



Time to Make Your Move 2
Balance and Stability with Fitballs

By Darryl Leech

Martial artists from any style can benefit from training with fitballs. You would be hard pressed not to find a handful of fitball exercises that complement your fighting style. The right fitball exercises in your training program will see you increase your speed, strength, and coordination. With that said, it's time to make your move with fitballs.

In the last article we briefly covered the importance of maintaining movement over muscle and how in order to be a strong and functional martial artist you have to move your training away from the seated, pin-loaded machines and into free space. Fitballs have become quite popular in recent years and can be found in just about every gym and training studio worldwide. They are used by health and fitness professionals for everything from basic core activation and rehabilitation all the way to conditioning for professional and Olympic athletes.

The great thing about training with fitballs is that they highlight the instabilities of the user and force the core and other postural stabilisers throughout the body to activate and strengthen. A lot of people shy away from using fitballs as part of their training because they believe that they are too unstable, when in actuality it is the user who is unstable and not strong enough to balance themselves. The fitball is a great tool for martial artists to challenge their stability and learn how to spatially orientate themselves.

The workout:

Before attempting the following exercises please ensure you are able to correctly perform the prerequisite exercises covered in the previous article.

Also before using a fitball make sure there are no scuffs or scratches on the ball.

Kneeling on Fitball:

This is a great exercise as it will activate and warm the stabilisers of the hip and the core. If you haven't performed this exercise before you'll probably be shuddering like crazy.

Start with your knees either side of the ball and hands in front of you. Lean your body weight over your hands and roll the ball forward while bringing your knees under your body. Push your hips forward and slowly bring your body to an upright position. Don't rush this – especially if you haven't practiced much. Remember to keep your shoulders and upper body as relaxed as possible – it is common for people with a weak core to want to bunch their shoulders up to give themselves some kind of support. You want to challenge your stabilisers and core so work through any shuddering by correcting your position with your hips and core not your arms or shoulders.

Tip: If you're having trouble, try to just stabilize in the position on your hands and knees. Get used to doing this without shuddering and then try to work on bringing your body up.



Fitball Hip Adduction:

This is another great exercise for balance and stability of the hips and core, it is especially useful for those who train in a style that uses a lot of kicks and is a much more functional alternative to the seated hip adductor machine.

Start in a standing position and rest one knee on the ball. Keep your hips and foot pointing forward. Lean your body weight into the knee on the ball and push it out to the side as if you were lowering your body into a side split. Pause in this position for a split second (longer if you really want to work those adductors) and then push the supporting foot into the floor and squeeze your knees together to return to the start position.

Tip: Remember to keep your chest up tall and your core on. If you have trouble balancing yourself, work through a smaller range of motion.



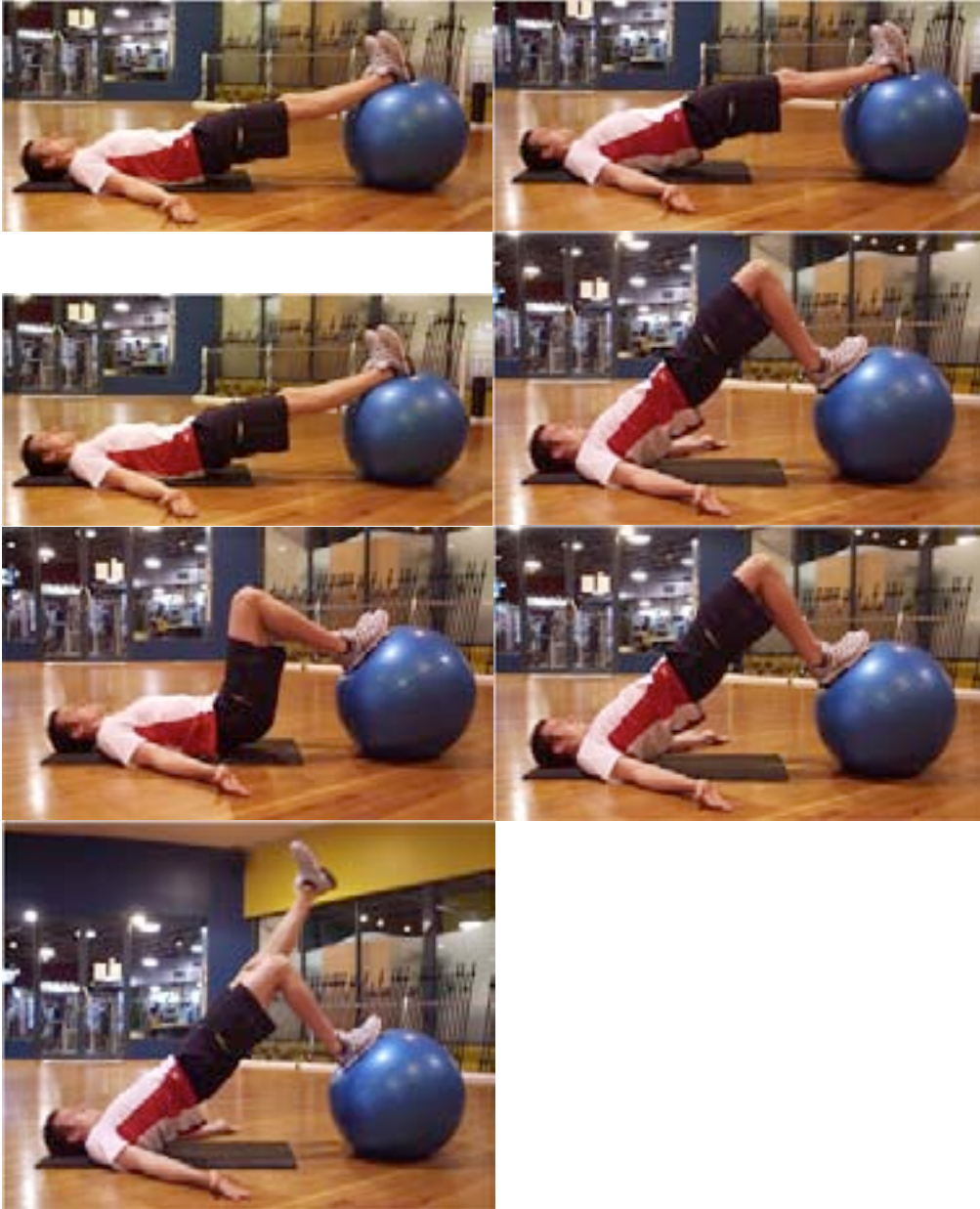
3 Level Hamstring Curl:

