

WE ARE TAKING YOUR FITNESS TO THE MAX!

MEN'S

MIDDLE EAST

HEALTH & FITNESS

BLAST FAT FAST!

10 TIPS TO GET
SUPER LEAN

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MAXIMIZE PERFORMANCE

TAKE YOUR BODY TO THE
NEXT LEVEL, **NATURALLY!**

TRAINING

3 LAWS of FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

DEFINING THE REAL MEANING
OF THE TERM FUNCTIONAL



**"CROSSING
THE LINE IS
ADDICTIVE!"**

READ OUR EXCLUSIVE
WITH MACCA



COOL IT DOWN

WHY IT IS
IMPORTANT TO
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SETS

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**PERFORMING THE
PERFECT SQUAT**

THE BREAD & BUTTER OF FUNCTIONAL EXERCISE

THE 3 LAWS OF FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

DEFINING THE REAL MEANING FOR THE TERM 'FUNCTIONAL'

Hopefully at one point or another in our lives you've asked the question "what am I getting fit for?" Are you fit for your job, your recreation, your families? To answer this question many of us have turned to the fitness world in the hope of receiving aid. However, these hopes soon turn sour as we encounter a font of conflicting information, with different camps embattled by a schism of "us versus them" or in industry language, functional versus dysfunctional training.

Fighting over the phrase "functional fitness" as it relates to training and fitness happens because it contains redundant words. To be able to

function means you are fit for what you're doing. If you can't function, then by definition, you're unfit. To prove this true when I qualify a new class of instructors I ask each to demonstrate "dysfunctional fitness" or "unfit functionality". No one ever has, nor ever will because, like jumbo-shrimp, dark-light and accurate-estimates, dysfunctional fitness and unfit functionality are oxymorons.

As a professional in this field for two decades this has become my first 'Law of Function' in the system I teach, called Tacfit, a form of tactical fitness. If you cannot function at what you're targeting, you're unfit. Can you function in your job, in your sport, with your family activities and domestic responsibilities? Does the type of exercise you do decrease your ability to function better in your life? Are you riddled with chronic aches, stinging pains, impinging pins and needles, immobilising stiffness and reoccurring injuries? Does your exercise make these subside, remain or amplify them?

academy class, which once again yielded zero injuries. All of their performance-related physical exams also exceeded all previously tested classes.

If your training cannot meet the physical standards that have been validated as job or sport-related, or if it meets standards but incurs injuries, then that training is not functional. When you're unable to function at your goal, you're unfit. You can't play around, fight through or perform with injuries either, because anything you exercise reinforces their dysfunction. The more you train with poor posture, bad technique or shortened tightness, the stronger that structure becomes. So, any training which advises you to just "tough it out" isn't functional, nor is it intelligent.

As I train special operations units, federal law enforcement agencies and mixed martial arts teams in Tacfit, I have encountered the common objection that if you don't replicate your performance environment in preparation, you won't survive the real thing when you need to fight through illness and injury. This logical fallacy needs addressing in almost every facility I consult, so let's deal with this notion.

Exercise is not the real thing. Exercise is not a replication or rehearsal. Exercise should build you up, not break you down. Results unanimously show across the units and agencies I consult that if you can fully recover from your exercise, then your improvements most often exceed those who believe in the myth that "destroying the body can improve it".

