



**Find Pain Relief
and Reach a New Level
of Fitness with
ABM NeuroMovement®**

**Discover the 5 Fitness Myths
and Learn How to
Enhance Your Performance**

Whole Body Health: A New Kind of Fitness

We all want to be fit and healthy. Yet the path to fitness is filled with myths that often lead to unnecessary injuries that can limit and even stop us altogether.

Much of fitness training is focused on muscles, repetition, trying harder and harder, and on continuing to practice through injury and pain.

Is it possible to prevent many of these injuries?

The answer is a definite YES!

We need to shift our focus from the muscles to the brain. It is the brain that organizes and controls all of our movements, thoughts, and emotions. It is the brain that tells our muscles what to do.

For the brain to figure out the best, most harmonious way to perform any movement, it needs lots and lots of new information.



Movement is the language of the brain.

—Anat Baniel

What Is NeuroMovement®?

NeuroMovement® is a holistic approach to human functioning and action, based in the understanding that movement is the language of the brain. Movement provides information the brain needs to grow and organize itself. And, in return, the brain organizes all movement, thought, feelings, and action.

Movement includes not only movement of the body in space—the movement of the skeleton and muscles—but also the movement of thinking, emotion, and feelings. All action involves movement in all aspects of the self.

Pain Is Caused By Habits of Movement

Pain is often the result of faulty and limiting movement and posture habits, whether you are a professional athlete or not.

Even when the pain is caused by an external trauma to the body, such as sports injuries, accidents, or surgery, the solution still lies in creating new, pain-free patterns of movement in the brain.

Prevent Injuries, Find Pain-Free Movement, and Reach New Levels of Fitness

With [Anat Baniel Method® \(ABM\) NeuroMovement®](#), rather than focusing attention on the muscles, we provide the conditions that flood the brain with the new information it needs to successfully create the necessary connections that lead to increased fitness and well-being.

[ABM NeuroMovement®](#) is a cutting-edge, science-based approach that has helped thousands of people eliminate aches and pains by focusing on the “secret” behind all pain—the brain.

Whether you’re already a world-class athlete or a beginner on the path to greater fitness, your brain is at the ready to make movement easier and you more powerful.

The brain’s ability to make positive quantum changes is often experienced by students of this method as miraculous.

Through gentle, innovative movement lessons and the [Nine Essentials](#) of ABM NeuroMovement, the brain quickly wakes up to form new patterns that eliminate body aches and pains and increase strength, flexibility, and creativity.

”

Vitality is within your grasp no matter what your age or life circumstances.

—Anat Baniel

The Fitness Myths That Hold You Back, and How to Succeed

Why is it so difficult for so many people to follow through on their fitness resolutions?

The answer is that there are certain myths about what it takes to become more fit—increase our flexibility, strength, coordination, and stamina—that contradict what our bodies really need and require.

Trying to achieve fitness, usually meaning physical fitness, is based upon myths that make it challenging, if not impossible, to commit to and achieve a successful fitness regime.



We'd like to introduce the first myth, the “*Training Your Muscles*” myth, based on the Anat Baniel Method® NeuroMovement® approach to fitness.

NeuroMovement® is a holistic approach to human functioning and action, based in the understanding that the brain organizes all movement.

With this approach, brain change ([neuroplasticity](#)) plays a critical role in becoming physically fit.

There are immediate ways for you to take advantage of the remarkable capacity of your brain to change itself and create new pathways for greater fitness and health.

Muscles Do Not Have a Mind of Their Own

There is no question that to be able to move, we need our muscles, and that stronger muscles provide us with the possibility for stronger, more powerful movement and stamina, making us more fit. However, muscles do not know what to do on their own.

It is the brain that “tells” the muscles what to do—when to contract and when to let go—through the signals it sends to the muscles.

And in order for the brain to know what signals to send to our muscles, it has to first “*know*” that the muscles are there to be used and learn how to coordinate the different muscle groups successfully.

Perhaps you've had the experience of trying to tone and strengthen certain muscles in your body and no matter how hard you exercised, it didn't work. This is because your brain never connected fully enough to these muscles. The brain needs a rich variety of experiences from which it creates the necessary connections and patterns of our movements, also known as "mapping" in the brain.

