", the lack of athleticism when I was younger had simply come around to bite me in the ass. I exacerbated it further by picking a Martial Art that had a heavily dominant "power side" and my chosen method of fitness was increasing the imbalance issues I already had because I didn't do any of the assistance work for it.

It really dawned on me how important it was to have a foundation. The 'training like an athlete' mind-set has become so mainstream, the idea that everyone should push themselves mentally and physically and that everyone can be an athlete if they just work harder... well actually, we messed up. If someone doesn't have good joint function throughout their body and lacks basic athletic qualities like single leg balance, jumping, running, sprinting, hand-eye coordination, lateral core stability and hip/spine/scapula awareness, they have no business being near a barbell. That's the very definition of skipping the basics.

LIFE LESSON

**There's no substitute for the basics,
seriously**

That's not to say you shouldn't do hard styles of training, but it is up to you to learn how to assess yourself so that you can cope with the training you want to do. If not, you need to change the program to suit you as an individual. Give yourself homework to do and don't progressively load, add loads of reps or speed until you feel satisfied with your positions and movement so you know you can progress without cutting corners.

If you need guidance on your mobility find someone that can help you out and don't allow yourself to be coached by someone who just wants your money and has no real care for your physical longevity. Similarly, I have no problem turning people away that just want a quick fix and don't want to take their body's health seriously, I won't be a part of that. Trying to get as many members through the door as possible is not for me. I like helping people get stronger safely, it's why I coach the way I do. I can't make you stronger or fitter if you're broken all the time.

-

During my injury recovery I was only a part time coach, I had another job so wasn't worried about making an income from coaching. This allowed me to train as many people as I could for free, testing what I had discovered with myself on others. In the gym I started pulling people off foam rollers saying, "Try this instead". I would play my favourite game: 'Can you do this?'. I'd take people through movements that seemed fun, like I was messing around with amusing challenges but were actually incredibly beneficial stability exercises.



Over time, everyone was agreeing with me, results were happening faster and lasting longer. Every few day's I would hear someone saying that something that has been bugging them for years was finally away - and they wish they knew the stuff I showed them sooner!

I started to notice that everyone with pain was imbalanced like I was! It was simply different combinations or levels of imbalances, it appeared to be the normal thing. A lot of people that I was helping were at the start of the road I was on, around Chapter 2 & 3 - getting symptoms of shoulder pain, hip pain, muscle tightness or noticing their strength numbers just stopped increasing; they had plateaued with their training and couldn't get any better.

But I was also starting to help people with serious issues get back to training properly, people that were plagued with injuries for years, in pain for years, getting all kinds of scans, pills, even booked in for operations – they all starting to lose their symptoms after I got them to do simple warm up exercises! I kept thinking to myself, "Am I actually doing this? Should I tell someone?!".

I couldn't believe no one seemed to have any kind of awareness or know what to look for – just as I didn't, I thought I was just unlucky or silly but no, this was a big, big problem with the fitness industry. Quality of movement was just being brushed over for the sake of looking better or being faster or lifting more. I was coming across people all the time that had injuries or were struggling with things that were completely avoidable with just a couple of the right exercises.

It goes to show you that giving the body what it wants and making it feel balanced again goes a very long way. None of the exercises I ever give people are special secret exercises; I share as much as I can publicly for free. My teaching style and how I explain things makes a massive difference. If you use all the technical jargon you learn in courses you are going to freak people out and make them think things are harder than they actually are – think about it:

"Your Scapulohumeral rhythm is off, you have Scapular Dyskinesis, your Serratus Anterior is really weak. You must follow this 12 week Rehab Program with 3x 20 of these 15 corrective exercises every day otherwise your shoulders will maintain dysfunctional movement."

Or

"Can you make big circles with your shoulders without bending your elbows? No? Cool! Something to improve on! Aim to do some circles at some point every day on all fours, hanging & horizontally and see where you're at in a week! It might feel clunky at the start, but you'll get better at it every day"



I don't need to guess who comes out better, I do this with multiple people every month. The super crazy perfectionists often get nowhere because they're so focused on doing the exercise "right" that they aren't figuring out how it feels for themselves... or discovering the big secret: just get better at something you're finding hard to do!

If you come to me with an issue, I don't want to give you an exercise that you can already do, I want to find the thing that's supposed to be easy but that you find challenging, and get you drilling the crap out of it.

Once again, I became "The Mobility Guy", and now I felt like the shoe actually fit! All the warm ups I was programming for classes and clients changed: they had a progressive mobility focus, they were taking up less time in the class and people were visibly moving better in a just few days! My newfound common-sense knowledge made me more outspoken about the things people were doing and promoting - WHY are you doing that? Instead of doing something because "everyone else is doing it", think about how is it relevant to your background and your training?

LIFE LESSON

**Always be suspicious of quick fixes that
require little effort**

I didn't want any kind of fluff or magic quick fixes, I wanted everyone to know that it can be hard work making a change, but it's worth it... and much simpler than a lot of people would have you believe. Then the best part about improving the way your body moves: there comes a point where you just move well! You will have done enough specific mobility work and your body just doesn't need it anymore - you can just enjoy training!

I knew from my own rehab that my body felt better than ever, nothing hurt. I was strong and I knew I wasn't bluffing myself. I understood if my body was sore from hard training sessions, I could take a day to do some movement drills rather than foam roll it out.