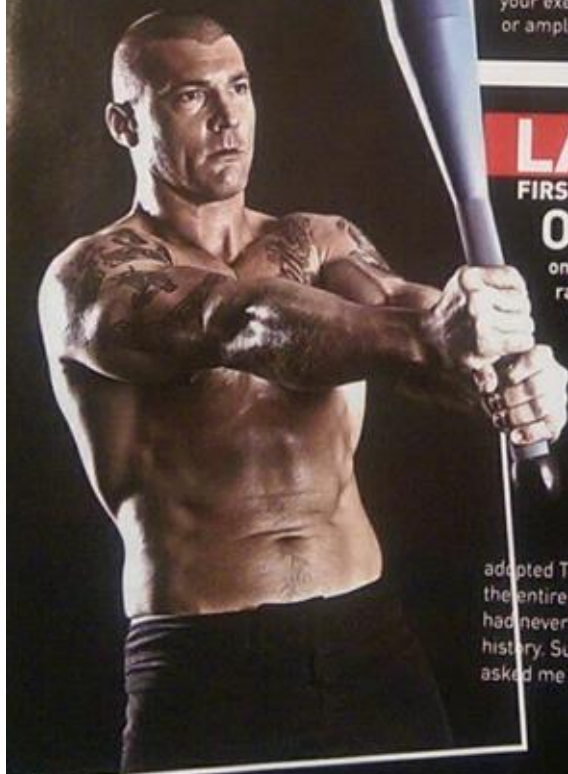
LAW #1


FIRST DO NO HARM

One of the elite federal law enforcement agencies I consult for on the Tacfit programme boasted a raucous 31% exercise-induced injury rate per academy class. To be clear, this was exercise, not combat training or scenario drills. This meant that nearly one in three recruits were becoming injured from the way they were being trained to be "more functionally fit for duty".

The agency called me to fix this problem and when they officially adopted Tacfit I eliminated injuries from the entire academy, a phenomenon which had never before happened in the agency's history. Suspecting it a one-time fluke they asked me to provide the training for another

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WHATEVER YOU CAN DO IN YOUR EXERCISE REGIME THAT YOU CAN RECOVER FROM, YOU CAN FUNCTIONALLY USE. IF YOU CAN'T RECOVER FROM IT, IT DOESN'T CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR PREPAREDNESS, AND THEREFORE IT INCREASES YOUR DYSFUNCTION.

LAW #2 STRESS RECOVERY-FOCUS

I have often been branded a radical for defining preparedness (the sport and military science term for fit-for-purpose fitness) as performance or injuries. If performance increases without injury you're more prepared than if your performance increases the same degree, but with an injury. This is hard science, not rhetorical semantics. Pain competes with performance at a spinal level.

Whatever you can do in your exercise regime that you can recover from, you can functionally use. If you can't recover from it, it doesn't contribute to your preparedness, and therefore it increases your dysfunction. So, if

you're obliterated after your exercise, unable to function the next day when you're needed for a task, then you're unfit.

You must also factor in the sum total load of the stress you face - occupational, travel, nutritional, emotional and psychological, financial and family stress - as well as a host of others including the less visible like chemical, magnetic, thermal and other environmental stress. Now add training stress. The units I train are often in abysmal dysfunction, not because they're inactive (quite the opposite actually) but because they're under-restored and are therefore in sub-prime condition.

For example, one special operations unit I train is responsible for flying elite combat teams in tightly restrained seats, with high vibration, under anticipation of lethal force encounters, all while performing mid-air surgery as medics. That's stress. Add 20kg of armour and even the 20-somethings have adapted their posture to the ill-fitting gear and poorly shaped, ergonomically-challenged seats, and often need to be shoehorned in.

I helped one pilot for nine months before he could actually stand up straight. When he finally readapted to a balanced posture all of his chronic pains and injuries evaporated. He also experienced a significant surge in

SPORT TRAINING

his physical test scores because of the increased neural drive of a biomechanically 'functional' structure. The most valuable aid I provide involves first getting them back to full functionality by sneaking in recovery from the unreasonably high stressors they endure with humility and honour.

What this illustrates is that if you're still carrying your job into the gym, you're going to reinforce that stress load, which means you'll strengthen those stressors. For instance, most people are chair-shaped, since they sit in the same position for hours. If you don't remove those bound areas, you'll strengthen them when exercised. Whatever posture you have, if it's not balanced, you're going to strengthen it with exercise. You're job-shaped and if you're in between jobs, then whatever you do the most, without compensating for, you'll become shaped like, including the couch.

