Session Title: **Stop Riding the Pendulum** *Presented by*: **Jonathan Ross, www.AionFitness.com; www.AbsRevealed.com**

Introduction

One of the more peculiar aspects of human behavior is the tendency to reject an extreme, incorrect approach to something only when a completely opposite and equally extreme point of view begins to gain favor.

And this disturbing tendency is particularly common in the fitness industry. Many fitness professionals "ride the pendulum" from one extreme to the other. In most areas of life, the middle ground is the correct place to be. Of course, it is harder to be there since you have to think for yourself, understand that life is full of grey areas, and can't simply rely on a guru or expert to tell you what to do.

Here are some topics where we have been riding the pendulum for too long and it's time to stop. For each one, I'll explain why each extreme is the wrong approach and provide a better way for you to find the intelligent middle and avoid the mental laziness of extremism.

From one extreme…	To the other…
Endless Crunches & Sit-Ups	Never do crunches – Do endless planks
Long, Slow, Distance Cardio is All You Need	High-Intensity Interval Cardio Is All You Need
The Modern, Overly Cushioned Running Shoe	Barefoot Training / Minimalist Running Shoes
Depth Jumps Increase Vertical Jump Height But Are Dangerous	Bigger Plyo Boxes to Increase Vertical Jump Height
Use Rotational Movements for Training	Use Anti-Rotation to Train Rotation

From Endless Crunches to Never Do Crunches to Endless Planks

As I covered in detail in my ACE article, "When Pigs Crunch," the rationale for the recommendation to never do crunches is seriously flawed in a number of ways. Crunches are far from the greatest exercise ever, but neither are they the worst. Our spines can safely flex. It's a fact. And there is no question that crunches have been overused previously. However, there are many ways to safely and effectively perform crunches which can have many benefits by using asymmetrical loads and unbalanced variations. I demonstrated a number of examples in the ab training video series I produced with ACE. You can view them here and get many more examples in my book, Abs Revealed, available in the ACE store.

The other overreaction to the overuse of crunches is to overuse planks. A plank is a teaching exercise. The goal is to learn how to create 360 degree core stability all the way around the torso and hips. Thus, planks beyond 20-30 seconds are mostly a waste of valuable training time. Life is movement, not the absence of it. Once someone owns the skill of creating a plank and holding for up to 30 seconds, it is time for a harder exercise, not more of the same. There's a reason you don't stay in 1st grade forever.

The options are to either (1) start performing a moving variation of a plank (see my "Plank School" ACE video for a few terrific examples of how to do this), or to perform a different, harder exercise.

What you should do: Use the resources above to know when and how to use crunches and how to progress planks.

When Pigs Crunch: www.acefitness.org/certifiednewsarticle/1884/when-pigs-crunch-a-commonsense-approach-to

Ab Training Video Series (includes "Plank School"): www.acefitness.org/blog/2516/top-tips-and-never-before-seen-exercises-for/

Abs Revealed (book and iPhone app): www.AbsRevealed.com

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HIIT is the only cardio you need

Several decades ago, distance running was all the rage. High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) did not yet exist. But it does now. And many people have fallen into the trap of thinking it is all you need. It is an attractive idea in that you can do far less time and still get results. The inspiration for this began when Dr. Izumi Tabata and colleagues published the now famous "tabata study" in 1996. It was watered down so much that people believe that a few minutes of HIIT cardio is equivalent to an hour of traditional cardio.

There are two main problems to address with the overreaction:

1. No one actually does Tabata training in a workout setting. Not even you. In the 1996 study, researchers used a protocol which consisted of 7-8 sets of 20 seconds at 170% VO_2 Max followed by 10 seconds of rest. The majority of humans will never, ever do anything at 170% of VO_2 Max. You can't do Tabata training with Squat Thrusts or Push-Ups – impossible. If you want to do intervals of 20 seconds of work, and 10 seconds of rest, go for it. But it is not Tabata training unless you are using the same impossible levels of intensity used in the study. (This has gotten so badly out of control that Dr. Tabata has now signed on with a company that is "officially" using his name to license a "Tabata" training program that will launch this year as a group exercise class (a format in which it is IMPOSSIBLE to do true Tabata training.) Yes, you read this right: Dr. Tabata is officially licensing a program that does not follow his protocol while claiming that it does.
2. Steady-state cardio is the only proven way to increase blood volume and thus the buffering capacity of your blood. (An increase in blood volume means there is more sodium bicarbonate carried by the blood to buffer acids.) When muscles fatigue, acids build-up. When the acids build up faster than the blood can buffer, performance declines rapidly. Thus, anaerobic recovery is dependent on how quickly you can switch back to aerobic pathways to speed recover.

You don't need a lot of traditional aerobic training – perhaps once per week for non-endurance athletes – but you do need some.

What you should do: Perform both HIIT and steady state (or "regular" interval) cardio to get the benefits of both.

