These 4 “Strength” Exercises Aren’t Actually Building Muscle Transcript

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Functional vs strength goals

If you do If you do strength training but strength training but still get still get injured or notice injured or notice that your metabolism doesn't that your metabolism doesn't change despite change despite training and training and eating right, I'll explain why this, I'll explain why this might be happening. I'm might be happening. I'm Deborah Atkinson. I am the Deborah Atkinson. I am the founder of Flipping 50. I have founder of Flipping 50. I have been doing this for been doing this for four and a half four and a half decades. And there's something decades. And there's something we all need to know we all need to know about true strength training about true strength training exercises that exercises that build muscle, build muscle, as opposed to those that as opposed to those that are purely are purely functional functional functional,,, help help help mimic everyday mimic everyday movements, and prevent movements, and prevent injuries. You need both injuries. You need both. It's not a. It's not a matter of choosing between matter of choosing between one or the other. It's a one or the other. It's a matter of combination.

Let me Let me break down four break down four functional strength functional strength exercises that I exercises that I both love and both love and hate. I hate. I like that they are like that they are functional, that functional, that they help they help prepare for prepare for those those those daily, weekly, daily, weekly, or monthly tasks or monthly tasks that we all want to that we all want to do. But they won't do. But they won't necessarily necessarily necessarily help you help you speed up your speed up your speed up your metabolism, change your metabolism, change your metabolic health, metabolic health, and improve your and improve your body composition, meaning reduce body composition, meaning reduce fat, fat, fat, optimize fat optimize fat levels, and levels, and increase muscle increase muscle strength and mass. Let's strength and mass.

The squat to overhead press

Let's talk about talk about why this is so and what the why this is so and what the reason is. So, reason is. So, let me let me show you each of show you each of these four movements and these four movements and talk about them.

When I would When I would use them, use them, when I wouldn't, and when I wouldn't, and making sure you making sure you understand—it's not about whether understand—it's not about whether it's a good it's a good exercise or a bad one. It all exercise or a bad one. It all depends on your depends on your goal and purpose, goal and purpose, or whether or whether you have limitations, and whether you have limitations, and whether this exercise is the best this exercise is the best choice for you. That's choice for you. That's really the really the point. So, point. So, if you're going to if you're going to do them, you'll know do them, you'll know when, why, and also when, why, and also possibly when possibly when not to do them and not to do them and why. Let's go. Number why. Let's go. Number one, the one you one, the one you see often. I'll step back see often. I'll step back so you can see so you can see my feet too. So, I'm my feet too. So, I'm keeping it. I squat keeping it. I squat and push out. This is a and push out. This is a squat with squat with a lift, a squat a lift, a squat with a push of the with a push of the weight up. Well, you weight up. Well, you get the idea, right? Did get the idea, right? Did you do this?

Let me tell you what you train and what you do n't. You actually n't. You actually do the most do the most work with the work with the hull. And if you hull. And if you have problems with lower have problems with lower back pain and your core isn't back pain and your core isn't strong enough, strong enough, you'll feel it you'll feel it in your lower back, which is not in your lower back, which is not where I want where I want you to feel it.

But let me But let me explain why I don't explain why I don't consider this exercise a consider this exercise a full-fledged strength full-fledged strength exercise. If we exercise. If we want you to want you to work on strength, work on strength, we want you to we want you to work on work on muscle mass, muscle mass, because more because more muscle mass muscle mass typically means typically means less fat, better less fat, better metabolic metabolic metabolic health, lower health, lower risk of disease, and better blood sugar regulation. This helps blood sugar regulation. This helps reduce reduce insulin resistance, less belly fat, and for belly fat, and for aging, all of these

things aging, all of these things are very important. But are very important. But when do we want to when do we want to use it? So what if I really if I really just want to get my heart rate up just want to get my heart rate up because you saw me because you saw me do five do five reps? My pulse reps? My pulse quickened. Did you hear?

quickened. Did you hear? I started to choke. I started to choke. That's why I don't That's why I don't turn off the microphone. So, you could hear me gasping for breath So, you could hear me gasping for breath. So. So if that's the goal if that's the goal, maybe it's, maybe it's part of a warm-up, and part of a warm-up, and you're not lifting too you're not lifting too much weight, it can much weight, it can be a great exercise.

But if you But if you are training to are training to increase lean increase lean muscle mass, then with muscle mass, then with this exercise we are not not working out anything purposefully. I'll working out anything purposefully. I'll do this a few more do this a few more times without the weight so I times without the weight so I can better explain the can better explain the process to you. Let's process to you. Let's imagine you're doing imagine you're doing this with me. If this with me.