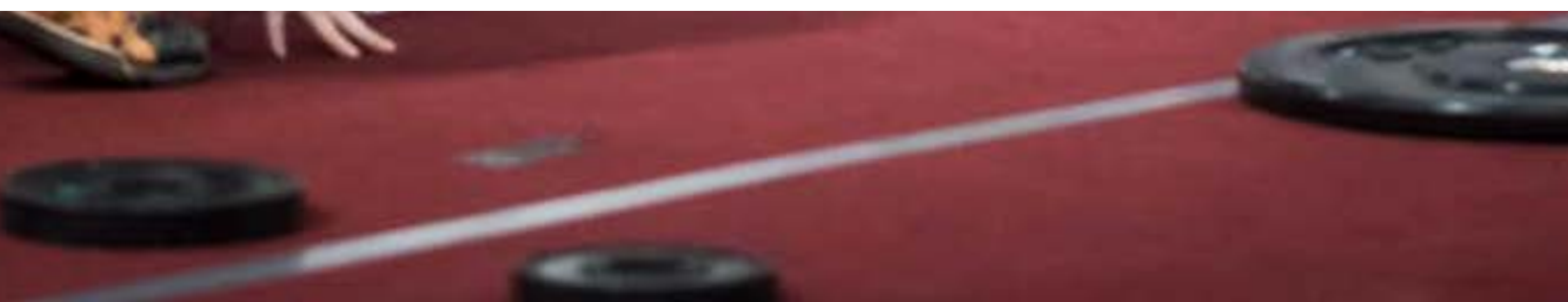
Though the coolest thing was my mood had started to change too - I was being crazy productive and creative! Moving well was definitely affecting me mentally. It's not something I often talk about, but when you move better you feel better, do things better, and are just generally a nicer person to be around! Never did I want to hang out with "broken Tom" ever again.

So, what happened next with my own training?



CHAPTER 9

Gains 0'Clock



I felt phenomenal, I was more aware than ever, all my previous max lifts were back and more.

I was hitting personal bests without even following programs, after sessions I wouldn't feel drained at all like I used to. I was feeling strong inside the gym and outside, after lifting I would feel like I could flip cars on the walk home!

Not only was my understanding of how things should feel & my technique way better, but one of the biggest improvements was my recovery. I used to get the most annoying DOMS (Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness) after most things, especially CrossFit workouts, but now I could train almost every day for multiple hours... and wake up the next day ready to go again and without feeling like I needed ten thousand massages!

It took me a while to get to this point because I was learning as I went, figuring things out as I was getting hurt, but when it all fell into place and the simple realisation to address my full body altogether as a whole, it really was like being in a brand new body. I felt better in my thirties than I did in my teens. All of my lifts not only got bigger, but they didn't take nearly as much effort, so I set a bunch of goals and hit them within a year, no injuries at all.

I got to a point where I wanted some new skills. I started working on more bodyweight gymnastic techniques. I'm not a lightweight guy, but I made a lot of gains really quickly. I was picking stuff up faster than ever, I was recovering from workouts better, my head seemed to finally understand where I was; I wasn't trying to skip basics anymore.

I'd create programs for myself not only geared towards the gymnastic skill I wanted to learn, but also geared towards my own body: where was I specifically lacking strength? When I looked at myself honestly, what skill level did I need? I was popping up to do free standing handstand push-ups in very little time. I wasn't "clumsy" anymore; I had trained myself out of it. I became a "natural", and it only took 5 years. The major attention I put into my body when it was hurt carried over to everything I do now. My new body awareness allows me to pick up new skills way easier and the programs I wrote for people were infinitely better.

LIFE LESSON

“Clumsiness” isn't for life, some people just take a bit longer to learn movements

I am the happiest I have ever been with my body. I feel like I am completely able to look after it properly and help people learn about their own body too. My goal is to change how people view training, pain and fitness from all angles whether it's a teen who's just starting out, someone in their mid-twenties that plays competitive sport, someone in their 40's that hasn't moved for twenty years, or someone 50+ that's just sick of being sore all the time.

I want **The Simplistic Mobility Method** to become the normal stepping stone and THEN I want people to have carefree fun with moving, and also deem movement as something that is enjoyable to do and not just something that you have to do so you don't get fat.

Discovering what your body is capable of is a mini exciting journey you can take every day. Over the years I have played with weightlifting, calisthenics, CrossFit, gymnastics, bodybuilding, powerlifting, yoga, martial arts of all kinds and I have built a massive list of things that I just really enjoy that are good for me physically, and I made relatively impressive gains in short amounts of time. I stopped being embarrassed about not being good at things and started to enjoy things I found challenging as I knew how beneficial they would be for me if I stuck at it.

I love training with people who are stronger than me and better at things, I think it is a great environment to put yourself into whenever your body is ready for it. Get yourself to a stage that you could go to any gym and play a bit with anyone! You'll meet incredible people and always learn a little bit more from everyone.

Nowadays I am not as competitive as I used to be, I like to push myself, but only at my own pace. That's not to be mistaken for laziness, I still love a challenge, but I know when to back off now, to whom do I need to prove anything to?

My fitness and strength are unique to me and the experiences I've had, so I never put pressure on myself to be something I'm not interested in being. Yet amount of people that I've met making themselves miserable doing something they don't enjoy is crazy! There is so much other stuff out there you can try! Don't try and copy someone who you deem to be "strong" if it's not filling you with fire.



You must also bear in mind, when you're talking about being "strong", you must include how the person is day to day. Outside of the pro/competition world, if you're lifting heavier than everyone else at the gym but constantly sore and tired and burned out, then are you that strong, really? Maybe you're only just good at a couple of lifts. Or maybe you can lift quite heavy, bang out a big set of pull ups if you want to and feel great all the time and have loads of energy outside of the gym? Then maybe you're strong enough and just need to keep doing what you are doing!

Be careful that your perception of strength doesn't force you into a guilty run of hammering yourself into the ground.

-

Your numbers and skills will always go up and down - you cannot maintain your peak condition all year round so making sure you are enjoying yourself is more important than anything else. Not being able to do something you used to be able to do doesn't necessarily mean you've gotten weaker; it just means you're out of practice with that particular thing. Other training styles you choose to do may carry over to your original training in a good way, joints crave multi-directional movement so a stint away from the barbell or running to do more bodyweight training could be the thing that makes your entire body feel way better and more stable.

I can try anything physical without worrying about hurting myself. I'm pretty confident in saying I am strong. There's a difference in wanting to prove it to others and actually feeling it.

