

## Yoga Corner



**Tree Pose:** Begin to balance on one foot, keeping the ankle stable and kneecap pointing forward. Place your other foot on the inner thigh of the leg you're balancing on. Rotate your free leg outward while keeping your hands at your hips or above your head. Hold for three to five breaths.

### BUILD YOUR BASE: BALANCE AND TRAINING FOR YOUR ANKLES

BY KAT BUECHEL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDREA TAYLOR PHOTOGRAPHY

When we work out, we generally don't place a lot of attention on improving the strength or flexibility of our feet. Our focus is often on our arms, abs and other parts of the body that are commonly used to measure physical progress in training. However, our feet are literally the driving force of the power we generate in many movements. Moreover, we need to have good balance at our base to perform those movements efficiently. How often does your coach tell you to sit back on your heels or drive from them in certain lifts? Devoting time to training your feet will lead to improvement in your overall fitness and capabilities in CrossFit.

Think of how often you transition from a metabolic activity (running, rowing, double-unders) into a gymnastics or weightlifting skill. Greater ankle stability provides a more fluid range of motion when you turn the corner on a 400m run, stop at your barbell and execute a lift. CrossFit's constant variance requires a different amount of work for your ankles

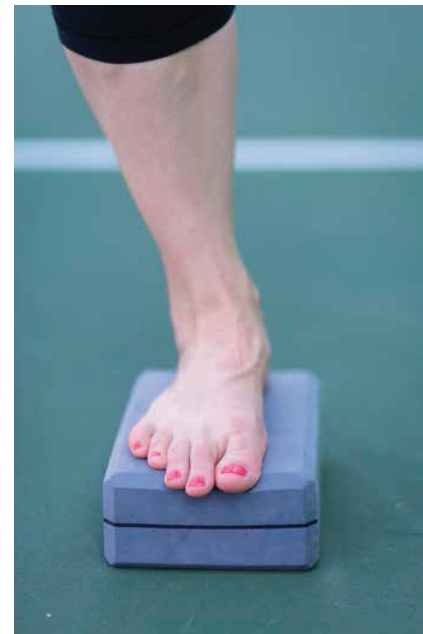
with each modality. Technical practice using balance work provides stability and injury prevention that will translate to all elements of CrossFit.

Targeting balance practice for a few minutes on an active rest day or during a warm-up/cool-down will allow you to improve your capabilities with regards to bodyweight movements, as well as improving your range of motion. Furthermore, balance has long been credited with positive results when applied as a modality for neurodegenerative diseases. CrossFit athletes experience a high neuroendocrine response (increased muscle mass and bone density) in their body when training with heavy loads at high intensity. Athletes that target their weaknesses with balance work will increase their neurological capacity, which will translate to improved technique, ankle stability and flexibility.



**Warrior III:** Keeping the ankle stable and the kneecap pointing forward, press the opposite leg behind you, slowly straightening the back leg while keeping the hips level. Internally rotate the femur of the lifted leg; lengthen through the front body (hands forward or at your sides); do not lock the knee of the standing leg. Hold for three to five breaths.

**TIP:** Check your breathing. When our balance is challenged we hold our breath. Think about your breathing when you perform these poses and find stronger stability by lengthening your inhale and extending your exhale.



**Intermediate pose:** Balance on an unstable surface like a foam block (a sandbag or soft surface of a flat bench can also be used). This deeper challenge creates strength in your ankles while challenging your balance on a different surface.

**Advanced pose:** On a flat surface, build on the intermediate pose by holding 15lb dumbbells at your sides or a training barbell across your back. Close your eyes or shift your gaze up and down to create a drifting focal point for an added challenge.

