

FUNCTIONAL MOVEMENT FOR HOCKEY PLAYERS

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In today's world of physical fitness the term "functional" has quickly become a household name. This term is thrown around frequently by personal trainers, hockey coaches, and other related health care and sports minded individuals. The question is: do we really understand how it relates to the hockey player? According to the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM), "*Function is an integrated, multi-planar movement that involves acceleration, deceleration, and stabilization.*"

Think about this definition in depth. Function is used in every day life (walking, lifting groceries out of your car, twisting your upper body shoveling snow, ect.). All require multi directional movement that includes some sort of acceleration, deceleration, and stabilization. Hockey players use functional stabilization, balance, reactive abilities and functional strength each and every hockey shift. Watch Ilya Kovalchuk next time he hits the ice. He is constantly moving in multiple directions at multiple speeds using his balance and strength to protect the puck, dish out checks, absorb checks, and using his core/trunk strength to unload his lethal one timer.

The problem lies in the fact that most training programs today are based on uni-planar movement (front/back, side/side) and most hockey injuries occur in the transverse plane (area around the body – twisting, turning, cutting, ect.) Training in a multi-planar environment can decrease the chance of future related hockey injuries. This is great news for players of all ages!

Anatoly Tarasov, a famous Russian coach in the 70's often referred to as 'The Father of Russian Hockey' was a pioneer of hockey specific conditioning. He trained his players to develop functional hockey strength, agility, reactive abilities and stabilization in all planes of motion. In doing so, he vaulted his Russian Red Army Hockey Team to the national spotlight.

“Training material must be selected in such a way that each exercise could to the maximum be brought nearer to those movements an athlete makes during play. Whether he squeezes out, shoves the barbell, practices with an exercise machine to stretch the muscles in his hands, jumps or runs. The hockey elements must be present even in playing basketball, soccer and other play exercises.”

-Anatoly Tarasov (The Father of Russian Hockey)

Stabilization/Balance:

Hockey is a game that requires adequate levels of stabilization/balance. Very few times during the course of a hockey game is weight evenly distributed on both legs. Think of how many times one leg is used as leverage: cutting to the net, protecting the puck, shooting the puck, changing direction, and pivoting.

Strength/ Power:

Grinding it out in the corners, giving and receiving hits require adequate levels of functional strength/power. In my opinion, relative strength (pound for pound) is the most important. If you're a small player with weak relative strength, potential for injury can be increased.

In Closing:

Hockey is a multi directional game of stabilization, strength and power. It is not a North/South sport. Movement occurs in all planes at many different speeds. Practicing training your body in this fashion can enhance performance and decrease injury. It is important to follow an integrated program catering to age, skill level, physical makeup ect. in a FUN environment.

Function is simply training the body in all planes of motion involving acceleration, deceleration, and stabilization. Hockey players are NOT bodybuilders, uni-planar training, while causing muscle gain, will NOT properly condition the body for the demands of hockey.

Yours in Hockey,

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