

# FITNESS & NUTRITION

MOVEMENT MACHINES - BY PAUL COKER

**Don't believe the hype,** it's not the board you ride or the wetsuit you wear that makes you the surfer that you are. Your body is the most important bit of kit you have when you paddle out.

Surfing is pretty simple. It takes three things; a wave, a board and a rider. If you are like most surfers, you probably spend an unreasonable amount of time checking the online forecast and staring at wave buoy data. You probably own more than one board and you are happy to spend money buying new ones and time on lovingly repairing dings, adjusting your fin set-up and re-waxing your old ones.

So what about the rider? How much do you spend on you? Don't panic, I don't mean in a "lie down over there and tell me about your childhood" kind of a way. I mean how much time and energy do you put into making sure your body is in optimum condition for the next swell. If you are like most surfers, you probably count trying to grab your wetsuit zip strap as a flexibility session and the two minute jog from the car park to the beach as your cardio for the week. This, it is my contention, simply will not do.

Surfing is hard. Optimal rider performance in any given session requires many facets of physical fitness. We need endurance to make the paddle out, explosive power to catch the wave, and flexibility and balance to be able to stay on our feet. Drop made, it is down to lightning fast reactions and precise co-ordination of your entire body to faithfully convert your brain's intentions into your body's actions.

You are a biological structure. Like all biological structures it adapts to the demands imposed upon it. That is to say it gets good at whatever we ask it to do a lot of. For all but the most lucky and dedicated surfers the average week contains a lot more working and sitting, than time in the water. The result? A body more adapted to sitting still than getting slotted.

Our bodies are 200,000 year old movement machines. They evolved to move, and move in a wide variety of different ways. Life on the Savannah back then was hard; your forefathers

spent the vast majority of their waking hours on the move. Whether they were: walking, running, digging a hole, climbing a tree, constructing shelter or trying to impress a potential mate (some things don't change!), surviving needed a whole heap of movement and two days would rarely have placed the same demands on their bodies. If they went more than a few hours without moving they were either sleeping or dying. Now, a few thousand generations later, we very rarely have to catch our dinner, we sit down WAY too much and repeat a few movement very often. The end result is that modern humans even sporty ones, don't move as much or with the variety that nature intended.

So are you interested? Do you want to give your surfing a potentially huge boost by tuning up the most important bit of kit you own? Sticking to broad strokes you need your body to do three things well. It needs to be bendy in all the right places; strong and balanced in lots of different ways; and efficient at converting air into energy.

Get bendy: Flexibility, particularly dynamic flexibility, really matters to surfers and not just to get into ridiculous zipless wetsuits! If you are looking for some quick gains finding your stiff and

tight bits, learning a kickass stretch or two and repeating it often is a pretty good place to start.

Get strong: The research is clear, if you want to reduce your chance of future injury, pick up some heavy stuff and practice doing things that make you wobble. Not only are you less likely to get injured you might find yourselves catching more waves and shredding them when you do.

Get breathless: I reckon this gets missed a lot even by more exercise aware surfers. Although surfing is not as demanding on your cardiovascular fitness as say running or cycling, it still places substantial demands on our cardio fitness. Train it by doing some run, bike and swim work that gets you out of breath and lasts at least 30 minutes - I promise you won't regret it.

**Paul is a Father, Husband, Surfer, Runner, Physio, Teacher and Writer (in that order).**

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