STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES & THEIR IMPORTANCE WHEN COACHING CLIENTS

DR SUSAN BAXTER

INDUSTRY INSIDER | #015

EXPRO

DR SUSAN BAXTER

Dr. Susan Baxter is a standout in the fitness and academic realms, for example innovating Zumba in a nightclub and growing her classes to over 100 participants at a time. Juggling her bustling fitness business and PhD studies, she emerged as an Optimum Nutrition sponsored athlete, top fitness bodybuilding competitor, and invited speaker at global conferences. Her PhD focused on overcoming exercise barriers in individuals with chronic illness, fueling her passion to inspire and educate fitness professionals. Today, Dr. Susan empowers trainers through her educational courses, speaking events and books to enhance their clients' journeys, her tenacity serving as a beacon in the intersection of fitness, health, and academia. Her shared mission with PTs is to be able to motivate and inspire clients through personal trainers to their best health using science.

A Message from Dr. Susan Baxter:

Throughout my journey, I've crafted my signature online programs, each a culmination of my academic research and rich practical experience, ranging from online mentorship to “Understanding your client with chronic injury and pain”. With every iteration, they're refined to work in real-world application for tangible results. These online programs have been informed by my PhD study, knowledge, and developed over years of working with clients and constantly being improved to what has worked and continues to work at a high level for us. Thus, I’m excited to give you a bit of a glimpse of just some of the things our students learn in the full program.

W: www.drsuzsquad.com
I: @sweat_equity_coach

WHY UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES IS CRUCIAL?

The realm of fitness and personal training is vast and complex, with each individual presenting a unique set of anatomical and physiological characteristics. For a personal trainer, understanding these structural differences is not just advantageous, it's essential. Singapore, for instance, hosts a diverse population with varied lifestyles, genetic factors, and previous injury histories. It’s not just about the workouts; it's about personalizing them for individual needs and setting a prognosis or a prediction for the level of improvement in the client.

To craft effective exercise programs, trainers must grasp the subtle nuances of each client's anatomy. This includes understanding bone structure, muscle insertions, and potential genetic predispositions. Furthermore, trainers should discern between structural limitations, which are often permanent, and functional ones, which can be improved over time as well as acquired. These can not only occur exclusively but can interplay, which is the task of a talented trainer to pick out.

"Studies have shown that individuals can have variances in hip socket depth, femur angles, and spinal curvatures. While one client might comfortably perform a deep squat, another might struggle due to their inherent bone structure."

There is an observed phenomenon casually referred to as the “celtic” or “scottish hip” which is a deep socket vs a “polish”, or “chinese hip” which is a shallower socket. This combined with the length of the femur as a ratio to length of tibia, and the angle of the femoral neck all contribute to predisposition of injuries as well as abilities in exercise for ranges of motion. Simple mobility exercises cannot change these structural differences nor will modification to these predispositions be possible without surgery.

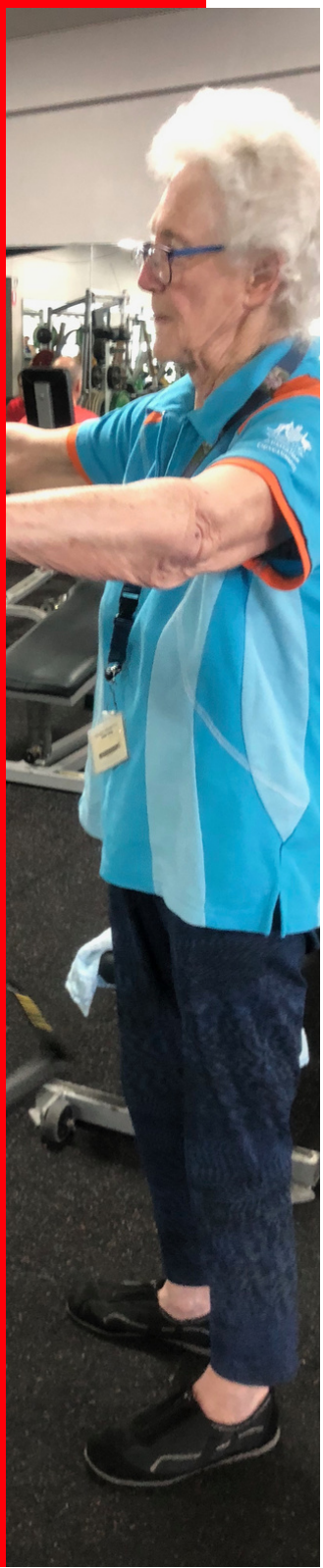
However, a typical fitness assessment may not delve deep into these intricacies. The standard measurements and range of motion tests don't always capture the individual’s structural uniqueness, nor does it often assist the observer to select the practical implications or the adaptations required in programming. Our suggestions seek to use testing with real world crossover (which is more inherently linked to the exercises that a client may encounter).