Stress can also be a deceptive term. In fact, the founder of the concept, Hans Selye, expressed, near his death, that he wished he had used the word strain instead. Stress is also necessary for positive adaptations. If you don't have stress you won't grow stronger, leaner and more efficient. When I was in Russia with their special forces trainers and working with the research doctors involved in their Cosmonaut programme, stress was mandatory for survival. This is due to the fact that in the zero gravitational field of outer space your body's ageing process begins to rapidly accelerate. Your tissues and bones need stress or they die.

Unfortunately, excessive stress - called distress in coaching parlance - cannot be adapted to and reinforces dysfunction [by breaking the first law]. There are many

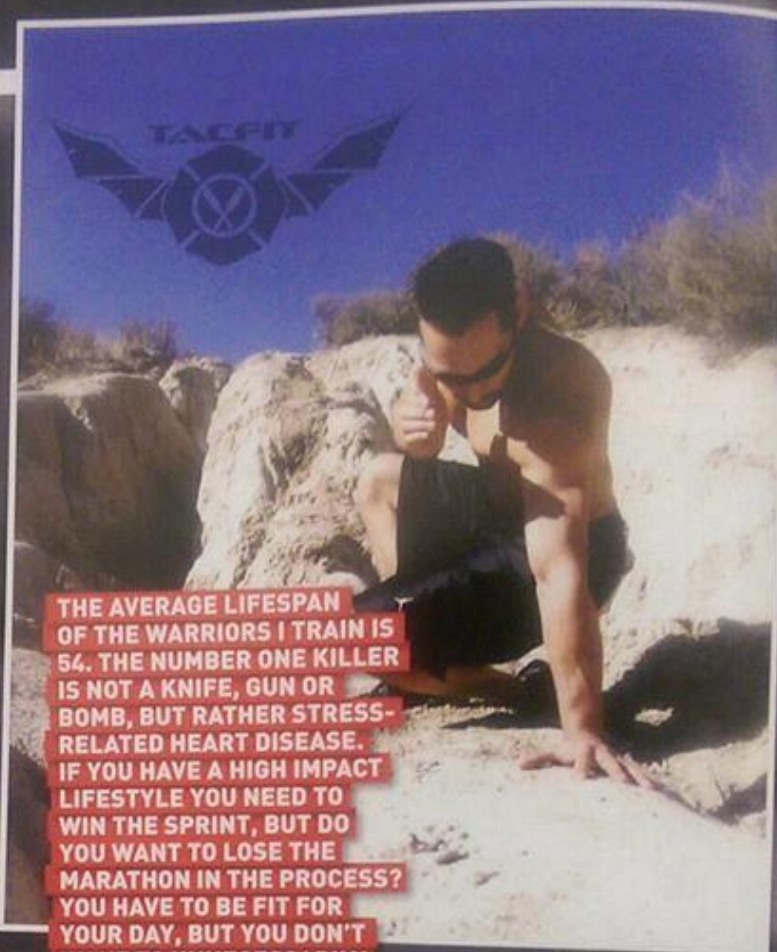
TEST YOURSELF AFTER YOUR NEXT EXERCISE SESSION:

As soon as you're finished with the final repetition measure your heart rate and then measure it again 60 seconds later to determine your recovery heart rate. Wear a heart rate monitor for optimal data accuracy. If you can't reduce your active heart rate by 10-12 beats in 60 seconds, go to a doctor as you may have heart-related problems already. If you can lower your HR by 20-40 beats, you're a highly conditioned athlete.

But within three weeks of stress recovery-focus, you can learn to change the nature of your exercise so that you can recover your heart rate by 60 beats in 30 seconds, which is up to six times faster than the typical conditioned athlete. You don't adapt that dramatically in mere weeks, which means that even well-

conditioned athletes lack functionality. If you can't recover you don't have access to your skills, your tools or your technique.

