The Essential Eight - Eight Mobility Drills Everyone Should Do.

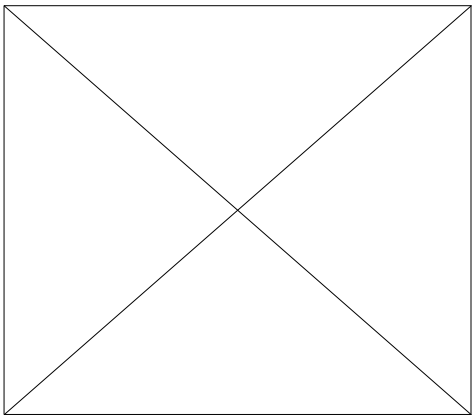
Michael Boyle

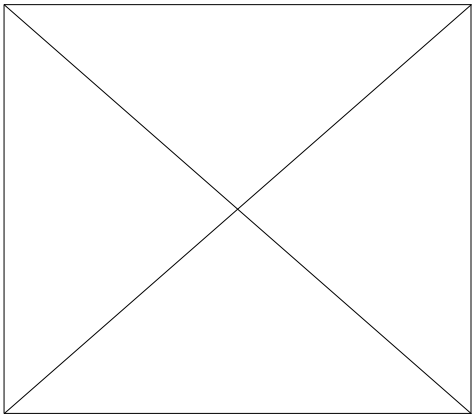
Mobility seems to be "the" hot topic. Everyone has their own opinion. If you've read any of my articles on mobility - A Joint by Joint Approach to Training you know that mobility should be done only for those joints that need it. If you haven't read Joint by Joint, go back and read it before you read this.

If you have read A Joint by Joint Approach to Training this is a straight-forward piece on the "essential eight". Eight simple things that everyone can do to warm-up. The nice thing about these exercises is that anyone can do them. Everyone may not be able to do them well but, they can do them. The people who can't do them well need them the most.

Number 1- Thoracic Spine Mobility. The mobility of the thoracic spine is one of the least understood areas of the body and was previously the realm of physical therapists. Sue Falsone, Director of Performance Therapy at Athletes Performance (www.athletesperformance.com, www.coreperformance.com) may be single-handedly responsible for introducing the athletic world to the need for thoracic mobility and more importantly for showing many of us in the world of strength and conditioning a simple way to develop it. The nice thing about t-spine mobility is that almost no one has enough and it's hard to get too much. We encourage our athletes to do thoracic mobility work every day. To perform our number one thoracic mobility drill all you need is two tennis balls so, there really is no excuse. Simply tape the two balls together and go to work. What you basically do is a series of crunches beginning with the balls at the thoraco-lumbar junction. The balls sit over the erectors and effectively provide an anterior-posterior mobilization of the vertebrae with every little mini-crunch. It is important that the head return to the floor after every crunch and that the hands come forward at a 45 degree angle. We do five reps at each level and simply slide down about a half roll of the ball. Work from the thoraco-lumbar junction up to the beginning of the cervical spine. Stay out of the cervical and lumbar areas these are not areas that need mobility work.

Video 1- T-spine mobility





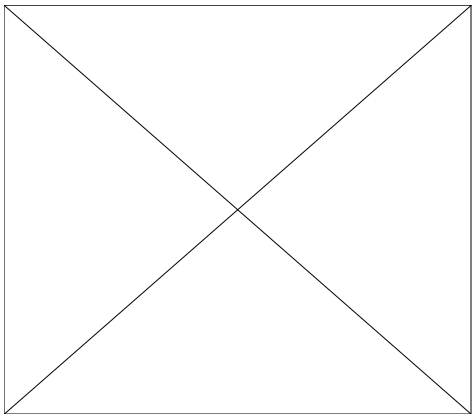
This drill is done first (usually after we foam roll, but that's another article) as we are already on the floor. The rest of our mobility work is done standing.

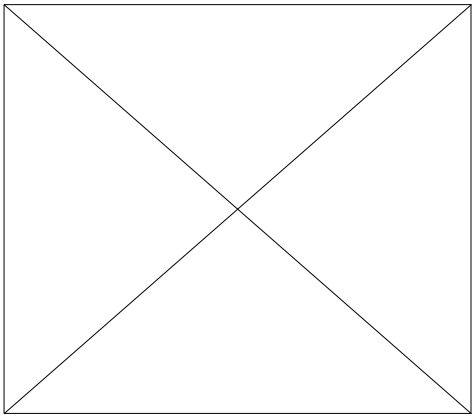
Number 2- Ankle mobility. Just as with thoracic mobility, it is rare to find a person that doesn't need some ankle mobility work. Whether you are an athlete who experienced an ankle sprain years ago (and who hasn't), or a woman who wears heels every day ankle mobility is step two in our warm-up. Credit for this drill goes to Omi Iwasaki, another Athletes Performance PT. The first key to ankle mobility work is to understand that it is a mobility drill, not a flexibility/ stretching drill. You want to rock the ankle back and forth, not hold the stretch.