This exercise helps to develop the strength of the hamstrings, which will help in avoiding strains or tears. It is also useful for developing force out put for any explosive movements in training.

Begin with your legs straight and on top of the ball. Keep your palms up and shoulders externally rotated. Raise hips off the floor, hold briefly and return to start position. Second lift your hips and

then bend your knees to bring the ball under you, hold then return to start. For the last one, start with your knees already bent and then push your hips up, hold then return to start. Perform three sets by firstly performing 8 reps of each variation (with no rest in between), then 10 reps of each, and finally 12 reps of each.

Tip: For a more advanced workout try the sets one a single leg. Remember to get you hips up high, you don't want to finish each rep with you hips hanging low.



Single Leg Option

Prone Jackknife:

This exercise has been around for a while and is good for encouraging core and spinal stability during hip flexion.

Begin with your chest on the ball and your hands on the floor in front of you. Walk your hands forward and roll your body along the ball until you finish in a pushup position with your feet on the

ball. Keep your hands directly under your shoulders and maintain a neutral spine. Bend your knees and bring them towards your chest, try not to let your hips lift too high and maintain the neutral curve of the lower back.

Tip: Spot yourself in a mirror or use a training partner to monitor your technique – this exercise is tougher than it looks.



Fitball Frog-kick:

The Frog-Kick is great for developing coordination and stability in the hips and is another exercise that is useful for those wanting more strength in their kicks.

Begin in a pushup position with a foot on each fitball. Maintaining a neutral spine, bring one knee to the outside of your body in an arching motion towards the same side elbow, once you have brought your knee as far as you can (remember to maintain that neutral spine) push it in a straight line back to the start position. Now, while you are moving one leg you can't forget about the other one. Effort is also made by trying to maintain balance and control over the stationary leg.

Tip: Try reversing the motion or even try moving both legs at the same time – this is really tricky.



Hip Adduction Pushup:

Another exercise that's tougher than it looks, great for activating hip adductors and core and makes the standard pushup a little more interesting.

Begin in a pushup position with your feet on the ball, take your feet apart and shuffle them towards the floor until they are about half way down the ball. Lightly squeeze the ball with your feet and don't let go, activate your core and maintain neutral spinal curves, then perform a pushup. When pushing away from the floor squeeze as hard as you can on the ball with your feet.

Tip: If you have trouble with this exercise try to grip the ball with your shins or even just practice building strength by holding the starting position. For an advanced alternative try doing clapping pushups.



Fitball 'V' Pushup:

This is a great exercise for developing stability in the shoulder girdle and upper body, especially useful for grapplers.

Start on your knees with two fitballs in front of you, place a hand on each ball. Maintain neutral spinal curves and lower your body to the floor while rolling your forearms along the balls. Hold this position briefly (longer if you want extra stability work) then activate lats and chest and bring your arms and body back to the start position.

Tip: This is a really tough exercise and should not be performed if you have a shoulder neck or back injury – unless under supervision by a health professional. When returning to start position think of using your upper body (lats, chest) to pull your arms in – not your wrists – work your muscles from biggest to smallest. This exercise can be done from your feet, but it is recommended that you take your time – 4-6 weeks - mastering this exercise before progressing.



Precautions:

Although the fitball is a great training tool for the martial artist precautions must be taken. Always realise your limitations regarding your balance and strength and take the time to master basics and build a strong foundation before progressing to more advanced exercises. If while performing these exercises you are unable to maintain a neutral spine or experience back, neck or shoulder pain you should first address these issues. It may seem like a step backwards but always remind yourself of the long term benefits of investing in a solid foundation – did you train like a 1st Dan when you first joined your club?

Training with Medicine balls and Fitballs will see you achieve great gains in strength, balance and coordination. After only a few short weeks of training with them you'll notice huge improvements in your martial arts ability – this is especially true if you've never trained with them before. Remember that as a martial artist you need to move, so next time your at the gym forget the seated machines and move!

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