

A dramatic photograph of a large fire at night. In the foreground, several firefighters are visible, wearing yellow helmets and gear. One firefighter's helmet has "LAF" visible. In the background, a large, intense fire is burning, with bright orange and yellow flames reaching upwards. Power lines are visible in the background. The title "The FIREMEN'S • Grapevine" is overlaid on the image in a white, stylized font.

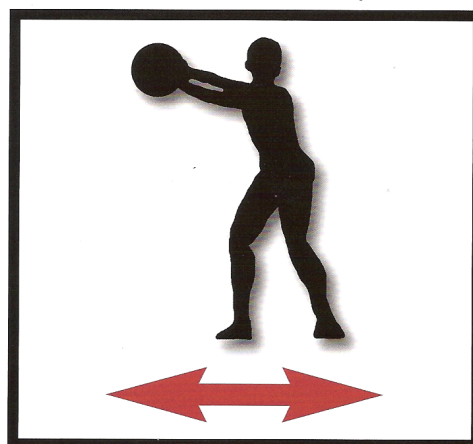
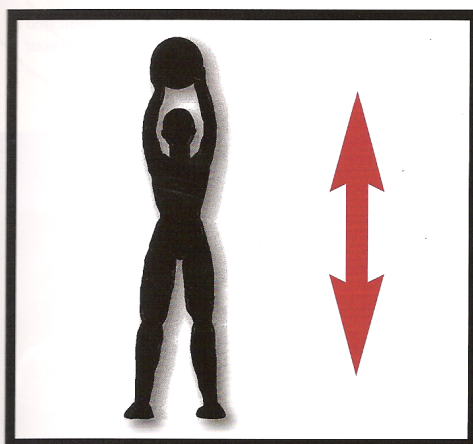
# The FIREMEN'S • Grapevine

September 2009

Tired of your exercise routine? Bored with lifting weights?

# THEN TRY ALTERNATIVE TRAINING

by John Platero



A warm up is an essential precursor to any workout. Most people use a treadmill, stair-climber or a stationary bicycle to get their body ready for whatever activity they're about to perform. The problem with these activities is they're all uniplanar. You're only moving in one plane of motion. In firefighting however, activities such as advancing a hoseline, throwing a ladder or just getting in and out of the rig require multi-planar movement. When performing these activities, your joints must adjust through these different planes, while the body's "active" system (muscles, ligaments, tendons and fascia) help stabilize and navigate the body to prevent an injury.

Often, people hurt their back turning in the shower or bending over to pick something off the floor. It's not necessarily caused by lifting a heavy weight. It seems when people lift something heavy, they prepare themselves, and therefore, no injury. However, if the "inner system" or stabilizers are not trained, a simple task of turning in the shower can leave a person gasping for air! Before any workout even the novice exerciser knows to "warm-up."

Why not get a little bit more out of the warm-up and actually prepare this "inner system" for our daily life?

Remember, a good warm-up should:

- raise heart rate
- raise core temperature
- heighten the nervous system
- increase balance
- increase coordination
- increase viscoelasticity of tissues
- prepare the body for sport or activity

Try this warm-up routine next time you exercise. It shouldn't take you more than fifteen or twenty minutes to complete.

You'll need a 5 lb to 8 lb medicine ball. Don't try using anything heavier than that for the first 8 - 10 workouts. A heart-rate monitor is a big plus. Keep your heart rate under the 85% of attainable heart rate. Always consult your physician before commencing an exercise regime.

## MEDICINE BALL TRAINING (Dynamic multi-planar movements)

### Wood Chopper

Stand up straight with all your joints "stacked" over each other. Make believe you're standing at attention with your chest pointing up towards the ceiling and your legs slightly wider than shoulder width. Keep your knees bent slightly over your toes. Your toes should point slightly outwards to the side about 25°. This is very, very important.

Raise the ball up over your head towards the ceiling and then bend forward with the ball ending up between your legs. Then, return to the upright position.

Inhale on the way up. Try to breathe into your belly button not just your chest. At the "12 o'clock" position you may extend your spine a little past neutral but control your movement and be careful. Exhale on the way down and make sure your feet don't "roll" outwards when the ball passes them on the way down. If they do, then widen your stance. Perform this motion about 10 - 25 repetitions for three sets with a slow to moderate tempo.