The second key is to watch the heel. It is essential that the heel stay in contact with the floor. Most people who have ankle mobility restrictions will immediately lift the heel. I will often hold the heel down for beginners to get the feel.

The third key is to make it multiplanar. I like 15 reps, 5 to the outside (small toe), five straight, and five driving the knee in past the big toe.

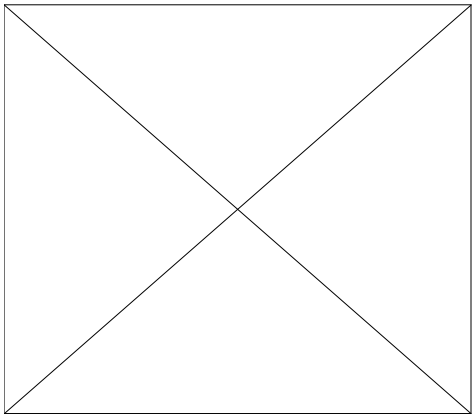
Videos 2a and 2b Ankle Mobility





Number 3- Leg Swings. Leg swings are an interesting exercise. I used to think of leg swings as a hip mobility exercise and a dynamic adductor stretch. I guess this is a day for the PT's to take a bow. Physical Therapist Gary Gray made me realize that leg swings are actually a great transverse plane mobility exercise for the ankle. Yes, I said ankle. Watch an athlete with poor ankle mobility do leg swings and you will see the foot move into external rotation (turn out) as they swing. The key to leg swings is to keep the foot in contact with the floor and to drive rotary motion into the foot and ankle. The action of the leg swinging creates mobility at the ankle in the transverse plane.

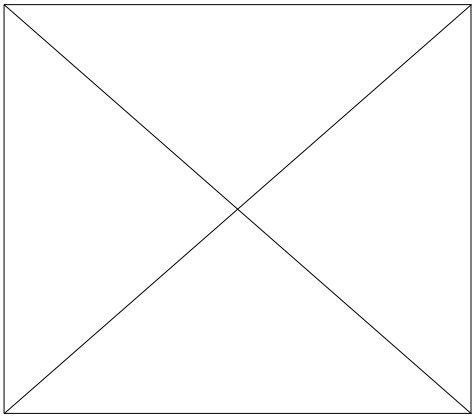
Video 3- Leg swings



Numbers 4-6- Split squats, lateral squats and rotational squats. This is a precursor to what many would call a lunge matrix. The lunge matrix is another Gary Gray concept but, one that has flaws in my mind. Athletes must have proper mobility to perform a lunge matrix and must gradually familiarize themselves with the movements to avoid often extreme soreness. To avoid soreness and develop mobility we perform an in place matrix for three weeks prior to moving to a lunge matrix. Another great thing about an in-place lunge matrix is also a Dan John idea. Dan is fond of saying "if something is important, do it every day". This means we can do single leg work every day. Some for mobility development, some for strength.

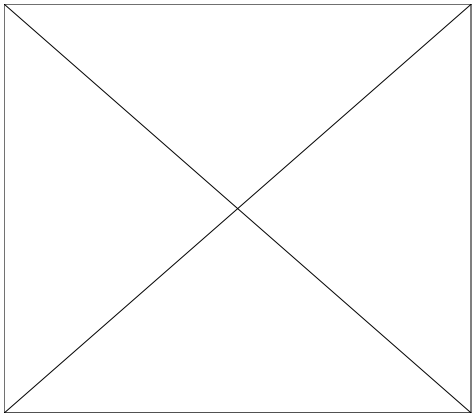
Split squats are in-place precursor to a lunge and develop sagittal plane mobility.

Video 4- split squat



Lateral squats are in in-place precursor to a lateral lunge and develop frontal plane mobility. This is an area where many are restricted. The key here is to watch the feet. In the lateral squat, the feet must remain straight ahead. External rotation is compensation. Lateral squats are a bit counter-intuitive. A wider stance makes them easier, not harder but most people will try to begin narrower. Try to get the feet 3.5-4 feet apart. I use the lines on roll flooring (usually 4 foot rolls) or the width of the wood on the platform (also usually 4 ft) as a gauge.