Deadlift technique and risks

If I have a weight here and I'm I have a weight here and I'm doing a doing a squat, a bench press squat, a bench press, that weight is, that weight is probably too probably too light for my legs to light for my legs to really get tired, and really get tired, and too heavy to too heavy to safely lift with my safely lift with my upper body, my torso.

So, I So, I used used used inertia. It was the push of my inertia. It was the push of my legs that lifted me legs that lifted me up, and the stability up, and the stability here helped me here helped me climb. But it's climb. But it's very dangerous if very dangerous if you lift you lift heavy enough. So you heavy enough. So you can feel it in your can feel it in your lower body.

lower body. But it will be too But it will be too heavy for the upper heavy for the upper body. So you body. So you compromise both compromise both parts. In fact parts. In fact, it's probably not, it's probably not heavy enough heavy enough for the legs, but too for the legs, but too heavy for the top. So heavy for the top. So nothing, neither the nothing, neither the top nor the bottom, top nor the bottom, receives optimal receives optimal load. We are not load. We are not getting getting getting optimal lift, optimal, optimal overload. This is an overload. This is an important distinction to pay attention to. If you have attention to. If you have very specific goals, very specific goals, you and I need to you and I need to choose very choose very specific exercises that will specific exercises that will lead us to those lead us to those goals. If you want to goals. If you want to have upper have upper body strength and body strength and put that suitcase on the put that suitcase on the top shelf, you top shelf, you should be doing should be doing strength exercises that strength exercises that really help really help you achieve muscle you achieve muscle fatigue in your arms, because you fatigue in your arms, because you probably won't be able to probably won't be able to just pick up that just pick up that suitcase and throw it suitcase and throw it there. It just won't there. It just won't work. Of course?

work. Of course? So you need to So you need to work with the work with the appropriate weight. And appropriate weight. And the shoulders are one of the the shoulders are one of the joints that are joints that are most often most often most often injured. This is injured. This is another reason why I would another reason why I would n't do any quick n't do any quick overhead movements in this overhead movements in this exercise. So you are exercise. So you are harming harming harming your lower body.

It's not getting what it It's not getting what it needs, and the upper needs, and the upper body is probably body is probably getting too much, because we have a, because we have a much stronger much stronger lower body lower body compared to the upper body.

So, is this a bad So, is this a bad exercise? No. But if exercise? No. But if you want to do it, you want to do it, do it with light weight. Do it without weight.

So, if I do that So, if I do that or I grab a stuffed or I grab a stuffed toy, just toy, just play, I'll still get play, I'll still get

my heart rate up. I'm still working on my coordination a little bit. This is a coordination a little bit. This is a great exercise in great exercise in a way. Okay, let's try another one. I, let's try another one. I see this a lot, and see this a lot, and sometimes I use sometimes I use it in training or it in training or during classes for during classes for our Flipping our Flipping 50 participants: I hold a weight, 50 participants: I hold a weight, maybe two kettlebells— maybe two kettlebells— one in each hand. I'm one in each hand. I'm just going to grab a kettlebell and just going to grab a kettlebell and do some do some squats. Great squats. Great exercise. And then exercise. And then I'll I'll I'll do a deadlift after it.

Both exercises Both exercises are based on inclines, are based on inclines, but I do them very but I do them very clearly. But this is where things clearly. But this is where things go wrong. When go wrong.

The farmer's carry

When we do we do deadlifts, we want to deadlifts, we want to focus on focus on working the muscles here. And working the muscles here. And if I may explain: if I may explain: your your your hamstrings start hamstrings start right here, at your right here, at your buttocks. They buttocks. They attach right there attach right there and then they go down and then they go down, right? So, the, right? So, the buttocks and hamstrings buttocks and hamstrings. This. This slope is what we slope is what we need. And when I need. And when I bend all the way bend all the way down, just because I down, just because I can, I don't really can, I don't really feel my feel my glutes working now. I glutes working now. I feel it in my feel it in my lower back. And that's exactly what lower back. And that's exactly what we want to we want to avoid. That's when a avoid. That's when a functional movement functional movement like this—leaning down like this—leaning down to pick up to pick up dog food, children, cats, dog food, children, cats, soil for flowers. This is a soil for flowers. This is a very functional very functional movement. But we don't want to movement. But we don't want to train by train by lifting from the floor.

