

## Ask the Professional – Exercise Balls

If there is one piece of exercise equipment that everyone should have (and use!) it is an exercise ball. Also called Swiss balls, stability balls or Theraballs, they are routinely utilized in order to help strengthen the core and back musculature, to make certain exercises more challenging and to help with functional training. The first step when deciding to use an exercise ball is to make sure that it is the right size for you. A rule of thumb is to have a 90 degree angle at the knee when sitting on the ball with your feet flat on the ground. If the angle is less than 90 degrees then the ball is too small, if it's greater than 90 degrees the ball is too large. Exercise balls typically come in 3 sizes, 55cm, 65cm and 75cm. A height guide is often given when purchasing a ball that is not inflated; 55 cm - 4'11" - 5'4", 65 cm - 5'5" - 5'11", 75 cm - 6'0" - 6'7". Exercise balls can (and should) be used when weight training, in place of a weight bench in order to make the exercises more challenging and to activate additional muscle groups to maintain stability, for abdominal training when doing traditional crunches, twists or sit ups to make the musculature work harder or for flexibility training, including yoga and pilates positions. The exercise balls can also be used in place of a chair in order to help promote proper seated posture, as a great deal of stress is placed through the spine when seated and to increase balance. However, if your occupation requires long bouts in a seated position, it may be necessary to opt for something more ergonomically designed instead of an exercise ball or regular chair. Because the balls create an unstable surface when you are positioned on them, your stabilizing muscles (including the abdominal or core musculature) are activated to help keep you balanced. Often these muscles become de-conditioned as they do not get routinely worked, unless specific exercises are done for them and this de-conditioning can be a factor leading to back pain or to a higher risk of sustaining a back injury. Exercises for the stability ball can range from beginner to advanced and anywhere in between and can focus not only on the core muscles but also the upper and lower body. Often more than one muscle group is working when exercising on the stability balls, which can help to maximize the efficiency of the workout. Please keep in mind that whenever initiating a new exercise program, it is important to speak with your health care professional prior in order to determine if it's safe for you.

For more information on this topic, please contact

 **ACTIVE CHOICE** Dr. Dana Selby BPHE, CK, DC  
**Active Choice – Rehabilitation Centre**  
38 Mill St. E., Acton, ON, L7J 1H2  
519 853 2244     [dr.dselby@gmail.com](mailto:dr.dselby@gmail.com)

Dr. Dana Selby is an alumni from the Faculty of Physical and Health Education at the University of Toronto, the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College (CMCC), is a Certified Kinesiologist through the Ontario Kinesiology Association (OKA), is certified in clinical acupuncture with the Acupuncture Council of Ontario (ACO) and is currently enrolled in a 3 year fellowship in rehabilitative sciences.