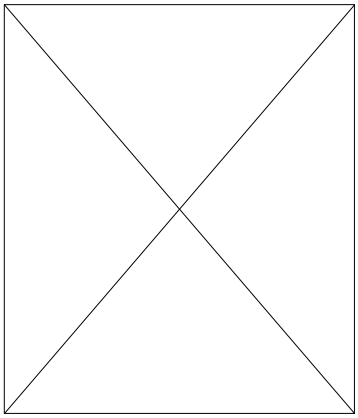
Video 5- Lateral Squat



Rotational Squats- these may be misnamed. They are not really rotational but, are the proper precursor to rotational lunges. The key here is again foot position. The feet are at right angles to each other as opposed to being parallel as in the lateral squat. I have often noticed that most people lunge matrix is actually a series of forward lunges done in different directions. The key to a properly performed lunge matrix is in foot position. My standard joke is that many who think they are doing multi-planar lunges are actually doing panoramic lunges. They do the same lunge, they simply face in another direction.

Either way, the rotational squat prepares the trainee for rotational lunges and continues to open up the frontal/transverse motion of the hips. Many may recognize lateral and rotational squats as "groin stretches". In fact, they are nothing more than dynamic version of the popular groin stretches. The big limiting factor in hip mobility is often flexibility in the muscles versus the motion of the joints. Hip capsular mobility is best left to trained therapists.

Video 6 Rotational squat

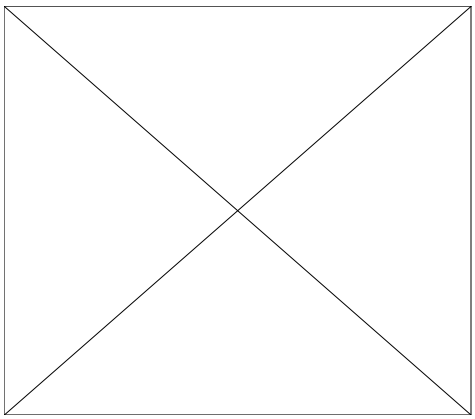


Number 7- Wall Slides- I have to tell you, I love wall slides. Talk about bang for the buck. • Activate low trap, rhomboid, and external rotators. • Stretch the pecs and internal rotators. • Decrease the contributions of the upper traps.

Try them you will be amazed. One thing that might amaze you is that you can't even get into the position. This is not unusual. Another thing that will surprise you is the asymmetry of your shoulders. A third surprise might occur when you try to slide overhead. Many people will immediately shrug. This is the dominance of the upper trap.

The keys to the wall slide • Scapula are retracted and depressed • Hands and wrists flat against the wall (the back of both hands must touch the wall) • As you slide up think about pressing gently into the wall with the forearms • Only go to the point of discomfort. You will notice that the anterior shoulder will release and ROM will increase. Don't force it.

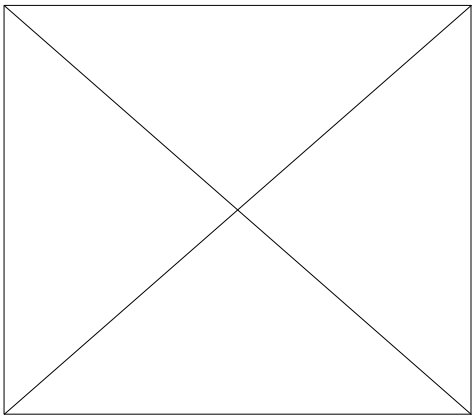
Video 7- Wall Slide



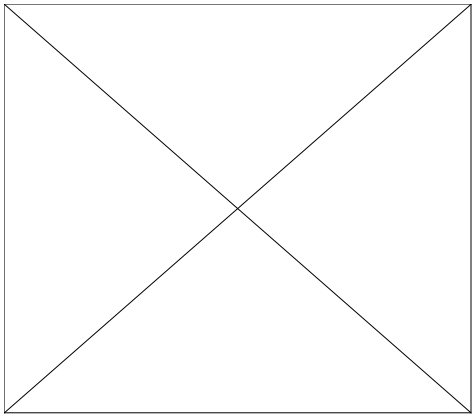
Number 8 Big X Band- Christian Thibadeau is going to love this one. Christian has written about my X-Band idea in a few articles. The Big X Band is an improvement on the original idea. The original idea was to add an upper body component to mini-band walks. The only problem was that many people did not retract the scapula, instead they shrugged so we activated the wrong stuff. Physical therapist Alex McEchnie , who has become the sports hernia rehab expert, uses Theraband to create the fascial slinging effect of the body. I borrowed and simplified the by cutting a ¾" Superband (you can also use Theratube) and creating a big X. Now I get a great simple total body activation. The Big X-Band activates

the glute med, as well as the entire posterior chain. It does it in an anatomically correct manner by using the diagonal relationship of opposite to shoulder. Again, great bang for the buck.

Video 8a- Old X Band



Video 8b- Big X-band



OK, I did it. I answered the often-asked question "What do I do to warmup?" I hope you're happy. Give these a try. It will take 5-10 minutes and not only will you look better, you'll feel better.

Michael Boyle is one of the leaders in the field of performance enhancement and has recently launched www.strengthcoach.com a website developed specifically for athletes and coaches.