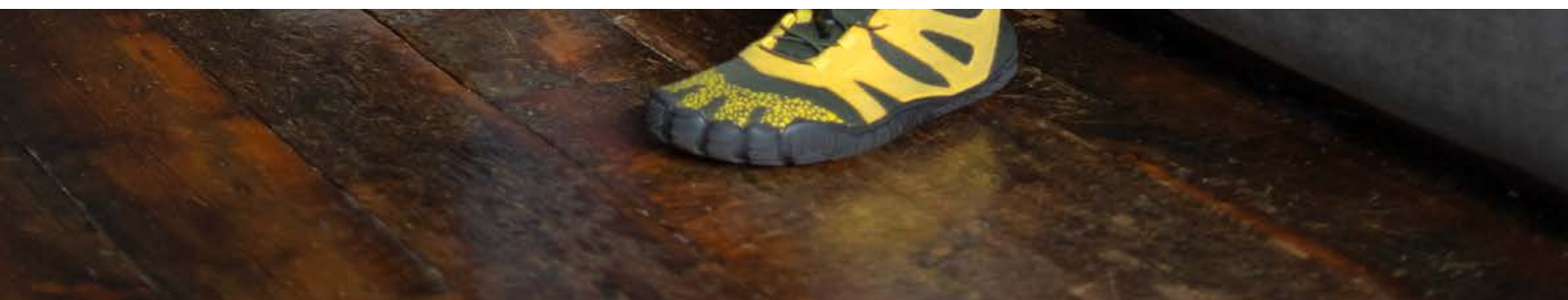
LIFE LESSON

Train for you, no one else



CHAPTER 10

Life Throws a Curveball



I went 8 years pain free from my disc injuries.

Since the MRI scan revealed my L4/L5, L5/S1 disc herniations in 2016, I only felt the occasional minor flare up that I was able to sort within a day or two. Even when it was quite intense nerve pain, I had enough control of my muscles & movement that it would literally be no more than a minor inconvenience. I just needed to wiggle more than normal for a few days.

However, when I moved house in 2024 and was waiting on my garage being converted to a new gym, I decided to take some time off lifting completely, I even stopped going on my regular walks. I fell back into some lazy habits, but I decided it was ok because I'd get back on it when the gym was finished! Basically, I made an excuse for myself that because I didn't have my regular gym space, it was more faff to do my normal movement & training... Even through there are a million things I could have been doing in the house with bands and weights just like I teach everyone else!

Turns out even I'm not immune to making habit whoopsies, I felt okay so why would I need to keep doing the boring "Tom Morrison stuff"

But because I stopped, my nerves weren't being stimulated and all my disc issues started causing muscle weakness again making my left leg weak. Hello limp! Not nice to see you again!

LIFE LESSON

When you feel better you can reduce the frequency of what got you there, but never stop completely

My left hip was hurting and hurting BAD.

I couldn't turn in bed again; the weight of my left leg was agony. I had to work on bed exercises to make my glutes work a little before I could turn, and then I wasn't able to handle putting my weight through my left leg when standing. I had to do a super regressed version of the Simplistic Mobility Method just to get myself able to walk each morning. Withing 30 minutes of SMM I could emerge with just a minor limp, despite the excruciating pain upon waking. That in its own was pretty incredible!

But the weird thing this time was that I was only getting pain in my hip, no back pain alongside it. So, I began to think that all these years of a training with a dysfunctional left glute must have wrecked my left hip – my mind started racing – I'll need a hip replacement at 37!! How am I supposed to teach people like this?! Do I have to go through a year of intense rehab again?!!

All the “it's not fair!” despair came back, how can I be going through this again?! I'd done everything right!! (Except those 3 months you took off doing any kind of training/exercise/mobility work, remember Tom...?)

Because of how worried I got, and how my livelihood depended on me being able to get through this, I decided I would get an MRI scan of my hip done privately! And since I was paying for it, I decided to also get my lower back, the shoulder I injured years ago, and neck done too! These additional scans were for my own interest, I wanted to see how my disc injuries were progressing and even though my neck had no pain, figured it would have some kind of structural thing to show just due to my age, so why not make a learning experience out of it!

Over the next few pages is a truncated version of my 2024 MRI results.

You don't have to read the full thing, but it can be reassuring to see the kind of crazy things my reports say and realise that I'm ok, feel ok, and I'm not restricted in my training due to mobility & movement work!

Neck:

There is degeneration of the upper 4 cervical discs.

There is loss of cervical lordosis.

There is evidence of early posterior osteophytosis at C3-4, C4-5 and C5-6.

There is a small syrinx in the cervical cord at C6-7 that measures 3 cm in craniocaudal length.

At C3-4 there is mild narrowing of the right foramen without nerve impingement.

At C5-6 there is bulging of annulus with a small left posterolateral protrusion which effaces the anterior epidural fat. There is stenosis of the left foramen by osteophytes and there is impingement of the left C6 nerve root.

At C6-7 there is mild narrowing of the left foramen with the potential for early or incipient impingement of the left C7 nerve root.

Conclusion:

There is a small syrinx.

There is disc degeneration with bulging of discs, a small protrusion and discovertebral osteophytosis maximal on the left side.

There is impingement of the left C6 nerve root and the potential for early or incipient impingement of the left C7 nerve root.

Shoulder:

There is mild degenerate change in the AC joint and there is probable early impingement of supraspinatus

Lumbar Spine:

There is degeneration of the lower 4 discs.

There is mild flattening of lumbar lordosis.

There is a focus of type 1 endplate change involving the Antero Superior margin of L2 consistent with a Romanus lesion and at the superior endplate of L1 more centrally.

There is enthesal new bone formation at the T12 L1 annulus anteriorly. There's also a little type 1 endplate change posteriorly at L4-5.

There is a focus of type 2 endplate change involving the Antero Inferior margin of the L3 likely representing a burnt-out Romanus lesion.

At L2-3 there is mild bulging of annulus without central nerve impingement.

At L3-4 there is bulging of annulus effacing the anterior epidural fat and there is a broad-based left posterolateral and foraminal protrusion that likely impinges the left L3 nerve root.

At L4-5 there is broad-based bulging of disc effacing the anterior epidural fat without central nerve root impingement and there is a small central annular tear.

There is also a broad-based left posterolateral and foraminal protrusion likely impinging the left L4 nerve root.

At L5-S1 there is a moderate sized broad-based central protrusion that effaces the anterior epidural fat causing mild effacement of the anterior thecal CSF barely abutting the left S1 nerve root & at worst irritating it.

Conclusion:

There is evidence of both an acute and burnt out romanus lesion consistent with seronegative pathology.

There is disc degeneration with left-sided foraminal protrusions resulting in impingement of the left L3 and L4 nerve roots

There could be irritation of the left S1 nerve root by a central protrusion at L5-S1

Hip:

There is an early degenerate cleft in pubic symphysis cartilage.

