

Anusara Teacher Community



Functional Movement for the Spine

With Adam Ballenger

Good morning Anusara folks,

I wanted to share a little bit of information and a resource for information about the spine. The recommendations I offer are only that, recommendations. You can decide how much you would like to consider the proposals by how important the focus or intention of them is for you.

My focus for today is functional movement for activities of daily life (ADL).

Functional Movement (FM), as it relates to ADL's focuses our intention and clarifies, this is function specific related to ADL's, not golf swing performance, downhill skiing, or playful advanced asana movements and postures. With this respect, the intention defines the way we practice. If your emphasis is FM or ADL's, it still works to have other secondary emphasis as long as they are in a proportion of the participant's greater intention.

For ADL's, the general nature of the different segments of the spine may become more critical than with other primary intentions. The trunk and upper-body loops in Anusara® yoga can be related to segments of the spine and the movements of flexion and extension within each region. In research about injury, longevity, and function, the lower segment, the lumbar, has the most significant task to maintain stability, resist rotation and extension while transmitting forces from the lower body, up into the upper body and extremities. This is directly related to the "Root to Rise" concept. According to the research of Dr. Stuart McGill (as well as others), this lumbar segment of the spine works best, and lasts longer, when stability is it's best skill as compared to a lower spine with a higher degree of mobility or flexibility. A lower spine with a higher degree of mobility would, however, serve many sport and recreational activities as well as an advanced asana practice. Lower spine with the quality of stability also tend to have less pain and tend to suffer fewer disk ruptures

over a long period of time. The Thorax, or middle twelve vertebra, have a counter curve to the lumbar, that allows more forward motion, flexion or bowing, and more vertebra to disperse rotation through than the lower spine. The upper-spinal segment or cervical spine has the highest potential for rotation and counter curves to the thorax. This allows the for a greater ability to observe the surroundings without having to turn the entire body and hold the head upright while the mid-section of the spine extends or places body mass forward, our dominant direction of mobility.

If we consider the mechanics of how we use these sections individually for efficiency and longevity, then we can tailor our application of alignment principals to focus on functional outcomes, if that's a person's intentions. In addition to the segments, we consider the interaction between segments, for example, a healthy and well positioned lower thoracic curve helps to establish an optimal position for the upper lumbar curve. Kidney Loop creates the location of the upper lumbar vertebrae and allows for improved function of lumbar muscles and thus the lower lumbar curve/function as well. Without those bones in the best place, the muscles have a more challenging time functioning correctly which can lead to, inefficient movement patterns, excessive joint wear and tear, changes like the fascia, and a higher risk of injury. In short, learning how to have a cow-pose nature in your lower spine, while also having a cat-like quality in your thorax, is functionally optimal. The healthy relationship between cow and cat pose, are dependent on one another for the optimal function of the whole. This focus of intention could replace a class plan to have an apex pose, with a focus to have an apex coordination of principals, or an apex ability to be mindful of how a portion of the body responds to your movements through various yoga postures. Because the way we move is a learned skill, we have a great freedom to affect the patterns we have.

In the long run, functional movement for activities of daily life are simply one of many options. If it is one of your choices, consider this introduction to spinal biomechanics and then develop your appropriate investment or devotion to it.