Fitness Myth #1 – "Training Your Muscles" Myth

How well your brain knows what commands to give your muscles will decide the quality with which you will move, or whether you will even be able to do the movement altogether. The "Training Your Muscles" myth assumes that you can train muscles directly by doing lots of repetitions of certain movement.

Only when you have a well-organized NeuroMovement pattern can you successfully begin to increase your strength, speed, and flexibility.

If your brain has not gotten the information it needs to be able to create the necessary patterns of the movement you are trying to do, you will either simply fail and eventually give up or you'll do the movement poorly, making it very difficult to do, often times painful, and even injurious.

What you need is to first provide your brain with information it can use to create more refined, accurate, and well-organized patterns for you to do any movement in an efficient, easy, safe, and pleasurable way.

How can you provide your brain with the information it needs?

ABM NeuroMovement has defined [Nine Essentials](#), each one providing an easy and very powerful way to flood the brain with new information that it needs. In this article, we will introduce you to the first *Essential*.



Movement With Attention: First Essential of ABM NeuroMovement

Brain research has shown that movement done automatically does not create new connections in the brain, but rather it grooves in more deeply existing brain patterns (those stubborn limitations we often experience).

However, the moment we bring attention to what we feel as we do any movement, there is an immediate, dramatic increase in the number of new connections associated with the areas of the body that we are moving.

When you bring attention to what you feel as you move, the brain immediately starts building billions of new neurological connections that usher in changes, learning, and transformation.

You can start right away. You can bring your attention to what you feel with any movement you do, and you'll immediately wake up your brain to form new connections. It might seem too easy to be true, but it works. And it will make it easier and even fun to stick with your fitness program!

For example, if you are walking on a treadmill, slow down the speed to a safe level for just a few minutes. And as you walk, pay attention to what you feel in the soles of your feet, in your ankles, in the back of your knees, your hip joints, your spine, your shoulders, and your neck. Pay attention, notice the movement of your breath and what it feels like.

Or if you are doing a yoga pose, as you move into the pose, pay attention to what you feel in the different parts of your body as you do it. Genuinely get interested in and focused on what you feel. For a few moments, don't worry how well you are performing. Just pay attention to yourself.

[Try this 10-minute video movement lesson and practice *Movement with Attention*.](#)

***Movement with Attention* will increase your flexibility, strength, endurance, balance, and skillfulness (i.e., your fitness).** It can also reduce aches and pains, prevent injury, and promote greater joy, creativity, mental clarity, and problem-solving skills.

This way of approaching fitness will help you learn how to be in the here and now, while enjoying greater physical and mental health. Give it a try and let us know how it works for you. We'd love to hear about your experiences.

Join our conversation on Facebook: www.facebook.com/anatbanielmethod.

Related Resources and Research

Baniel, A. 2016 (2nd Edition). *Move into Life: NeuroMovement® for Lifelong Vitality*. California: Crowning Beauty.

The brain has the ability to figure itself out: The brain is the ultimate self-organizing system. Thompson E, Varela FJ. 2001. Radical embodiment: Neural dynamics and consciousness. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 5: 418- 25. Lewis MD, Todd RM. 2005.

Getting emotional— A neural perspective on emotion, intention and consciousness. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 12(8- 10): 213- 38.

What we know from the science of neuroplasticity: “[T]he realization that the adult brain retains impressive powers.... to change its structure and function in response to experience”: Begley S. 2007. How the brain rewires itself. *Time*, January 19. See also Doidge N. 2007. *The Brain That Changes Itself*. New York: Viking.

Research shows that movement done automatically creates little or no new connections in the brain: “[T]he variable determining whether or not the brain changes is....the attentional state of the animal.” Schwartz J, Begley S. 2002, rpt 2003. *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force*. New York: HarperCollins.

Recanzone G. H, Merzenich MM, Jenkins WM, et al. 1992. Topographic reorganization of the hand representation in cortical area 3b of owl monkeys trained in a frequency discrimination task. *Journal of Neurophysiology* 67: 1031-56.

Nudo RJ, Milliken GW, Jenkins WM, Merzenich MM. 1996 Use-dependent alterations of movement representations in primary motor cortex of adult squirrel monkeys. *Journal of Neuroscience* 16: 785- 807. See Doidge N. 2007. *The Brain That Changes Itself*. New York: Viking/ Penguin.