It can be all too easy to think that since there was a certain level of change in one client or oneself that this can be a benchmark for other clients. If we overpromise and underdeliver it can be hard to keep clients interested in our services or we may alienate them entirely from wanting to participate in exercise because they are trying their hardest but they are not getting the results on the timeline as promised.

It’s important to note that I personally believe all trainers are doing their best to seek out the best treatment and exercises for their clients, and I am simply sharing what works well for our studios and staff after years of research and refining in real world scenarios. Consider the following as methods that at the very least can assist you in articulating to clients the nuances that a specialized program brings to them in terms of benefits compared to a general non-specialized program.

THE RISKS OF IGNORING STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES!

Failure to acknowledge and adjust for these differences can lead to:



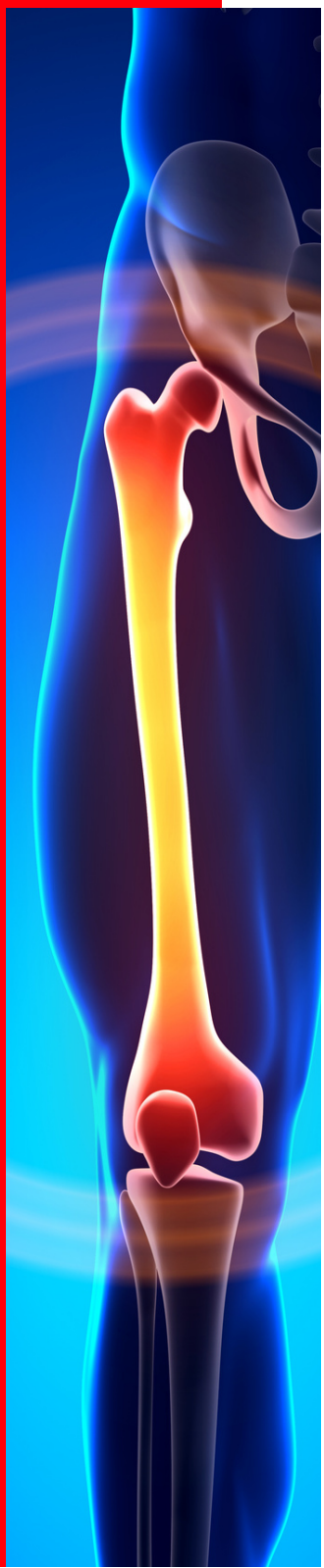
- Ineffective training programs that don't deliver results. Picture this - a client finally decides it's time to make that significant change in their life. They are guided by the expectations you have suggested for them. Without the specific knowledge of structural vs functional or acquired differences and how to pick them, you're guessing a client's ability to be able to achieve what you can.
- Increased risk of injuries due to inappropriate exercises. Some exercises are contraindicated for clients based on the results of practical testing. Sometimes momentarily until they can meet the positional demands and movement required for the exercise; sometimes for the structure of the client that exercise will be off their radar.
- Frustration and dejection, leading to client drop-off rates. As a client who has been told if they work hard they will reach a certain goal and then due to a factor outside of their control they do not reach it, it's understandable that they may feel like their best is not good enough and not only give up your leadership but also exercising.
- Missed opportunities for specialization and personalization in training. Clients may permanently start believing there is no special difference beyond someone telling them what to do.
- Damage to a trainer's reputation and client trust. If there is a disconnect in alignment of results regardless of limitations.

HOW TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES IN CLIENTS

Personal trainers should focus on:

- Comprehensive assessments that go beyond standard flexibility and strength tests with little to no crossover to their specific goals.
- Open and honest communication about potential structural limitations.
- Collaborative goal setting that considers these limitations.
- Referring clients to specialists, like orthopedic doctors or physical therapists, for a deeper understanding when necessary.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF COMMON STRUCTURAL OR FUNCTIONAL DIFFERENCES IN CLIENTS THAT WOULD DICTATE CHANGES TO THEIR PROGRAM?



The following is by no means an exhaustive list but includes just some of key aspects:

Imbalance of left compared to right ankle mobility: For example, a subtle difference from left to right of more than 2cm increases the risk of injury in the client for lower limb training, especially during axial loading. This can be acquired structural, functional or a combination of the two. Considering whether back loaded squats are optimal for these clients prior to them correcting the imbalance if possible.

Anterior translation of the shoulder/breast augmentation under the muscle: The anterior translation of the shoulder may suggest that reducing the range of heavy bench presses is indicated. In order to ensure that the range is preserved for incidental work (such as the client throwing a ball for their dog at the park), I include some lighter DB work focusing on strength in the end range that is possible for the client.

Celtic hips: The depth of the socket and the angle of the hip coupled with the length of the femur can result in a structural difference which may preclude full depth squats and sumo stance for deadlifts. Whilst there may also be a functional component, the structural component cannot be modified by mobility training.