You lose fine motor control at around 60% of your heart rate maximum, complex motor skills at around 80% and cognitive function at 100%. In other words, if you're exercising at high intensity, your greatest danger is losing your technique, adapting to the poor form and seriously injuring yourself. Poor form becomes impossible to avoid because of your sympathetic nervous system's survival alarm when in distress. Therefore, the more quickly you can recover to good technique when performing at high intensity, the more 'fit' you are, as you're prepared to operate with greater function under higher levels of stress.



THE AVERAGE LIFESPAN OF THE WARRIORS I TRAIN IS 54. THE NUMBER ONE KILLER IS NOT A KNIFE, GUN OR BOMB, BUT RATHER STRESS-RELATED HEART DISEASE. IF YOU HAVE A HIGH IMPACT LIFESTYLE YOU NEED TO WIN THE SPRINT, BUT DO YOU WANT TO LOSE THE MARATHON IN THE PROCESS? YOU HAVE TO BE FIT FOR YOUR DAY, BUT YOU DON'T WANT TO UNNECESSARILY SHAVE DAYS OFF OF YOUR LIFE BY EXERCISING DYSFUNCTIONALLY.

people who lack sufficient positive stress [called eustress] to adapt, but many more who have unrecoverable distress. This isn't an emotional evaluation or psychological tendency, but rather a trackable, measurable physical data metric in Tacfit. If your heart rate exceeds your maximum for the day [maximum heart rate is approximately, but inaccurately, $220 - \text{age} = \text{HRmax}$], then every repetition you perform near your HRmax is wasted garbage as you cannot adapt to greater hormonal arousal. That hormonal 'dump' is also counter-productive, because you grow more dysfunctional from it. Distress therefore makes you unfit.

The average lifespan of the warriors I train is 54. The number one killer is not a knife, gun or bomb, but rather stress-related heart disease. If you have a high impact lifestyle you need to win the sprint, but do you want to lose the marathon in the process? You have to be fit for your day, but you don't want to unnecessarily shave days off of your life by exercising dysfunctionally. I've given my units a Tacfit maxim in combat training, which I'm now giving to you. "Whoever recovers fastest wins". Whoever can recover their heart rate faster not only lives longer, but also performs the best under stress.

LAW #3 JOB RELATEDNESS

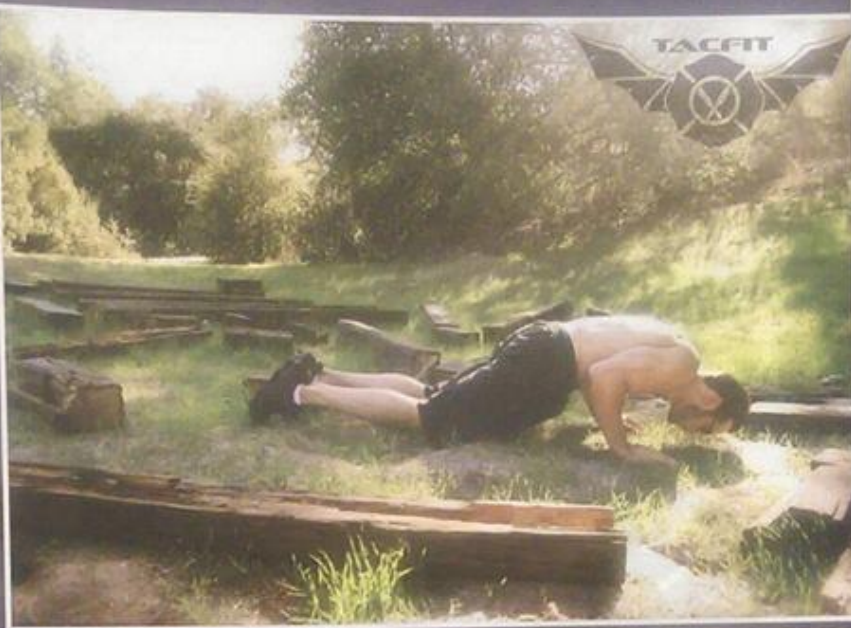
So many of my colleagues get lost in a Squagmire of academic arguments in this regard. They neglect to address the first two laws and frenetically rush to the third law. They argue about the optimal programme for "general fitness". Let me dispel one of the biggest myths in fitness now. There is no such thing as general fitness. If you recall the first question in this article, "what are you fit for?", you can only ever be fit for something specific because your body only ever adapts directly to what you've performed. This is called the SAID law - Specific Adaptation to the Imposed Demand. You're specifically fit to do the things you do most often from which you can recover.