When attention is brought to movement, the brain creates new connections and possibilities at an incredibly rapid rate: *My teacher and colleague, Moshe Feldenkrais, used movement to increase awareness, which in turn helped to upgrade people’s functioning, often in breakthrough ways; he had his students pay close attention while moving as a way to enhance functioning. However, he did not formulate Movement with Attention as an Essential per se, that is, distinct from awareness.*

Think of *Movement with Attention* as bringing about a virtual explosion of activity in the brain: Scans showed high levels of activity in the prefrontal cortex during new learning but not once the performance became routine. Jueptner M, Stephan K, Frith CD, et al. 1997. Anatomy of motor learning. I. Frontal Cortex and attention to Action. *Journal of Neurophysiology* 77(3): 1313- 24.

Johansen- Berg H, Matthews PM. 2002. Attention to movement modulates activity in sensori-motor areas, including primary motor cortex. *Experimental Brain Research* 142(1): 13- 24.

“Experience coupled with attention leads to physical changes in the structure and functioning of the nervous system”: Merzenich MM, deCharms RC. 1996. Neural representations, experience and change.” In Llinàs R, Churchland PS, eds. *The Mind-Brain Continuum*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Fitness Myth #2 – No Pain, No Gain Myth

In the beginning, like most of us, Gary put way too much force into what he was doing. To get himself in shape, he started weight lifting, climbing steeper hills, and taking much longer walks ... But it seemed that the more effort he put into these workouts, the more tight and rigid he became, and his back pain and stiffness worsened. — Excerpt from [Move Into Life](#)

How many of you have had this kind of experience of going gung ho when deciding to get fit or when starting a new fitness program just to find yourself injured and in pain? If you are like most of us, it didn't take long for you to become disheartened and quit, even if you were told to "work through the pain."

One of the biggest fitness resolution killers is pain. It is a harmful myth that is deeply ingrained in our fitness culture and beyond. The question we need to ask: Is pain, or more importantly, forcing through pain, necessary for increasing our athletic ability and reaching new heights of fitness, performance, and health? My answer is a resounding no!

Pain is the body's alarm system that informs us that we are in the process of harming ourselves, that we need to back off and do something differently.

Forcing through pain actually can have long-term negative outcomes to your body and your fitness level. So much so that recent brain research shows that chronic pain results in loss of brain connections to the painful area—a loss in what is called brain "mapping."

For example, when musicians or athletes have pain in their shoulder and they keep forcing painful movements in that arm, they not only suffer, but gradually lose some of their dexterity and strength in that area.

Their performance begins to deteriorate and over time, if the pain persists, they have to give up.



From my experience working with thousands of people (from athletes to musicians to moms to computer users) suffering from back, shoulder, neck, and other kinds of pain, almost always the pain is the result of poorly-organized movement.

As described in *Fitness Myth #1: "Training Your Muscles" Myth*, what needs to be done is to provide the brain with new information with which it can create new patterns of well-organized movement. Almost without exception, when movement is well organized, the pain disappears, and strength and flexibility increase—we become more fit.

Ways to Provide Your Brain With New Information

In addition to the first *Essential* we discussed previously—*Movement with Attention*—there are two additional *Essentials* that are powerful antidotes to pain and limitation.

The Slow Essential of ABM NeuroMovement

Fast, you can only do what you already know. Fast does not give you an opportunity to feel what you are doing and for your brain to discover alternative and better ways to move.

Doing an exercise fast from the very beginning, or doing it while in pain, will only groove in more deeply the existing brain patterns of pain and limitation.

[Try this 10-minute video movement lesson and experience the Slow Essential!](#)

**SLOW lets you feel and experience life at a deeper, more profound level.
You can bring the *Slow Essential* to any movement you do.**



The Subtlety Essential of ABM NeuroMovement

The *Essential Subtlety* provides the brain with new information it needs to improve the organization of your movement and relieve you of pain, thus opening up the path for greater fitness.

Subtlety means that you intentionally reduce the force with which you do the movements or exercise you are engaged in. When you move with as little effort as you can master, your brain can notice what it is that you are doing and how you are doing it, and immediately use this information to improve the way you move.

Any well-organized, harmonious movement is pain-free, leading to greater strength and skill, and is always very pleasurable to do. And guess what? When moving feels good, you move more and get more fit.

[Try this 10-minute video movement lesson and experience the Subtlety Essential.](#)

By reducing the force with which you move and think, you increase your sensitivity.