Bigger plyo boxes to improve jump height

Frequently a young, very fit male comes up to me in the gym and says, "You need to get bigger plyo boxes." To which my response is, "No, you need to use a harder exercise." If you're capable of jumping up onto the 36" box, you don't need a bigger box. Jumping up onto an elevated platform is nothing more than a *demonstration of current jumping ability*. Putting a larger box in front of someone does not make them suddenly able to jump up to it. Box jumps demonstrate how high you are*already capable of jumping*.

Also, this is the *easiest* form of plyometric exercise. Next hardest is level jumps (such as in place squat jumps, or standing long jumps), followed by depth jumps. To jump higher, you need to overload the muscular and nervous systems by asking them to decelerate, control, and produce forces at a higher level than what they are used to.

What you should do: If you need to jump higher, then train with harder exercises rather than repeatedly showing how high you can currently jump.

Modern running shoe vs. barefoot running

The "modern" running shoe popularized in the 1970's features a highly cushioned sole and frequently elevated heel with additional cushioning. This allowed runners to continue to run incorrectly for decades with a heel strike and a longer than natural stride. The incidence of running injuries has stayed fairly constant even with increasingly advanced shoe technology. The overreaction launched by the book, "Born to Run," and the barefoot

running zealots is just as misguided. If your goal is to go "natural" with running, you can't go half way with it. The logic has to be consistent all the way through.

Running barefoot on asphalt or concrete – in shoes or out of them – is *unnatural*. Ancient humans ran barefoot or with minimal covering on surfaces that were not rock hard and perfectly flat. It is not natural, and never will be, to run barefoot on streets and sidewalks. There's always one person for whom it works fine, but if you are in position to make recommendations for the masses, you have a higher standard and a responsibility to make recommendations based on more than anecdotal evidence and a single data point.

Also, it is irresponsible to recommend to people who have lived and exercised in "traditional" footwear for many decades to immediately adopt the opposite extreme. There is a period of adaption that needs to occur to allow the body to adapt – through biomechanical and neural changes – to the new experience.

What you should do: If you want to try barefoot or minimalist shoe running, do so only on softer, unpredictable surface (like grass) at first and only for short distances. *Avoid running with the natural foot on unnatural surfaces.(It doesn't matter if there's a guy you know who runs marathons barefoot on asphalt. Anecdotal evidence from a single individual is insufficient to develop recommendations for the masses.)*

Anti-Rotation Exercises Are Enough to Train Rotational Movement?
This is perhaps the nuttiest of all the overreactions. There is a growing belief among some fitness professionals that due to the increased stress and torque placed on the spine during rotational *movement*, training time should be spent only on anti-rotational exercises to avoid the extra stress during training.

Proper training *is* stress – period. *You cannot train the body to do something by preventing the body from doing it.* Neurologically – and even just linguistically – it does not follow logic or physiology. Further, life is movement. And you cannot train for movement through the absence of it.

It is precisely because rotational movements are the most stressful that we *must* train them. In a controlled setting, we need to teach the body to create and control the most "dangerous" of movements so that in life and in sport – an often uncontrolled and unpredictable setting – when that body is called upon to rotate, it has learned to do so without the need for conscious control through sound practice, repetition, and skill development. We certainly must apply intensity and training volume carefully, but we need to remember the golden rule of fitness: the SAID principle.

What you should do: Use common sense – you train for movement by moving, not with stillness. Limit total volume of the most dangerous movements, but it is foolish to avoid them all together if you need to train that movement to use it in life or sport.

Wrap-Up
It seems that there will always be those who prefer to use the last name of an expert as the rationale for adopting an extreme viewpoint for or against something. It is admittedly easier and comforting to do so than to think for yourself and develop a reasonable, balanced approach that weighs all factors. Jumping on a bandwagon with an expert name behind it provides safety in numbers, but is intellectually lazy.

Do the hard work. Think for yourself and find the middle ground that will serve the masses the most effectively. However, this is the only way we will stop repeating the mistake of bouncing back and from one extreme to the other.

There is no "secret" or one answer that fits all situations and can incorporate the unique biodiversity of humanity. We all have the genes for one head, two arms, and two legs, but within that, there is a massive amount of

variability to the smaller individual variables that determine what we look like and our limb length. And this variability further applies to our abilities, limitations, and proper training choices are.

Here's your call to action: Stop riding the pendulum. Hop off in the middle, think for yourself, and be a leader to those that need you to be one. Do the hard work of taking a balanced position and avoid extreme ones – they are most often always wrong.

Contact:
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Abs Revealed Products and Information:
Main site for the book: www.AbsRevealed.com
- **Book**, **iPhone app**, **video library** available: www.AbsRevealed.com/buynow.php
- Extra exercises not included in the book available on the "Deleted Scenes" page

Twitter: www.twitter.com/JonathanRossFit
Facebook: search "**Everyday Fitness with Jonathan Ross**" and "**Abs Revealed**"