There is mild synovitis in the left hip joint.

There is a possible small labral tear within the right acetabular labrum.

There is at least degenerate change seen within the left acetabular labrum and possible interstitial tearing.

The lateral aspect of the left labrum appears blunted. There may be a little new bone formation at the junctions of the femoral heads and femoral necks.

There is significant oedema seen within the posterior aspect of the left iliac bone at the level of the SI joint there is no significant joint effusion within the left SI joint or signal change across the joint.

There is evidence of fatty scarring on the iliac side of the right SI joint.

There is possible early herniation of fat into the right inguinal canal but there is no herniation of a viscus.

Conclusion:

There is evidence of bone marrow oedema within the left iliac bone at the level of the SI joint.

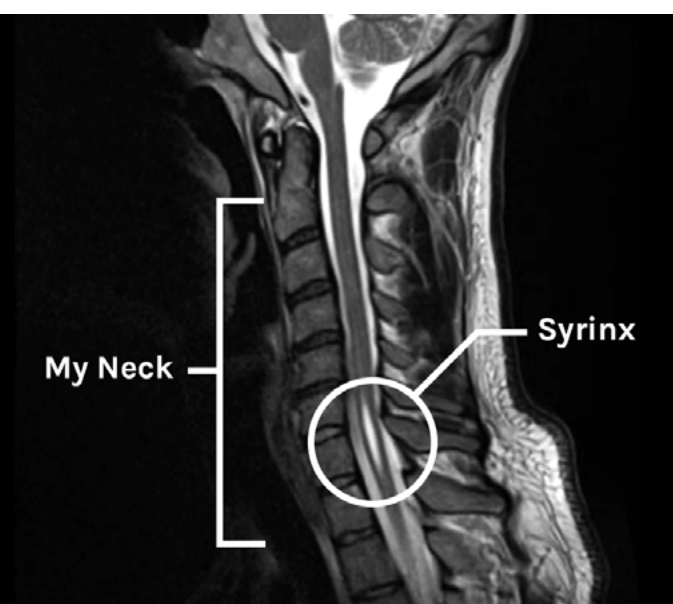
Fatty scarring at a similar level within the right iliac bone likely marks the site of a previous similar inflammatory process.

There is probable labral pathology bilaterally with this non-arthrographic study and there may be a degree of femoral acetabular impingement.

So, in the end, my hips weren't that bad. Some degeneration was showing but at this time it wasn't serious enough to need to worry or require intervention (foreshadowing for the future, but that's a story for another day). Although I did have 2 new lumbar disc herniations (L2/L3 and L3/L4) that I wasn't aware of, which seemed to explain the hip pain.

There were 2 things that worried me from the scans though, and neither were things I expected:

1. My spine was showing evidence of inflammation-based damage
2. I had a 3cm syrinx inside my spinal cord



This syrinx is a fluid-filled cavity in my spinal cord. It can continue to grow over time, and if it does it can do unpleasant things like obstruct the flow of cerebrospinal fluid, compress (or even damage) surrounding nerves, and disrupt signals from my brain to my body. As mine was in the C6/C7 region, I might feel pain, weakness, numbness or tingling down my arm into my hand.

I had only decided to get my neck scanned to confirm suspected disc bulges, bone growths and stenosis just for my own education and to help show others that structural changes don't mean pain. It wasn't to find a spinal cord cyst.

By the time I had my MRI results, my back and hip felt fine again (déjà vu from 2016!) but the syrinx... I hadn't ever considered having something like that before.

And it's something that can just get worse, and I have no control over it. You can't stretch or strengthen your way out of it. If it expands and prevents signals being passed down my spinal cord, then everything below it can "switch off" ... everything below my neck.

That messed with my head. I started feeling like I was experiencing neurological issues, I felt like I was struggling to grip things and losing dexterity in my hands. I had to go to the doctor and get Amitriptyline (an antidepressant) to calm my nerves and sleep. I was driving myself insane. I felt like there was a worm inside my neck (keep in mind, I had ZERO symptoms until I seen my MRI report)

I knew I was being irrational. But even though I told myself I've been fine, had zero symptoms, and that originally, I didn't even suspect anything was there... I was living the worst possible, highly unlikely, scenarios in my head. Over & over again.

I forwarded my MRI results to my doctor, and I was red flagged to both Neurology (for the syrinx) and Rheumatology (for the spinal inflammation) and seen within weeks! In the UK's NHS that is very quick, so I wasn't sure whether to be glad or concerned at how quickly they wanted to see me.

Thankfully Neurology did all their tests and said my syrinx was small, so I would just need to check in every 6 months to monitor growth - and it may never get bigger. Low and behold the "worm" sensation in my neck disappeared without me even noticing and I was able to stop taking the amitriptyline. Isn't the brain just crazy sometimes.

So the thing I was worried about turned out to be manageable and monitorable after all. What about the stuff I wasn't so concerned again?

When I showed up to my Rheumatologist appointment I'd sorted my hip again by getting back to doing SMM regularly and lifting weights, so at the hospital I was able to hop out of the chair and skip into the room for my appointment to see what drugs they wanted to offer, which turned out to be a combo of Naproxen (a Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug) and Methotrexate (Immunosuppressant) which I'd been on for my skin before.

Nothing crazy so far.

They explained to me that my spine changes were typical of Ankylosing Spondylitis which is a progressive chronic inflammatory arthritis which affects the spine and the hips, and that they wanted to test me for it. Ankylosing Spondylitis (AS) is something I've worked on with clients before, but not something I'd ever really investigated deeply, nor something I ever thought I might have.

I was tested for the HLA-B27 gene, which is a gene strongly associated with AS.

And I was positive.