In Gary's case:

I told Gary that he would need to cut way back on his exercise. Instead of lifting the heaviest weights he possibly could, I asked that he lift very light weights for a while—and not climb more steep hills for a few weeks....

....I had him do some very simple floor exercises. Through these exercises, I guided and encouraged him to reduce the force with which he moved. He discovered that when he did this, his body moved much better, with greater ease and pleasure....

Gary continued lifting lighter weights as part of his new regimen....He enthusiastically reported that the pain and stiffness were gone and that at the end of the day he had so much energy that he was getting things done around the house that he'd been putting off for years....that he was also feeling younger and more vital than he'd felt in over a decade. — Excerpt from [Move Into Life](#)

These three *Essentials*—*Movement with Attention*, *Slow*, and *Subtlety*—may feel counterintuitive. **However, practicing these *Essentials* will not only help you get rid of pain, it will actually increase your fitness level very quickly. Give them a try for a week or two and see what happens.**

Related Resources and Research

Baniel, A. 2016 (2nd Edition). *Move into Life: NeuroMovement® for Lifelong Vitality*. California: Crowning Beauty.

The brain uses information it acquires through perceiving differences to create new connections between different brain cells; this capacity is called *differentiation*. Differentiation is a fundamental process underlying all forms of life.

Prasad KN. 1980. *Regulation of differentiation in mammalian nerve cells*. Plenum, NY. Scientists are able to measure and track the process of differentiation as it is taking place in the brain.

Hebrew University of Jerusalem. 2007. Scientist observes brain cell development in “Real Time.” *ScienceDaily*, May 29.

Mizrahi A. 2007. Dendritic development and plasticity of adult- born neurons in the mouse olfactory bulb. *Nature Neuroscience* 10(4): 444- 52.

Those connections come together in complex, dynamic, responsive, and continuously evolving patterns. For research describing development in terms of complex dynamic systems, see:

Smith LB, Thelen E. 2003. Development as a dynamic system. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7(8): 343- 48.

Thelen E, Smith LB. 1996. *A Dynamic Systems Approach to the Development of Cognition and Action*. Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Fast we can do only what we already know, see:

Libet B, Gleason CA, Wright EW, and Pearl DK. 1983. Time of conscious intention to act in relation to onset of cerebral activity (readiness potential): The unconscious intention of a freely voluntary act. *Brain* 106: 623- 42.

Going slowly allows the brain to figure out what in its existing repertoire may be useful, allowing the new skill to emerge. Bernstein NA. 1996. On exercise and motor skill, In Latash ML, Tuvey MT, eds. *On Dexterity and Its Development*. Translated by ML Latash. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

See also:

Thelen E, Smith LB. 1996. *A Dynamic Systems Approach to the Development of Cognition and Action*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

“Thinking is the same fundamental process in the brain as organizing movement.” Merzenich M. April 2009. Lecture on brain plasticity to students in the Anat Baniel Method Professional Training Program. Anat Baniel Method Center, San Rafael, CA.



Movement is life; without movement life is unthinkable.

—Dr. Moshé Feldenkrais

Fitness Myth #3 – The Stretching Myth



Why do we feel the need to stretch? We may feel restricted in our movements and that our muscles are too short. We often stretch in an attempt to make these muscles get longer.

We have also been told that stretching is good for us, that it is necessary to stretch before we run or do any kind of rigorous exercise in order to avoid injury. We stretch in an attempt to increase our flexibility and move better, all highly valid goals.

Stretching is everywhere. It is used in yoga, Pilates, sports and dance training, and aerobics. Stretching is also an important part of physical therapy, where it is applied after injury and surgery.

There is no question that when muscles are chronically contracted, it limits our ability to move freely and powerfully, and increases the chances of injury. However, is “the way” that most people stretch the solution? The answer is “no.” This answer becomes obvious when we look closer at how muscles work and what makes them too short in the first place.

How Do Muscles Work?

Muscles can only do one of two things: contract or let go. When a muscle contracts, it moves us in space. Once the movement is completed, the muscle lets go and relaxes so that it is ready to contract again when needed. A chronically contracted muscle stops being useful to us, and actually interferes with our freedom to move and be powerful.

When we try to force a muscle to relax by stretching it, we are applying force against an actively contracted muscle. Unbeknownst to us, we activate the “*stretch reflex*,” a built-in mechanism to prevent muscles from being torn. There are muscle spindles (sensory receptors that detect stretching) that get activated when force is applied to the muscles and actually tell them to contract further, in order to protect those muscles from injury.

