

COACH DAVE'S CORNER

Making sense of exercise...

BY DAVID S. GESLAK

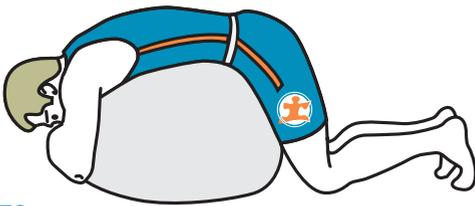
Many individuals with autism have heightened sensory systems. If you try to teach exercise while his or her body is in this state, you may experience resistance from the child or student. This can result in frustration on both sides, and even worse, exercise may be seen as negative experience for your child or student.

To better prepare them to exercise begin with the exercises below: Log Stretch and Stability Ball Hug. These can help calm their bodies and minds, while even improving their posture and abdominal strength. And by using the Foam Roller and Stability Ball you are introducing them to fitness equipment that can become part of more advanced exercises as they progress.

STABILITY BALL HUG

OBJECTIVE

Help to relieve stress and calm the nervous system.



HOW TO

Have child kneel on the ground and place the stability ball at his knees. Next, have him lay his stomach on the ball and gently hug it. Make sure that his feet stay in contact with the ground to maintain balance.

HOW MANY

- ▶ Perform one to four sets for 20–60 seconds.
- ▶ If your child requires more time, allow it, as long as he's not trying to get out of exercising or a specific activity.

COACHING TIPS

- ▶ This can be paired with other exercises within a program.
- ▶ Students may want to lie on their backs, which is okay, but be aware of their surroundings and ensure that they are safe.



Champion Rachel compares lying on a Stability Ball to lying on a Squeeze Machine. While it may not elicit the exact benefits, it can be a great and cost-effective alternative.

DAVID S. GESLAK, BS, ACSM-HFS, CSCS ...



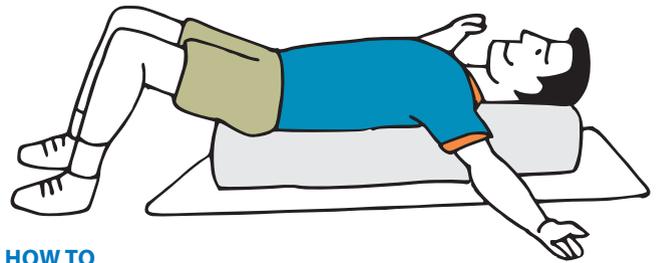
...Coach Dave, founder of the Exercise Connection (EC), is widely recognized for the pioneering of structured visual exercise programs, as well as his insightful and dynamic presentations. Dave has experience as a para-educator and was a Fitness Coordinator at Giant Steps, a school for children with autism. He is an author, advocate, hosts a TV Show "Coach Dave" on The Autism

Channel, and trains parents and professionals across the world on his protocols. He employs individuals with autism at the EC and is developing the first employment program, incorporating exercise, within Hart Schaffner Marx, a company in Chicago. The autism community has enthusiastically embraced Dave's message and is especially encouraged by his results. ◀

LOG EXERCISES

OBJECTIVE

To help improve the individual's proprioception while increasing the flexibility and range of motion of the shoulder girdle.



HOW TO

It is important that you model how to get onto the log. When the child squats down to sit on it, you may have to adjust the log during the process. It is important that the child's bottom is on the far end of the log and that he then lies back. The back of the head should be on the log and in a neutral position and the neck should be relaxed.

HOW MANY

- ▶ Begin with 30 seconds for the general stretch. If they want to stay on longer, that's fine as they are in a safe position.
- ▶ When performing the arm actions, have them do 8–12 reps.

COACHING TIPS

- ▶ Palms should face up.
- ▶ If the hands are not on the ground, that is okay. Don't force them down, as this means that the muscles of the neck and shoulder girdle are tight. This will happen naturally; keep practicing and watch to see the improvement.
- ▶ Make sure the neck is not arched back. Chin should be down. You may have to prompt to get the neck into a neutral position.



Log Exercises can be like self-massages, helping to reduce stress and tension in the neck. This is very important for our children but can also benefit mom and dad. So make sure you try this exercise too! ◀