Suddenly a lot of things started making sense: my lifelong skin issues, back pain and bouts of Uveitis (immune system attacking your own eyes). Suddenly the doctors I was seeing understood: "Oh you've got Anky Spondo? Ha, yeah, you guys like to do things like

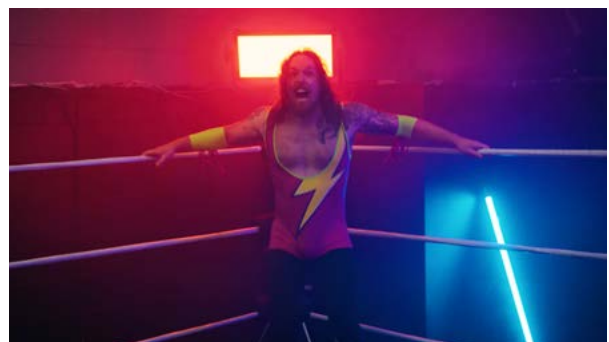
that". My immune system seems to hate me, I'm allergic to everything, and it turns out I'm even allergic to myself.

Happily, I explained that I was pain free again and living life normally, and the Doctor was really surprised. They couldn't believe I didn't even have bad stiffness in the morning, to the point that she stopped me as I was leaving and asked again with a bemused face... "not even a little bit of pain?!". It was nice to feel like an anomaly. They were happy for me to continue without any intervention or drugs and put in my notes "managing well with lifestyle" (aka the Simplistic Mobility Method!).

The next appointment was the Physiotherapist to check my range of motion, which I passed with flying colours! They were super impressed with me, which of course inflated my ego. It was inflated further when a few of the physiotherapists recognised me from our YouTube channel and came in to say hello and that they love our stuff! I'd had that with independent physiotherapists in the past but to get that in my own hospital too was really special to me, I knew we were reaching the right people. The only score I lost one point in was my neck turn to the right, everything else was 10/10.

Off I skipped back to helping others again!

I even finished that year by learning pro wrestling for our Christmas advert. Getting slammed into a hard ring, flying over the ropes, and general wrestling shenanigans completely challenged every part of my body for the 6 hours of filming - and I loved every second of it. I even went on to participate in a live Royal Rumble for the club that taught me the moves!



When I think about the alternate timeline of what could have happened if I didn't learn about joint function, mobility, strength & stability, etc. that I use to keep myself healthy it's a crazy comparison. I could have been sitting in the betting office (my old job) on painkillers every day, taking immunosuppressants, scared to moving in case my spine snapped... and I wouldn't have known that life could be any different with disc herniations & AS.

Every little thing I did wrong along the way was worth it (even the foam rolling phase!) because at least I didn't stop.

Even now if I have a flare up of my AS, it's "just a bit of spine pain" to me, because I have such control over my body. I don't go into spasm, and I can still move and train as I want to, I just reduce the weights I'm lifting until it calms down. A life altering diagnosis to me is nothing more than an occasional minor inconvenience.

Will it get worse as I age? Maybe. Do I want to let it affect my choices and things I want to do now? No.

I like to think of it as playing Life in Hard Mode, so I just need to do some extra stuff to keep my body healthy. Millions of people have it worse than me. A friend of mine recently discovered they have bone cancer in their jaw, so it's been partially removed then part of their shin bone was cut out and used to replace the missing jaw section. Throughout the process, their level of positivity has been incredibly inspiring to me. I can think of 10,000 things I'm glad I don't have and I think that helps me frame things well. I'm not saying I don't get frustrated or feel annoyed sometimes that I have something that's only manageable and not curable, but I do try to find my way back to being positive about it as soon as I can.

Maybe in ten or twenty years I'll need my hips replaced or a spinal fusion or need to get a stent put inside my spinal cord, but all I can focus on is how I feel today. And when I do the Non-Negotiables how I feel always significantly improves!

LIFE LESSON

**Control the things you can and it
will have a positive influence on the
things you can't**



CHAPTER 10

Non-Negotiables & Super Tricks



Nowadays, I work with so many different people with completely different backgrounds but one thing you realise about everyone is: they're always going to do what they enjoy and what interests them, even if it's at the expense of their body.

I am not going to tell you what you should and shouldn't do, but I damn well will make you better equipped to cope with what you're doing so you don't break yourself. If you listen to me you might get a few extra years of performing at a high level, or avoid a surgery in 10 years time, or just be a happy old Granny or Grandad that can skip down the street without needing a Zimmer Frame.

One of the most amusing things to me is that a lot of the movements I give to people will be the same. All too often you see people looking for specific exercises for their muscle problem, sport, or even age... but if I'm 100% honest, that's mostly comes from marketing and trying to catch people's attention.

Often, I will give the exact same shoulder mobility drills to a Powerlifter that's getting pain when they bench press as I would give to a Yoga practitioner that has shoulder stability issues, because they both have the same goal: strong, stable shoulders that move through the full range of motion. Their progressive focus will be different, the Powerlifter will most likely be focused on the range of motion they can achieve to improve their flexibility, whereas the Yoga practitioner will be concentrating on their control of the movement and potentially increasing resistance over time, building a baseline of stability.

But the reason why they can use the same exercise is: joints like to do joint things. A stiff shoulder fundamentally doesn't need different things to a wobbly shoulder. As mentioned, they both simply need to be stable through full range of motion... they don't want to be pummelled with a million reps loaded in limited directions (like just the bench press).

If you get up for a moment and flail your arms around like a stroppy teenager, you'll see just how many different directions and positions and combinations there are and some people NEVER do any of them - it's unsurprising why so many people's necks and shoulders feel like crap, and why tendonitis is so common.

There are so many weird misconceptions and stereotypes around mobility work, be it skipping it entirely or doing way too much of it for no justified reason.

You'll see teams (usually guys) actively mocking each other for stretching or warming up.

You'll see Weightlifters, Powerlifters and CrossFitters all on the rollers and lacrosse balls every session avoiding working on their actual movement issues.

You'll see general Gym-Goers come in from sitting all day in their office jobs, to sit on the machines and move all their muscles in isolation with no awareness of how to move their body as one unit.

You'll see Body Builders that "don't have time" to stretch because they already have a dumbbell in one hand and a full chicken in the other, and they are petrified to lock out their joints.

You'll even see some people in gyms doing so much cardio who are scared to look at the weights in case they turn into Arnold, when in reality they could literally be blown away in a strong wind

...ok, I'm starting to exaggerate a little.

What I want to do is set a baseline of things that EVERYONE should be able to do regardless of what they like to train, which is the premise that **The Simplistic Mobility Method** is built upon.