Lack of proprioception: Occasionally clients are over reliant on the visual feedback of a mirror: whilst this may not seem like an issue, it can set them up for injury due to “clumsiness”. Clients may require some extra agility training and coordination training to help them.

Issues with toe mobility: Oftentimes clients may have a lack of movement in their big toe or toes. This again could be acquired structural from osteoarthritis for example, or functional. In these cases extra demands of the mobility required for a lunge for example may come from the hip and cause hip issues or other injuries further up the chain.

Balance: Lack of balance can be acquired from neuropathy of the feet from chemotherapy or diabetes, amongst other conditions as well as a function of a detrained individual. Lack of balance indicates consideration of risk to reward for exercises which may place demands on the vestibular system.

Scoliosis: Whilst there can be a functional and acquired component, a structural or all of the former there may be a need to consider setting parameters for weights lifted in clients for example during a deadlift or a squat or axial loading.

Kyphosis: Occasionally this can be functional as well as structural (and acquired). Consider the postural demands of exercises especially in extreme examples for breathing during exercises too.

Run asymmetry: If not contraindicated, checking the clients running form can often indicate further areas of work in the kinetic link chains of the body.

Forward head lean: The advent of phones has made forward head posture all too common. Many clients will have a limit on being able to look over their shoulder or often feel headaches or neck pain. This may make the client prone to more anterior tilt of the hips, and disengagement of the abdominal muscles. Whilst this can occur from acquired structural reasons such as Ankylosing Spondylitis, it is most likely to be functional and require some work ongoing as well as lifestyle modifications.

HOW OUR "UNDERSTANDING YOUR CLIENT WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS AND PAIN" COURSE CAN ASSIST?

Dive deep into the nuances of catering to clients with unique structural needs, especially those battling chronic illness and pain.

- In-depth Analysis of pain processes and recovery mechanisms.
- Holistic Learning about complementary and alternative treatments, introducing you to a broader spectrum of care options.
- Empowerment Strategies to uplift clients, even those living with chronic conditions.
- Stress Management Techniques presented in an easy-to-digest format.
- Exclusive CLOVER™ Technique Integration into your training programs for superior results.
- Exercise Periodization Know-how to optimize workout scheduling.
- Client Retention Mastery to ensure you never second-guess your approach or lose clients due to uncertainty.
- Industry Leadership Skills making you the sought-after expert in your gym or locality.
- Reputation Enhancement for added credibility and likability, solidifying your position as an expert in this specialized field.
- Financial Uplift as you become the preferred choice for clients seeking specialized care, reflecting in your earnings.

Empower your clients. Enhance your skills. Elevate your reputation.

TOP TIP TO PASS TO OUR EXERCISE PROFESSIONALS

1. COMMUNICATION

It's not just what you know but how well you can explain it and understand how to communicate this to your client to get their buy-in. A program is only as good as the client's willingness and motivation to follow it and that comes from using psychology in your favour and finding out what will ultimately work best for each client.

Feel free to use my line “your movement is as unique as your own fingerprint” when explaining that the assessment of their movement is to help you to help them better instead of somehow criticizing their ability to perform something.

2. CONTINUED EDUCATION IS CRUCIAL

We encourage all trainers to delve deeper into understanding structural differences in the human body. While foundational fitness courses offer a starting point, specialized certifications can provide a more nuanced perspective.

By understanding the intricacies of human anatomy and biomechanics, trainers can offer a more personalized and effective training program. This is not just about lifting more weight or achieving a deeper stretch; it's about optimizing health, reducing injury risk, and enhancing overall life quality: PLUS how many of the 80% of the currently not exercising population will we be alienated if we are not across what their modifiable and nonmodifiable limitations are.

It's time to shift the focus from "one-size-fits-all" to "tailored-for-you." Equip yourself with the knowledge and tools to understand your clients better and offer them a truly customized fitness journey.

Doing all of this can help you with leveraging strategic partnerships too, because on one hand you can communicate with the current allied health staff working with your client for parameters, but also if you are making a major change to the client's quality of life, the allied health team of this client can be impressed and know to refer more client in your direction.

3. RECONSIDER HOW EXERCISES ALIGN WITH A CLIENT'S GOALS

Whilst a full range of motion squat is arguably a great compound leg exercise, is it really necessary as the only exercise to work on legs for example? It's time to get creative and understand how to creatively get to a client's goal instead of focusing on the specific exercise as a goal. Your client might want to catch their children in a game or in a race, so they are not concerned how you prepare them for that.

Learn more about Dr Susan Baxter and her mission at

www.drsuzsquad.com

As a valued ExPRO Fitness follower, we are offering a 20% OFF our On-Demand Membership for a year when you use promo code **EXPROMC20**

EXPRO

WANT TO CONTRIBUTE TO OUR INDUSTRY INSIDER?

CONTACT OUR TEAM FOR MORE INFORMATION AND TO EXPRESS YOUR INTEREST

EVENTS@**EXPROFITNESS**.COM

WWW.**EXPROFITNESS**.COM