(There is a growing body of [research that shows that stretching](#) can actually impair performance and cause injury. See the resources, research, and links at the end of this article.)

So what can you do when you have chronically short muscles—for example, your hamstrings or your lower back muscles?

Increase Flexibility Through Brain Change

It is our brain that tells our muscles what to do. Muscles don't have a say in how long or short they are going to be. So when a muscle is too short, we need to change the brain patterns that are telling our muscles to do so.

As described in *Fitness Myth 1: "Training Your Muscles" Myth*, we need to provide the brain with new information with which it can create new patterns that allow the short muscles to lengthen when necessary and create a better organized movement altogether. Without exception, when movement is well organized, our strength and flexibility increase; we prevent injury and we become more fit.



ABM NeuroMovement has defined the [*Nine Essentials*](#) to communicate with your brain and provide it with the information it needs to create these improved new connections and patterns.

In this article, we will show you how you can use some of the *Essentials* to help you get great outcomes from your stretching routine.

Previously, we discussed three *Essentials*: *Movement with Attention*, the *Slow Essential*, and the *Subtlety Essential*.

The *Variation Essential* of ABM NeuroMovement

In this article, we are introducing the *Variation Essential*, which will further wake up your brain and flood it with new experiences and information to give you more of the flexibility you want and help “warm up” your muscles in preparation for your fitness routine.

Brain research has shown that introducing variations to any movement you do rapidly increases the number of synapses in the brain associated with that movement.

As a result, new possibilities open up for your body to move in a more flexible and harmonious way that also feels a lot better.

How to Get the Most Out of Your Stretching Routine

To get the best outcomes from your stretching routine, in terms of increased flexibility and prevention of injury (muscle warm-up), it is perfectly fine to keep the routine you have, simply apply the four *Essentials* presented above:

1. Whatever stretching movement you do, make sure to first do it a number of times very slowly and don't go as far as you can.

**Remember, you do not want to activate the stretch reflex
which will shorten the muscles involved.**

2. Make sure that as you do the movement, you pay close attention to what you feel as you move.
3. Reduce the force with which you do the stretching movement. Go only as far as you are comfortable at any given moment. It may be counterintuitive, but combined with your attention to your movement, your brain will be figuring out alternative ways for you to move so that you can safely go further, i.e., become more flexible.
4. Introduce variations to the stretching movements that you do. So, for example, if you are reaching for your toes with your hands to try and lengthen the hamstrings, you can turn your head one way as you do it, then the other way; then move your hands to the left of your feet, then to the right of your feet; do the movement with your belly pulled in, then with your belly pushed out, etc.

Be playful and let your imagination blossom. You will find yourself quickly becoming more flexible. In addition, by connecting your brain to your muscles this way, your brain is getting ready to move you in powerful, effective, and safe ways. In other words, you become more fit.

[Try these two short video movement lessons to experience the *Variation Essential*.](#)

**Discover how quickly your brain can change old habits,
free your muscles to be both flexible and powerful,
and also reduce pain and prevent injury.**

If you regularly apply these *Essentials* as you do your stretching routine, it will become second nature to you, your stretching will become effective, and you will avoid the potential negative impact of forceful, fast, and automatic ways of stretching. Give it a try and see what happens.

Related Resources and Research

Baniel, A. 2016 (2nd Edition). *Move into Life: NeuroMovement® for Lifelong Vitality*. California: Crowning Beauty.

Black JE, Isaacs KR, Anderson BJ, et al. 1990. "Learning causes synaptogenesis, whereas motor activity causes angiogenesis, in cerebellar cortex of adult rats." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA* 87: 5568- 72.

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Nicol C., Komi P. V., Horita T., Kyrolainen H., Takala T. E. S., "Reduced stretch-reflex sensitivity after exhausting stretch-shortening cycle exercise." *European Journal of Applied Physiology and Occupational Physiology*. 1996, vol. 72, no5-6, pp. 401-409.

Reynolds, Gretchen. "[Phys Ed: How Necessary Is Stretching?](#)" *New York Times Well Blog*, Nov 25, 2009.

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Samuel MN, Holcomb WR, Guadagnoli MA, Rubley MD, Wallmann H. "Acute effects of static and ballistic stretching on measures of strength and power." *J Strength Cond Res*. 2008 Sep;22(5):1422-8.

