

Get Centred

WORKING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM CAN LEAD TO LONG-TERM BENEFITS

BY ANUPA MISTRY

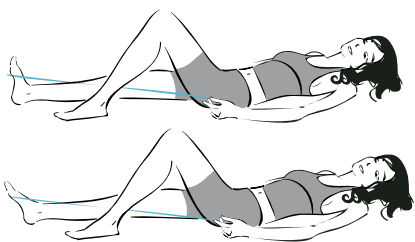


We exercise and work our bodies to keep the structure strong as we age, but what about the mechanics behind that system that help it run? “It’s important to train the nervous system throughout ones entire life,” explains Kathleen Trotter, a personal trainer and pilates equipment specialist from Toronto (kathleentrotter.com). “One of the most vital components of the nervous system is its proprioceptive capabilities—the body’s ability to know where it is in time or space.” Trotter explains that as we age, proprioception decreases, leading to poor posture, balance and lower back problems.

The good news is that exercise can boost our nervous system communication because, as Trotter explains, “we consciously get our brain to send signals to our muscles and expect specific responses. The ‘conscious’ aspect of this interplay between the brain and muscles, during a workout, is vital when trying to train or retrain the nervous system.” Since we’re thinking about what our muscles should be doing when we work out, says Trotter, we have the ability to make positive changes.

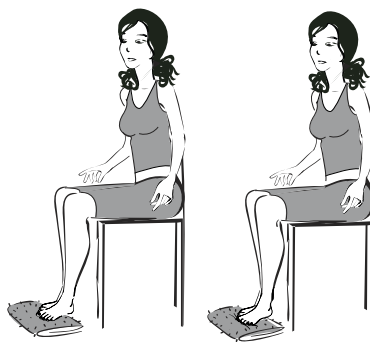
Luckily, it’s not difficult to train the nervous system, and you might already be doing it unknowingly if you use

unstable equipment at the gym, play sports that require mind-body/hand-eye co-ordination or do Pilates. “All exercises train the nervous system to some degree,” says Trotter. But it’s important to train all nervous system pathways, not just the same ones over and over. “Many people ignore the connections that go from the brain to the smaller, more posture-based muscles, like the deep core or foot and ankle muscles.” Incorporate unstable elements into your gym workouts, or do the following simple exercises to train your body’s ability to balance and perform isolated movements.



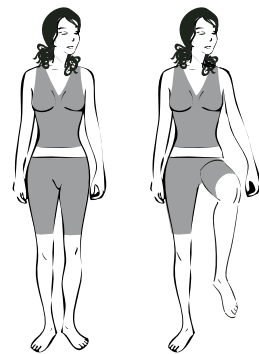
RESISTANCE BAND ANKLE EXERCISE

Lie on your back and wrap a resistance band or towel around the ball of your right foot (shoes off!), straightening your right left. Keep your left leg bent with your foot on the floor. Slowly point and flex your right foot, trying to feel all the muscles in your foot. Repeat 15 times and switch legs.



TOWEL TOE PULLS

Sit in a chair with your shoes and socks off. Place a towel flat and close in front of you, put your foot on the towel try to use your toes to pull it toward you slowly. Take your time and feel your toes moving. Try to pull the entire towel towards you; feel free to reposition your foot whenever too much towel bunches underneath your arch.



SINGLE LEG BALANCE

With no shoes on, stand on your right foot and lift your left leg in front of you. Close your eyes and try to balance for as long as you can, then switch. To get maximum benefit from this exercise, pay close attention to your weight distribution: try not to put more weight on one side of the foot than the other. 