lifting from the floor. We want to We want to train standing at an train standing at an amplitude where amplitude where we feel the we feel the target muscles working. So target muscles working. So I I I both love and both love and hate the deadlift. If you hate the deadlift. If you are going to do it are going to do it at a high incline, you at a high incline, you can do it can do it with a weight in each hand with a weight in each hand or do what is called a hex squat. It's like you hex squat. It's like you 're in it, 're in it, but but but you bend your knees a lot more, and you bend your knees a lot more, and then you lift up with the then you lift up with the weight. I like this option more. It is important more. It is important to remember to slightly to remember to slightly bend your knees and bend your knees and tilt your hips, but tilt your hips, but stop where stop where you feel the you feel the right muscles working, not the right muscles working, not the wrong ones. If wrong ones. If you bend your knees, your you bend your knees, your back remains back remains straight. I bend my straight. I bend my knees to knees to go down and go down and up. I don't up. I don't bend my back.

bend my back. So, I So, I love and hate deadlifts at love and hate deadlifts at the same time. You can the same time. You can alternate it with alternate it with squats, but squats, but be careful, because be careful, because you won't have a full you won't have a full range of motion. You will range of motion. You will only have the only have the amplitude that engages the amplitude that engages the right muscles.

right muscles. Otherwise, there is a risk that the Otherwise, there is a risk that the deadlift deadlift deadlift will put strain on the lower back. This also often This also often leads to hamstring strains in those who are prone to who are prone to this and do not have this and do not have enough strength for enough strength for full range of motion. You full range of motion. You must control must control your range of motion. It is better to practice is better to practice during yoga classes, during yoga classes, with your own weight, without with your own weight, without weights, before weights, before moving on to moving on to weight exercises. The next two weight exercises. The next two exercises are variations of the same exercises are variations of the same action. I action. I 'm going to do what's 'm going to do what's called a " called a " farmer's walk." Ideally, farmer's walk." Ideally, the weight in both hands should the weight in both hands should be the same.

be the same. I can't I can't do this at home due to do this at home due to limited limited limited equipment, but here's what a farmer's walk looks like. I hold farmer's walk looks like. I hold the weight and walk, the weight and walk, trying trying trying to control the movement to control the movement back and forth across the room.

I would do the same. There are many There are many ways to do a ways to do a farmer's walk. farmer's walk. You can walk You can walk back and forth across the room.

back and forth across the room. You can do this You can do this for 30 seconds. But again, But again, ideally we walk because ideally we walk because it's a functional it's a functional activity: carrying activity: carrying bags, groceries, a bags, groceries, a suitcase when suitcase when necessary. There are necessary. There are times when you need to times when you need to carry a suitcase, not carry a suitcase, not carry it. And such things are carry it.

Suitcase carries and wrap-up

And such things are very important. But what kind of very important. But what kind of exercise is this? First, it works the entire, it works the entire body. There is almost no body. There is almost no muscle group that is not that is not involved. It is great involved. It is great for for for functional strength.

functional strength. This is great for This is great for longevity. If we longevity. If we can do these can do these things, we will things, we will deliver the products ourselves. We deliver the products ourselves. We can pick up can pick up packets of salt for the packets of salt for the water softener. We water softener. We will be able to do these will be able to do these things. If things. If no one is around, we no one is around, we can handle it ourselves. This can handle it ourselves. This will probably be will probably be important to each of important to each of us at some point in our us at some point in our lives. And as a woman who lives. And as a woman who lives alone, I will say that lives alone, I will say that this has been important to me this has been important to me more than once. But more than once. But why shouldn't I why shouldn't I use it?

If you need to If you need to improve metabolism improve metabolism and pure strength, not and pure strength, not just the ability to just the ability to lift bags, we lift bags, we want to improve want to improve bicep, back bicep, back and leg strength. I would like and leg strength. I would like you to do you to do special exercises special exercises for these legs. For legs, I would for these legs. For legs, I would like you to do like you to do squats or squats or leg presses at the leg presses at the gym.

gym. For your upper For your upper body, I would like you to body, I would like you to do pulling exercises do pulling exercises like incline pull-ups, seated pull-ups, pull-ups, seated pull-ups, pull-ups, or overhead presses or overhead presses. I would like. I would like you to do bench you to do bench presses, presses, presses, chest presses. So you can chest presses. So you can either do push-ups or either do push-ups or lie on your back or on a lie on your back or on a bench and do a bench press.