Shrier I. "Does stretching improve performance? A systematic and critical review of the literature." *Clin J Sport Med*. 2004 Sep;14(5):267-73.



*Play leads to discovery, feeding our brains with information
to create new and unexpected possibilities.*

—Anat Baniel

Fitness Myth #4 – The Flat Stomach Myth

Perhaps you are one of many people who do sit-ups, crunches, or other exercises to get a “flat stomach,” or what is often referred to a “strong core.” I applaud your goals. I’m all for being attractive, pain-free, and strong.

However, from what I know about the brain and how it organizes muscles into successful action and high-level performance, the idea of chronically contracted stomach muscles as the way to be strong and lead a potent life is fundamentally wrong.

Many have bought into the myth of the “*flat stomach*.” In my workshops when I first let people know that they might want to free their abdomen, there is a gasp in the room. However, this myth is likely undermining your athletic performance, increasing your likelihood of injury, and aging you prematurely.

What Is a Strong Muscle?

A muscle is strong when it has the ability to contract and de-contract, move you and do the greatest amount of work it can.

A muscle that is already contracted (e.g., flat stomach) can no longer do powerful work.

Making things even worse, muscles work in a synergetic fashion with what is called their “antagonistic” muscles. The brain orchestrates this organization of muscular activity. The “antagonists” to the belly muscles are the back muscles.

When your abdominals are chronically contracted, your back muscles cannot work to their fullest capacity; and it is primarily your back muscles that are engaged in the powerful movements of your body, such as jumping, punching, serving a tennis ball, and in keeping you upright.

Try This Movement:

Sit in a chair with your arms on your knees. Slowly lift your right arm up in front of you.

Put your arm back down.

Now suck in your belly really hard and keep it pulled in; and in this position try to lift your right arm up again and see what happens.

Of course, it is much harder, because your back muscles that need to get into action when you lift your arm are stopped by your brain.





I fully agree that strong abdominals are very useful and important to have. But this is not the full story.

The most powerful muscles of our body are all the muscles that are attached to the pelvis, what I call the “power center.” And what makes us strong is a strong brain that has figured out which of these muscles to contract for which movement and when to let go.

When you tighten your belly, you not only weaken yourself...you also lose flexibility, restrict your breathing, lose vitality, and accelerate aging.

The Story of Mike

I worked with a young baseball player Mike (not his real name). He had a great physique and was a tremendous batter with a multimillion-dollar major league contract. He came to me to get relief from chronic right shoulder and lower back pain.

When he came into my office, I immediately saw that his abdominal muscles were powerfully contracted no matter what movement he did. That was a problem, because when he lifted his right arm up to swing a bat, his back muscles weren't available to participate in the movement as needed. As a result, he overused his shoulder muscles and his back became disorganized and painful. Mike badly needed to learn to let go of his flat stomach.

I asked him what, besides practicing baseball, was his fitness regime. His answer was sit-ups; he did hundreds a day. This alone can dumb down any brain. This incredibly capable, talented athlete was undermining himself without knowing. So much so that I discovered that he already had surgery on his right shoulder.

Initially he was resistant to learning to free his abdomen—he had a deeply-ingrained belief that it was his flat stomach that made him powerful. But once he agreed to give it a try, his shoulder pain and the discomfort and rigidity he felt in his lower back disappeared, and he was able to hit the ball with more power and better precision.

Use Your Brain to Synchronize Your Muscles

How can you synchronize your stomach and back muscles to perform optimally? ABM NeuroMovement has defined the *Nine Essentials* to communicate with your brain and provide it with the information it needs for creating well-organized movement. We'd like to introduce you to our next *Essential*.

The Flexible Goals Essential of ABM NeuroMovement

There is no way to know in advance the path that will lead you to achieving your goal.

Know your goal and at the same time free yourself from the compulsion to achieve your goal in a certain way.

By truly embracing all the expected and unexpected steps and missteps, you will create a rich source of valuable information for your brain to lead you to your goal, including successfully achieving your fitness goals.



[Try this 10-minute video movement lesson to experience the Flexible Goals Essential.](#)

**Discover how to move both your belly and your back
in free and harmonious ways that will make you stronger,
energize you, reduce pain and injury, and reawaken your vitality.**

Use all of the *Essentials* we introduced previously while exercising, and you will find yourself doing things you never thought possible. You will also strengthen your power center in the most efficient and pain-free ways.