Stated simply, are you trained for the right fight? Some people are well trained for the wrong fight and therefore they step into the cage unfit to fight. Many fighters believe they're well-prepared, but don't realise until it's too late that they were poorly trained. Running senseless hours on the road when you have a three minute match or maximum bench pressing for a no time limit grappling match means your training doesn't relate to your goal.

If you cannot perform the physical tests which have been validated as specific to your job, sport, discipline or lifestyle then you're unfit, because you cannot function to minimum standards. So, you must design a programme specific to you. But how do you do this if you're not a personal trainer? Well, to be candid, most trainers don't understand individualised programme design because their educational orientation is not derived from the three laws of functional fitness.

For example, someone with a rugby conditioning background gets certified by an Olympic lifting organisation and then starts training individuals. Nothing about his background - unless otherwise invested in functional design - can help him create a specifically individualised programme. They define fitness as the ability to do the things that they like to do. For instance, powerlifters define it by powerlifting metrics, marathoners by their metrics and triathletes by theirs.

Even cross-training or CrossFit athletes are specifically conditioned. They just practise variety. Variety doesn't change the mandatory fact of specific adaptation. Hopefully they remain with one programme for sufficient duration to reap the adaptive



potential. But even if they do, that doesn't mean that they understand how to individualise a programme for you.

When I consult for a government agency I perform a needs assessment and risk analysis of their job-related function. From that evaluation I create a physical test and minimum performance standard for the test, which validly demonstrates increased job performance. Finally, I create a curriculum of programmes to perform in the form of Tacfit, which will enable them to exceed those minimum standards. If these workouts demonstrate test improvements while eliminating injuries then they're specifically prepared to function. This is true functional fitness.

Henry Ward Beecher wrote that, "Greatness lies, not in being strong, but in the right use of strength". So, if you want to truly realise your innate potential for greatness you can't believe in being strong anymore. You need the right strength at the optimal moment for the longest time, which should be repeatable.

IF YOU WANT TO TRULY REALISE YOUR INNATE POTENTIAL FOR GREATNESS YOU CAN'T BELIEVE IN BEING STRONG ANYMORE. YOU NEED THE RIGHT STRENGTH AT THE OPTIMAL MOMENT FOR THE LONGEST TIME, WHICH SHOULD BE REPEATABLE.

Functional fitness is not a genre. It's a classification of effectiveness. But functional fitness as a term is a senseless oxymoronic cliché. However, you need to be "fit" in your life, so begin by asking, "For what?" Then, move on to the do no harm law. Proceed to maximising your adaptive potential by recovering fully, then evaluate if a movement or protocol fits the specific lifestyle that you lead.

Scott Sonnon, founder of Tacfit Tactical Fitness Systems, is a hall of fame award-winning producer, acclaimed speaker and prolific author. Overcoming his childhood obesity and learning disabilities, he became a world champion martial artist, USA National Team Coach and consultant to government agencies, units and institutes worldwide. He can be followed on his page www.facebook.com/ScottSonnon or at his commercial website www.Tacfit.tv.

In future installments we'll accept reader feedback on how to develop specific examples of functional applications of fitness. I'll take your job, sport or lifestyle responsibilities and draft examples of the three laws. Stay tuned to future issues. ■