### Side bends

Start with the same posture as before with the ball over your head. You may slightly close your legs, narrowing your base of support. Slowly alternate side bends by moving the arms (with a slight bend in the elbow) with the ball to each side. Range of motion is limited so be careful and "feel" you end range.

Remember to keep the knees bent and you may let them bend to each side. Inhale as you lean to a side and exhale as your return to the neutral position. Perform this motion 10 - 25 repetitions for three sets with a slow to moderate tempo.

### Russian Twist

Start with a "stacked" or military posture. Bend your knees about 15- 30°. Keep your feet a little wider than shoulder width with feet pointing out to the side and knees tracking over the toes. Hold the ball just below chest height. Keep the ball close to your body at first. Twist towards each side like a washing machine. Make sure all the joints move together. Your head should remain fairly straight towards the front.

Slowly start moving the ball away from your body as you twist. Inhale out to each side and exhale back to center. Begin by going to one side and then back to neutral. Progress to one fluid motion from one side to the other. Perform this motion about 10 - 25 repetitions for three sets with a slow to moderate tempo.

### Wood Chop and Reverse Wood Chop Toss

For this exercise you'll need a partner or a sturdy wall to throw the ball against. Get into your Wood Chop position and start with the ball over your head. Throw the ball to your partner or at the wall but try not to use your arms. Propel the ball with your torso instead. Your partner

should now throw the ball back to you towards your feet. If you're using a wall, aim the ball so it lands near your feet. You'll now have to catch it in the bottom position of the Wood Chop exercise. Catch it and immediately, throw it back to your partner - hence, the Reverse Wood Chop. Your partner should return the ball over your head so you can catch it in the top position of the Wood Chop. Again, if you're playing with the wall, aim the ball so it returns back over your head. Remember not to use your arms, but your glutes, hamstrings and back to propel the ball. Exhale as you throw the ball and inhale as you catch it. Perform this motion for a set of 15 -25 repetitions counting a down and up as one repetition.

### Oblique Toss

Resume the Russian Twist position. Make sure your knees are bent and the spine is in alignment. Hold the ball out in front of you at about stomach height. Position your body so your partner or the wall is parallel to you. Toss the ball to the side at the wall or partner. Concentrate on using your torso, not your arms. Practice catching the ball out in front of you or as late as possible before it reaches the ground. The further away from your body you catch the ball the harder it will be on your obliques. Switch sides and repeat the same movement. Exhale as you throw the ball and inhale as you catch it. Let your knees and ankles bend throughout the motion. Perform this motion for three sets of 15 - 25 repetitions to each side.

### Abdominal Ball Toss

You'll need a 25 inch, a sturdy wall or a partner to perform this last exercise.

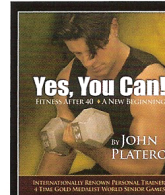
Place the stability wall about 3-4 feet from the wall. Anchor your feet under

a pair of dumbbells. The dumbbells should equal 50% of your total body weight. Lie supine (on your back) on the ball with a wide stance. Each foot should be under a corresponding dumbbell. Place your body so the lumbar curve (your lower back) is flush against the ball.

With two hands, hold the medicine ball out parallel to your head, which is now hanging out over the stability ball. Using your torso, not your arms, crunch or "sit-up" quickly, tossing the medicine ball at your partner or the wall. Your partner should toss the ball back over your head so you'll actually catch it behind you as you lie back down on the ball.

This is a killer! Because of the dynamic eccentric (the "negative") contraction performed by the abdominals, you'll really feel this the next day. Don't try anything larger than a 5 lb ball the first couple of times. Inhale as you catch the ball and exhale as you let go. The key is to use the trunk, not the arms. Perform this motion for a set of 15 -25 repetitions, counting a down and up as one repetition.

Aha! Tricked you. And you thought this was just a warm up. Pick a body part or parts and train that for the remainder of the hour. You're now thoroughly warmed up. 🍌



John Platero, an internationally renowned fitness educator, is the director of education for the National Council for Certified Personal Trainers. He is the "trainer to the trainers." He has filmed more than 30 fitness videos and has been published in most of the fitness magazines. As an athlete, John was a champion bodybuilder turned cyclist and has won medals in cycling and mountain biking. You may contact him at [johnplatero.com](http://johnplatero.com) or at [NCCPT.com](http://NCCPT.com)

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