We'd love to hear how these *Essentials* work for you. Give them a try and let us know what happens.

Join our conversation on Facebook: www.facebook.com/anatbanielmethod.

Related Resources and Research

Baniel, A. 2016 (2nd Edition). *Move into Life: NeuroMovement® for Lifelong Vitality*. California: Crowning Beauty.

“Core stability exercises (are) not superior to conventional physiotherapy exercises in terms of reducing pain and disability”

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The brain has the ability to figure itself out: The brain is the ultimate self-organizing system.

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What we know from the science of neuroplasticity: “[T]he realization that the adult brain retains impressive powers.....to change its structure and function in response to experience”:

Begley S. 2007. “How the brain rewires itself.” *Time*, January 19.

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Doidge N. 2007. *The Brain That Changes Itself*. New York: Viking.

Research shows that movement done automatically creates little or no new connections in the brain: “[T]he variable determining whether or not the brain changes is...the attentional state of the animal.”

Schwartz J, Begley S. 2002, rpt 2003. *The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force*. New York: HarperCollins.

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Nudo RJ, Milliken GW, Jenkins WM, Merzenich MM. 1996. “Use-dependent alterations of movement representations in primary motor cortex of adult squirrel monkeys.” *Journal of Neuroscience* 16: 785- 807.

Doidge N. 2007. *The Brain That Changes Itself*. New York: Viking/ Penguin.

Fitness Myth #5 – Practice Makes Perfect Myth

You've probably heard this saying before, or perhaps simply "practice, practice, practice..."

If you want to get more skilled at playing the piano, playing tennis or baseball, or getting more flexible and skillful in yoga, the belief is that the more hours of practice you put in, the better you will become.

There is no question that in order to become skillful at any sport or fitness activity, you need to participate in and practice the activity. But if that is all that is required—practice, practice, practice—how come not everyone that practices a lot excels at what they do?

**How come most people, even those who practice a lot,
do not reach the level that only few who excel reach,
such as top athletes, top musicians, and other top performers?**

You may be thinking that some people are more "*talented*" than others. But in my experience working with thousands of high performers, "*talent*" has a lot less to do with it than the conditions we give ourselves so that our brains get the information needed to reach ever more refined and skillful levels of performance.

Many years ago, I had the good fortune to work at the Tanglewood Music Festival with both mature, world-renowned musicians and younger, already accomplished musicians. I was brought in to help prevent the anticipated typical repetitive stress performance-related injuries these musicians experienced every summer.

The program was very successful. It reduced what was described by the musical director of the program at the time, the famed pianist Leon Fleisher, "*...from a small army of injured musicians every summer, now we have only a handful of injuries.*"

One of the elements of the successes was following my suggestion that these young musicians practice fewer hours a day and spend the freed-up time providing opportunities for their brains to get new information with which to help them continuously change and improve the way in which they played.

When their brain improved the quality of organization—the way in which their body moved in relation to the instrument while playing—not only did it prevent injury and pain, but the quality of their performance improved. **How come this approach worked?**



When you do something over and over again the same way (practice, practice, practice), the brain quickly grooves in very deep connections and patterns, turning what you do into strong habits.

These habits will limit your ability to continue improving to higher and higher levels of mastery.

That is why so many of us find ourselves being intermediate-level skiers, intermediate-level pianists, and intermediate-level yoga practitioners.

Make Time for Your Brain to Get New Information

What you really want to do is to alternate practice with times when you stop your automatic practice. It's important to back off from trying to reach specific goals, and instead make sure that your brain is getting new information with which it can change itself and upgrade the level of your performance.

This flow of new information wakes up your brain to continue differentiating, refining, and improving your performance.

Previously, we introduced five of the *Nine Essentials* that will wake up your brain and improve performance: *Movement with Attention*, *Slow*, *Subtlety*, *Variation*, and *Flexible Goals*. Now we'd like to introduce you to the *Awareness Essential*.

The Awareness Essential of ABM NeuroMovement

To be able to recognize when you are ready to move onto the next level of mastery, it is important to learn how to use the *Awareness Essential*. Think of awareness not as a state of mind or as a "thing," but as something that you do—an action, a skill that you develop.

