



## Don't be a jerk; clean & jerk!

I was recently struck down with flu. This was more than man-flu and I was only able to resume anything approaching normal exercise after two weeks off. Going increasingly crazy through inactivity, I planned my training for when I recovered in meticulous detail and was struck by something.

Have you ever tried looking for your glasses or sunglasses, only to find they're on your head? It can be all too easy to miss what's immediately in front of you and I realised I had been doing this in my training. For years I have trained for sport using exercises that mimic the movements I use in sport, so called "sport-specific" training. This principle has been extended into exercise for everyone with what is called "functional training", but I have been missing this out of my exercise.

This should be a lesson for you too. Functional training is not aimed at playing sports better, but at living, or functioning, better. Its aim is to make people stronger and more flexible for everyday actions. This should make life feel easier and reduce the chances of common injuries such as back problems.

Have you ever watched weightlifting in the Olympics to see if they drop the bar on their head? They might look like pub bouncers trying to see who can get the purplest face, but Olympic weightlifters can often perform the splits and get their hands to meet behind their backs! They combine great strength with great flexibility.

The two Olympic lifts use almost every muscle in the body, operating in combination and with great power. The Snatch involves lifting from the floor directly above the head in one movement. The Clean & Jerk lifts the weight from floor to chest (the clean) and then from the chest above the head (the jerk).

So how is this relevant? Well I found myself using a clean & jerk action to put a bookshelf into a high-sided skip at the refuse tip only a week ago. You have probably used a modified 'jerk' action to put a bottle of squash or wine onto a high shelf in the past fortnight. You use the same muscles when you pick a heavy item from the floor and if you've ever painted a ceiling you've used the control and shoulder strength of an Olympic lifter.

I'm not suggesting you should start Olympic lifting right now! However try a few exercises that involve large movements from floor level to head level and higher. They will help you to keep supple and get your body working as a whole far more effectively than a machine at the gym.

You might also introduce a controlled twisting element such as squatting down and touching the outside of your right shin with both hands, then standing up and rotating both hands above your left shoulder. This will help strengthen your stomach and back as well as keeping these areas as mobile as possible. As ever if you have any medical issues, chat to your doctor first and if you have injured a muscle or joint it is worth getting some professional advice from a Personal Trainer.

There are an increasing repertoire of functional exercises designed to strengthen up weaknesses and vulnerable joints as well as making everyday tasks easier. You don't need any fancy kit and you can do them at home, so don't be a jerk, do a jerk!