Aside from SMM, here are the **Non-Negotiables** that you should take in and implement. You'll find you will run into fewer problems in training, and life. After these, you'll find a list of **Super Tricks** that will help you easily implement them into your day!

The Non-Negotiables

1. Breathe

Take breathing more seriously, and I don't mean just for your general oxygen intake. Actual breathing technique for relaxing your body when you are stretching or in pain can make the world of difference. Similarly, practicing how to breathe when performing reps, maxes, or doing cardio could see you make more progress than if you never bring attention to it.

When you're trying to improve a range of motion, if you're holding your breath and grinding your teeth your body is going to sense you are being resistant and resist further. Relaxing your breath goes a long way to making your body feel safe and relaxing allowing you more range. A large part of your inflexibility comes from your body perceiving something as dangerous. It's right to be hesitant. If you've never done something before it's only trying to protect you, but, provided you're not trying to do something way too advanced (or actually dangerous), controlling breath and being able to relax your body during your mobility work will increase your gains in a much shorter time.

Chest breathing is a common side effect of pressure, nerves, even self-consciousness about weight and physical appearance. Basically, you're not using your diaphragm or lungs very efficiently, and can cause tightness around the neck and shoulders. As well as this, it genuinely can affect your mood. Right now, try this for me:

- Take a long breath in through your nose.
Don't exaggerate and gasp in as if you're about to hold your breath, instead imagine you're filling up your lungs, expanding your ribs out to the side and your back and expanding your stomach forwards
- Hold for 2-3 seconds.
- Exhale, through your mouth, taking at least 4 seconds to completely breathe out.
Imagine your lungs deflating, feel your ribs and stomach relax, drop your shoulders down away from your ears and relax your jaw & forehead
- Repeat 3 times

How do you feel?

In the worst days of my back injury, the only way I could get myself to move during a bad spasm would be 5 or 10 minutes of just diaphragmatic breathing. Being able to ease my panic state through my breathing allowed me to decrease my reliance on painkillers.

With both physical and mental benefits to improving your breathing, it's something that's easy but very worth doing. One of the most basic ways to make a start is to ask yourself: are you still breathing? You'll be surprised how often you're holding your breath!

2. Move your neck every which way, every day

Look left, look right, look up, look down, look side to side and every variation in between. People do not move their necks enough and this leads to trap tightness, weakness in the arms and just generally your head becoming fused to your upper body.

If you start to lose the ability to look about, your body will start to move slower and less confidently. Trapped nerves and all that jazz can happen just because you aren't moving your neck regularly enough - and don't start thinking it's your pillows fault or the way that you sleep! You can sleep upside down and sideways if you want, provided when you're awake you feed your body with good movements regularly.

Ever pulled your neck from just turning to the side? You're not just unlucky (or getting old) you potentially haven't been moving your neck well/enough for years, making it feel weak and immobile and it's scared in case your head falls off. You need to earn the right to make a sharp turn with your noggin, and it comes with maintenance.

3. Do something for your upper back, every day

If you make a habit out of opening your thoracic spine daily, a lot of potential shoulder issues like impingement, forward head posture, rounded shoulders and general "bad posture" just float away.

Through improving your thoracic extension your shoulder blades will be able to move better, your ribs will move better, you will breathe better, you will feel less stiff and more options for upper body training will open up.

A lot of people get caught up with wanting to have perfect posture all the time but it's a flawed venture. Positions are just positions, sometimes you'll be slouched, sometimes

you'll be sitting funny, and as long as you do the opposite movements regularly too (extending your upper back, being straight etc.) you will happily meet in the middle and offset any sitting or slouching - there is nothing wrong with those things provided you have balance.

The secret to better thoracic extension is to use thoracic rotation using a movement like the Zenith Rotation:

- Lock your hips in place by sitting on your heels or on a chair.
- Rotate your upper back as far as you can in one direction.
- Take a deep breath in and as you breathe out, rotate further until you feel the stretch intensify.
- Do two more deep breaths, for 3 breaths total, trying to rotate your upper back further each time
- Switch sides and repeat on the other side

This exercise is a good way to learn, but you can effectively do thoracic rotation anywhere, even just sitting in your office chair; it's the principle that's important not a specific exercise.

4. Understand what core strength is!

It is important to see core work as a way of protecting your spine and moving well, rather than just doing sit ups for rock hard abs.

How to brace correctly falls into the category of core strength, knowing how to create intra-abdominal pressure. You don't need to deadlift, but you should know how to do it. Being able to lift using your hips without compromising your spine is an incredibly valuable skill and one that applies to general human movement, not just inside the gym with a barbell.

But staying stiff & strong isn't the only movement your spine can do, there are discs between each vertebrae which gives your spine the ability to twist and bend like a whip made of chains (pretty cool right?). You should bend yourself laterally, forwards, backwards and all little combinations in between, don't over think it though, yes pick some exercises that do those things and train them but never underestimate the power of just dancing about like a kid that's had too many sweets for a few minutes. Never be afraid to move your spine!

As well as bracing and movement, you also need strength. You want to know how to resist being pulled out of a position by an external force such as a person, weight... or an unexpected bolt when dog you sees a squirrel. You can train this with partner exercises or using a resistance band that's pulling you in different directions. For complete core strength, you want the ability to create and maintain tension in any position you can move into, it's not useful to move a certain way if you can't be strong there, that's how you can get easily hurt.

Lastly, proprioception and balance also fall into core strength. Your hand eye coordination, agility and balance all play a part in creating a stronger, more "intelligent" body that moves better. If your body is extremely confident in your ability to not fall over, it has less reason to slow you down - relaxed play like throwing & catching a ball with a partner while balancing on one leg may seem silly, but it's exactly this relaxed unorganised, unscripted chaos that causes your body to learn how to react faster. Create the stimulus for your body to learn and think for itself quickly and it will give you all kinds of good things in return.

There are 4 principles I break core strength down into:

- Isometric (Bracing / Staying still)
- Rotational (Moving)
- Anti Rotational (Resisting external force)
- Reactive (Responding to unexpected change)

Have a healthy balance of all 4 and your core training will be complete. Most go wrong by putting an unholy amount of attention into planks which is only one element (Isometric). Move your spine like a spine and it won't turn into an immobile stick.