Awareness means the ability to observe yourself and know what it is that you are observing. It is the highest-level, most evolved capacity of the human brain. It elevates the functioning of your brain.

Observe yourself as you practice and when you notice that you have reached a plateau, stop repeating yourself. At this point, back off from forceful, repetitious practice.

Instead, pay close attention and become aware of what parts of your body are moving, how you are moving, what you feel, what feels comfortable, and what feels difficult as you slow down, introduce variations to what you do, and reduce the force with which you move.

Employing awareness intentionally, combined with the other *Essentials*, will facilitate quantum leaps in your performance. Become aware of these.

Allow yourself to be playful and experiment, and give yourself the freedom to have a beginner's mind. You will find that you will very quickly get better at what you do, have fewer injuries, and experience greater pleasure.

When you have discovered more skillful ways of performing, practice this new way for a while. When you become aware that you have reached another plateau, once again back off from automatic practice and repetition, and introduce *Awareness* and the other *Essentials*.

Great artists and all great performers, no matter how exquisite they already are at what they do, stay engaged in this kind of process throughout their lives.

Models we can follow are some of the greatest artists and athletes, such as Pablo Picasso, Vaslav Nijinsky, Dick Fosbury, Michael Jordan, Martina Navratilova. **While they were already remarkable masters at what they were doing, they never stopped experimenting, learning, and changing.** They took advantage of the enormous capacity of the human brain to always move them to their next level of performance.



[Try this 15-minute video movement lesson to experience the *Awareness Essential*.](#)

Discover how to be *aware*, drawing upon the full faculties of your amazing brain.

Awareness is a unique human capacity that can catapult you to remarkable heights!

Related Resource

Baniel, A. 2016 (2nd Edition). *Move into Life: NeuroMovement® for Lifelong Vitality*. California: Crowning Beauty

The Nine Essentials of the Anat Baniel Method® (ABM) Transform Your Life through NeuroMovement®

1 – Movement with Attention

Bring attention to what you *feel* as you **move**. Your brain will immediately start building billions of new neurological connections to help you change, learn, and transform.

2 – Slow

Slow way down to learn new skills and overcome limitations. Fast you can only do what you already know. Slow stimulates the formation of rich new neural patterns.

3 – Variation

Introduce variation and playfulness into everything you do. Your brain will get the information it needs to create new possibilities in movements, thoughts, and actions.

4 – Subtlety

Reduce the force with which you move, think, and act. Developing greater sensitivity will enhance your brain's ability to perceive the finest of differences.

5 – Enthusiasm

Practice enthusiasm in your daily life. Enthusiasm tells your brain what is important to you, amplifying whatever that is and infusing it with energy to grow more.

6 – Flexible Goals

Know your goals and **embrace all the unexpected steps, mis-steps, and re-routes** along the way. These are a rich source of valuable information for your brain.

7 – The Learning Switch

For the brain to properly do its job, the learning switch needs to be turned ON. **Expect that you will do, think, or learn something new** in each situation, even familiar ones.

8 – Imagination & Dreams

Imagine how to carry out your tasks and **dream up as many possibilities** as you can. Imagination & dreams guide your brain to continue growing and developing.

9 – Awareness

Become aware of what you are doing, sensing, thinking, and experiencing **at any given moment**. When you are *awaring*, your brain is working at its highest level.

The Nine Essentials Wake Up Your Brain

Each of the *Nine Essentials* describes one of the brain's requirements for waking up and doing its job well.

Each *Essential* helps the brain create new connections to overcome pain and limitation, thus reaching new levels of physical, emotional, and cognitive performance.

Anat Baniel Method

The Nine Essentials of NeuroMovement®

Movement with Attention
Slow
Variation
Subtlety
Enthusiasm
Flexible Goals
The Learning Switch
Imagination and Dreams
Awareness



The *Nine Essentials* offer you concrete, effective, and immediate ways to easily tap into your brain's enormous potential.

The *Nine Essentials* Are Validated by Neuroscience

The *Nine Essentials* are validated by modern science's latest discoveries in the area of [brain plasticity](#)—the brain's ability to change and grow new neurological pathways and connections throughout life.

View the [research that supports the NeuroMovement principles of the Nine Essentials](#) of Anat Baniel Method® NeuroMovement®.



With the Essentials, the brain becomes a brilliant problem solver, leading to breakthroughs in movement, pain relief, and performance.

—Anat Baniel

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