Performing Performing bench presses, deadlifts, and bench presses, deadlifts, and hip dips helps hip dips helps isolate isolate isolate body parts, such as the pectoral body parts, such as the pectoral muscles, certain muscles, certain back muscle groups, the back muscle groups, the latissimus dorsi, and the latissimus dorsi, and the trapezius. And for the trapezius. And for the lower body, lower body, it would be the glutes, it would be the glutes, quadriceps, and quadriceps, and hamstrings. We hamstrings. We want to stabilize want to stabilize and isolate muscles and isolate muscles for pure strength, for pure strength, metabolism, and metabolism, and overall overall overall endurance, endurance, endurance, then combine them in a then combine them in a complex way. But we complex way. But we also want to also want to do do do functional exercises. So that doesn't mean. So that doesn't mean it shouldn't be done. Just choose. Just choose specifically and specifically and make sure make sure you get the best of you get the best of both worlds. I would never both worlds. I would never say: let's say: let's just do just do deadlifts and deadlifts and forget about the press, forget about the press, deadlifts, or legs, because deadlifts, or legs, because deadlifts engage deadlifts engage all muscle groups. You all muscle groups. You can say, but you can say, but you need to do both need to do both. We need. We need workouts where we workouts where we isolate the press, deadlift, and isolate the press, deadlift, and incline, and we want to have incline, and we want to have movements within that.

Perhaps during Perhaps during warm-ups, in warm-ups, in between sets, or on between sets, or on days off, we can days off, we can do functional do functional transfers. Here is transfers. Here is another exercise. So, we another exercise. So, we call it call it porting, but for porting, but for obvious reasons, it's obvious reasons, it's more

like more like carrying a suitcase. I carrying a suitcase. I don't know if you pack don't know if you pack things the way I do, things the way I do, maybe you have a weight maybe you have a weight on the other side as well, but in on the other side as well, but in this case we'll this case we'll just take one.

We're engaging the We're engaging the core muscles because the weight is core muscles because the weight is pulling me down, and I'm pulling me down, and I'm not giving in because I not giving in because I 'm working hard on 'm working hard on that side. So I would that side. So I would go with that weight.

It turns out that I It turns out that I hold it in my non-working hold it in my non-working hand, and it's good hand, and it's good practice. Don't do practice. Don't do this constantly with your this constantly with your working, dominant working, dominant hand. So, this is hand. So, this is carrying the suitcase carrying the suitcase to one side, with the to one side, with the other hand free.

Of course? There is nothing here Of course? There is nothing here. The reason is that. The reason is that it forces me to it forces me to watch my watch my posture. This forces posture. This forces me to align my me to align my shoulders and shoulders and stabilize my hips. Not letting it. Not letting it pull me down while I pull me down while I move and coordinate move and coordinate those movements. I don't know about you, but I recently, but I recently had to do this. I was had to do this. I was carrying a 10-month-old baby, carrying a 10-month-old baby, right? I carried the car seat right? I carried the car seat he was sitting in and he was sitting in and also dragged a suitcase up the also dragged a suitcase up the stairs at the airport stairs at the airport because the escalator because the escalator was broken. We will have was broken. We will have cases cases cases when we want to when we want to plan such plan such movements. But identify movements. But identify functional exercises, like squats with a, like squats with a push.

push. The combination of movements The combination of movements looks quite looks quite interesting and interesting and inventive. But you inventive. But you have to ask have to ask yourself, is it really yourself, is it really beneficial for each body part involved? Or is this a good body part involved? Or is this a good functional movement functional movement for rest days for rest days when I can when I can train to train to do similar do similar things in my things in my daily life?

I just want to be I just want to be careful not to careful not to injure myself by injure myself by doing it too doing it too fast, too easy, fast, too easy, or too hard or too hard to get the results I want to get the results I want.

.. I hope this was I hope this was helpful. We helpful. We looked at four looked at four functional movements: the functional movements: the squat with squat with a push, the a push, the deadlift, the deadlift, the farmer's walk, farmer's walk, and the and the suitcase walk. I love them, suitcase walk. I love them, but I don't but I don't like them if you're like them if you're really looking for really looking for real strength and real strength and muscle muscle muscle tissue changes to tissue changes to speed up your speed up your speed up your metabolism.

metabolism. Metabolism during Metabolism during these exercises these exercises only changes while you are only changes while you are doing them because doing them because you are burning calories.

We need both. We need both. You want to You want to get everything. And here's how to get everything. And here's how to achieve this. Let me achieve this. Let me know if you have any more know if you have any more questions.