5. Do something that requires you to balance every day

Continuing on from Reactive Core strength, balance also gives you ankle, knee & hip stability gains.

Prolonged periods of balance are incredibly beneficial for your body and is basically how you create stability: small micro movements cause you to constantly make corrections. Plus, you can take yourself to the point of fatigue quite safely, allowing for significant adaptations in a short amount of time, giving you more endurance and strength to be able to endure harder forms of training.

If you find balance challenging, then you are never going to feel as strong or as "springy" as you could. Same as anything, there are many levels of proficiency and you just need to find out where you're at. For some it starts with standing on one leg and simply trying to build up to 10 seconds each side, but eventually you want to find standing on one leg so easy that you could do it all day.

Once you have reached a level that you find balance "easy" then it's up to you to find drills to make it harder again so your body still makes gains: sprinting drills, closed eyes balance, limiting how much foot you are balancing on, wobble boards, whatever takes your fancy, just don't get complacent! If you're not finding what you're doing hard anymore then you're getting nothing from it.

This is where I see a lot of mid-level athletes get stuck, they assume because they're quite good at a few things that their aches, pains & stiffness are the result of being unlucky... but what actually has happened is while they're increased strength & skills in some areas, they have forgotten to bring the fundamental skill of balance with them.

Balance should feature every day or appear some way in your training program.

6. Rotate your rotatable joints, and rotate them often

It's really, really, really strange that this needs to be pointed out so much.

Shoulders and hips are ball & socket joints, meaning they have the capacity for so many different combinations of movements... and yet when people do corrective exercises for them they do the most limited and specific ranges of motion that borderline on pointless.

When you start to rotate your shoulders and hips more often you feed the joint what it wants. You gain better stability and even muscle activation because there are fewer gaps, you're shoulders/hips regularly pass through so many different positions that it confidently knows it can go up, down, left, right and sideways without hurting or catching or nipping, resulting in a heck of a lot better performance than the guy stuck doing isolated external rotator exercises.

My recommendation for the best shoulder and hip movements can be quite technical, I like to call them:

Big-Ass Circles!

I have replaced multiple exercises in people's programs with just 2 or 3 drills and they felt better in a matter of weeks than they have in years of fancy, over-complicated warm ups and protocols.

There is a place for certain exercises when you're talking about a fresh injury or surgery rehab, but a large majority of hip & shoulder health really comes down to just: move your joints like joints.

You don't need to be the International Internal Rotation Champion either. If you can do internal and external rotation to some degree and they feel relatively similar on the left and right sides of your body you'll be alright. You can get caught up trying to create "perfect" joints with "perfect" ranges of motion and still get hurt. In some cases, your belief that you have really specific "weaknesses" can really hinder your strength. Notice differences between sides for sure but remember everything is changeable ... and it might not even be that bad!

If you are not already doing rotational movements in your warm ups and cool downs then you are missing out! You don't know what recovery is until you add this to your life!

7. Look after the little guys

Feet, ankles, hands, and wrists are the cause of so many "whoopsies" that it only makes sense to add some extra durability to them.

Sure, it may not be cool or sexy to be the person doing toe exercises and ankle rotations, but you know what else isn't cool? A sprained wrist or ankle, or plantar fasciitis, or Achilles tendonitis.

Your feet are the things that hold you up all day, if you devote time to making them stronger such as through balance (multiple crossovers! Woohoo!) then a lot of good stuff comes of it upstream!

If you have weak feet, then everything else could collapse on you. Move your ankles in all the ways they can move and even put a little pressure on them in unfavourable angles - you don't want the first time you ever go over on your ankle to be... the first time you've ever gone over on your ankle with your entire body weight crashing down as you stumble off a step. Practising "bad positions" can give yourself a bit of wiggle room that could mean the difference between a small sprain or a full-blown snap. You'll never be fully injury proof, but you can give yourself a nice buffer by doing the right things often enough.

For the wrists, you want to gradually increase how much load they can tolerate by leaning on them in different positions while they're on a wall or the floor. If you train wrist-intensive movements like handstands or muscle ups, your durability will improve the more you practice, meaning you don't need to spend as much time working your wrists in isolation - but don't forget to do the "opposite" movements. Like slouching & thoracic extension we talked about earlier, if you're spending a lot of time in handstands (wrist extension) a large part of your additional wrist work should be in flexion to build balanced strength.

Too many times I have seen incredibly strong people being held back by their wrists, so make sure to move them through flexion, extension, and also radial & ulnar deviation (side to side). Plus, did you know that you can rotate your ankles and wrists?! So, you know what that means... *points to tip number 6*

Grip is also a nice addition to consider; strong grip, strong person, that's just the way it works. Carry heavy things, make sure you can hold your own bodyweight from a bar easily. You don't need to be so strong that you could crush someone's skull with your bare hands... but it's pretty cool to think you could if you had to...

8. Go into the deepest positions you can, every day

It doesn't need to be a mad, intense, life-changing, stretching session, but just sitting as deep into your squat as you can, reaching up above your head as high as you can and reaching down towards your toes, etc. once daily can be enough to start making an improvement, maintain your flexibility, or notice if it's regressing.

That last one is quite important but often forgotten; be it through training or inactivity, if you start to lose a range of motion or movement pattern, you want to reclaim it as fast as possible.

Losing the ability to move a certain way can happen easier than you think. It's not a frantic race against time, so don't freak out... but the "use it or lose it" principle is very applicable to your body and how you move. I meet people that have no interest in overhead pressing, handstands or pull ups and their shoulders are in bits - they simply never have a reason to reach straight above their head, so they lose the ability to do so. Similarly, when you don't regularly sit deep into your hips (e.g. with squats or lunges) they can lose the ability to move properly too, so your lower back is forced to compensate by moving more than it should. You can see why lower back pain becomes so "normal" as we get older.

Moving through your deepest ranges doesn't need to be fancy. You can hold on to a door frame and sit into your squat, then stand up, bend over putting your hands on the wall with straight arms and lean your chest forward, then stand up and touch your toes - done. The main thing is that you do some sort of test like that daily, that way you'll be way more body aware and KNOW the second something starts to feel the slightest bit funky.

Your mobility does not need to be a "training session" and you don't need to sweat. That's often a barrier for someone to commit to morning routine: you don't want to get all sweaty if you only have a few minutes to get ready for work and go out the door... but having a just few things that feel great, that you can do while half asleep still in your pyjamas, that will set you up for the rest of the day? That's something you can be consistent with and THAT'S the thing you need, it's the thing everyone needs.

You don't need to be going 100% and feel sore the next day to make a physical difference to yourself.

The Super Tricks

After reading the Non-Negotiables I'm sure you're thinking you have to do mobility work for several hours a day, fitting in all these different exercises in, just to stay on top of things. This is not the case at all! These Super Tricks are little hacks that you can use to fit all those good things in easily, making them ingrained habits so you'll just instinctively do them!

1. Do 5 minutes of unscripted movement in the morning

In the **Simplistic Mobility Method** we call this "Head to Toe" mobility and all you have to do, as soon as you wake up, is just 5 minutes of random movements starting from your head and working all the way down to your feet!

Glance at the clock, then do a few neck movements, some shoulder circles, a couple of thoracic rotations, a few easy hip movements, then something for your feet or balance and that's it!

Using this one super trick you can get in your full depth/full range movement, your joint circles, neck movements, balance, ankle/wrist movements... all in 5 minutes!

It doesn't need to be fancy or Instagram-worthy, it only needs to be enough to get you moving and get rid of that early morning stiffness, so you train your body to want to move in the morning.

Everyone is a little bit stiffer in the morning, you've been sedentary for hours, but extreme morning lethargy is a learned feeling that comes with years of never doing anything about it - don't chalk it down to just getting older, a big reason why age is a factor is because you've had bad habits for so long that you aren't "getting away" with anymore. I cannot believe the difference to the way I feel in the mornings now compared to how I felt in my twenties, just from having a 5 minute routine.

Stretch when you're stiffest and your other movements throughout the day will be so much easier. The unscripted part is important too. Rather than following reps or a certain routine, you will start to get more creative and actually pay attention to how you are feeling, even start to create movements on the spot based on how you are that day.

Sometimes, I'll spend most of the 5 minutes on my neck & shoulders, or sometimes all hips, or head to toe joint circles, if I feel ok and nothing feels tight after my first minute or so, I'll do some balance practice. It's like having a conversation with your body, almost like a "How are you feeling today?" and asking it what it wants to do - that's something you cannot get from set movements.

Set routines, programs & movements are important, but developing your own body awareness is too valuable to miss out on. It will take practice, like anything, but you'll get better at moving and adapting to your body over time. It's definitely worth those clumsy, clunky, not-very-graceful days to develop one of the most beneficial morning habits you'll ever have.

2. Make friends with your floor, stairs, walls and door frames

You don't need equipment (especially not a \$100 "mobility stick") to improve your mobility, all you need is the knowledge of what you need to work on and some anchor points - i.e. something to hold onto, lean or stand on.

Stairs are one of my favourite things to use for hip stretches and balance drills, even backbend progressions. Plus, they have adjustable settings built into them! One of the easiest things to do is keep one foot at the bottom, lift the other foot onto a step and sink into a deep lunge, it even locks your lower back into a good position so you can do some thoracic stretches too!

Control the intensity by stepping onto a higher or lower step, allowing you to dictate how much weight to put through your joints - especially useful if you have knee issues or back pain.

Walls and door frames are great ways to anchor yourself and stretch your shoulders, or as things to hold on to while you work on your balance. Some people really struggle to lunge without feeling like they're going to fall, so practicing with something you can grab if you need is such a good confidence builder. You'll find that the option to hold something if necessary can give the safety net to help someone perform better! Then eventually you won't need the wall at all.

Finally, you should always keep an eye on your relationship with the floor. If it starts becoming a big deal to get up and down from the floor, you're in big trouble. Luckily, it's as easy as practicing anything else - just spend more time on the floor! Practice until it becomes so easy that you don't think anything of it anymore.

So, get down on the floor and twist, bend, move and try to do a little something every day on the floor, even if it's just watching TV. Long after all your deadlift PR's are distant memories and you've ran your last marathon, getting up off the floor could be the difference between you and a nursing home - our goals will change in our later years.

3. Become a Resistance Band connoisseur

Having a healthy number of resistance bands and therabands lying around your house and in your gym bag is a super-hack to filling gaps in your training. With one band you can add a tonne of rotations and retraction for your shoulders, give your elbows and wrists multiple angles of resistance, challenge your core in multiple ways and get your hips on fire with the right exercises.

Resistance bands are basically a multipurpose home gym. A light theraband is best to start, allowing you to get lots of reps in and your blood moving but, I'd say investing in a bigger set of different resistances that you can really start to play with and challenge yourself with is a good idea too.

You're not necessarily going to put on muscle with bands (unless you combine them with bodybuilding principles & other exercises) but the stability and movement you can build with them is like music to your joints! Everyone should have & use resistance bands.

4. Have a "technique awareness" day

Every few months (or more frequently if you're new to something) have a day in the gym or at home that you over-analyse your form & technique. Think about your muscle activation and positions, is there anything you could be doing better or making look nicer? Your goal with this session is not to go physically hard, but instead pickle your brain and analyse if you're getting the most out of the exercises you're doing and the way that you're doing them.

This is something that is great to do with a coach but also something very worth doing for your own knowledge, experience, and confidence. It's very easy to miss things, just go through the motions, or let bad habits creep into your training so taking that time to reset and keep yourself accountable to chasing perfection is very, very valuable.

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The more of these Non-Negotiables and Super Tricks you add to your day, the easier and more beneficial they'll become. In the mornings you'll see me messing around on the stairs for a 5 minute Head to Toe Mobility, then throughout the day I'll just grab on to door frames and stretch while continuing a conversation, after training sessions you'll see me doing a megaton™ of reps with a resistance band and usually before bed to as I keep a band beside my bed. I never have to tell myself to do these things anymore, they just happen because they make me feel good, like how a nice cup of coffee in the morning makes you feel; your body will start to crave it.

In your own training and development, whatever you choose to do, do it to the best of your abilities. Use these Non-Negotiables and form good habits to give your body the things that it wants to do and you'll be keeping your longevity in mind. When you get injured less, it is much easier to make progress with the things you love to do.



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