

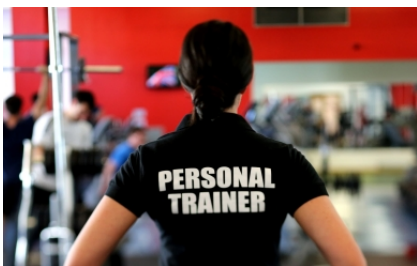


## The 'softer' aspects of fitness which can really improve aspects of our MS

### Hello again and welcome!

Welcome to my new subscribers...and hello again to my existing supporters. Thank you for signing up to receive my blog; I hope you find this week's content interesting and feel it was worth subscribing to.

Diana xx

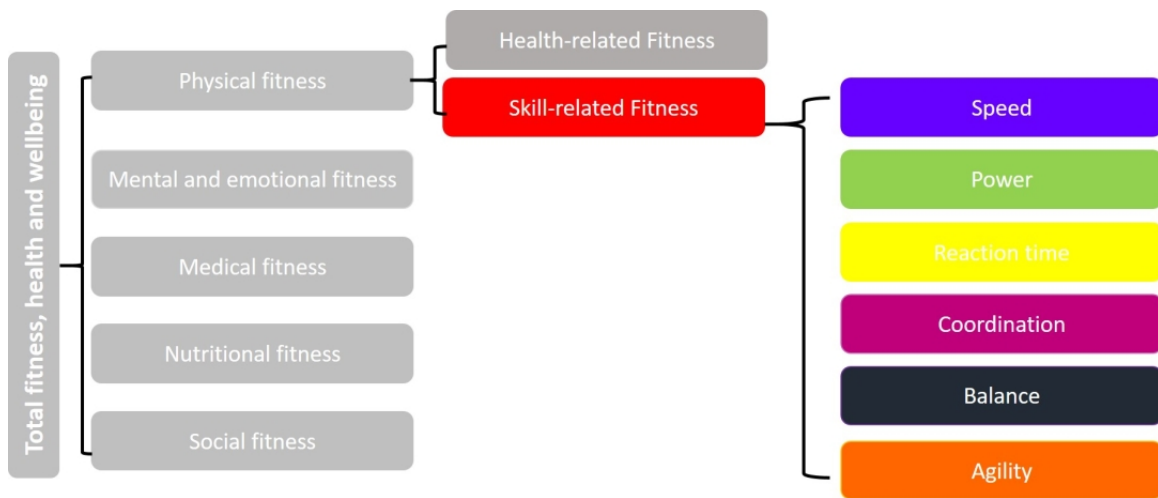


When I first studied these aspects of fitness as I began training as a PT I was a little dismissive; well, they're not about 'running faster' or 'lifting heavier', so really, I wondered if the trainers were just padding out the course a bit. However, once I had a bit of time to think about it (and stopped being -know-it-all-sassy) I realised these elements are really important to develop for general life; and even more so specifically in terms of helping us to manage our MS symptoms

### Flashback to last week's post on 'total fitness'

...or 'overall fitness' as I often feel it really is. This week's post (the second instalment in this 'what is fitness' mini-series) focusses on what is technically termed 'skills' related fitness.

The chart below shows these six components:



## The 6 'skill'- related components in detail

Speed

Power

You're welcome to disagree with me, but I feel that 'Speed' and 'Power' are more relevant to specific sporting activities rather than general (and specifically) MS-related health. I debated whether

we can interpret 'speed' to mean [or include] increase in walking speed but the definition of 'speed' in the context of this model is 'how quickly a movement can be performed in a short space of time'; so I decided that this is much more relevant in a sporting-specific context. There is possibly a piece around 'the more you practice walking faster, the more likely your body is adapt to [get used to] a faster walking pace', but there is so much more involved when we add MS into the picture: if only we could persuade the 'movement' messages to just be sent/interpreted by our central nervous system and/or limbs a bit quicker, we might be more inclined to agree that this can be trained. As always, we are all individuals so it may be that you find that you can train yourself to walk faster - super fab if you can :).

Reaction time

Reaction time is the time it takes to respond to a stimulus; this incorporates three stages:

- 1. Sensation:** the nervous system gathers information about the body's internal and external environment eg a drink being spilled, or the feeling of falling/tripping.
- 2. Integration:** the nervous system interprets and formulates the need for a specific response
- 3. Response:** the nervous system responds to the information analysed and initiates appropriate reaction eg right the cup, or correct the imbalance to prevent falling.

You can probably see (and may have experienced) that these stages [are meant] to happen instantly. The challenge is our messaging and transport system is

damaged so messages often do not transmit correctly. The good news is that we can attempt to improve our reaction time through specific 'training' (exercises); this is obviously dependent on a number of factors including the severity of your symptoms; time that you have been living with the disease and general health. I know this is a 'cop-out' answer, but please speak to a physiotherapist or personal trainer who can give you personalised one to one advice on the best exercises for you..

#### Coordination

The ability to smoothly move two or more body parts under control, accurately and efficiently. Some of the individual tests within the battery of testing performed as part of diagnosis assesses coordination. Coordination involves the use of both eyes and ears (senses) for example hand-eye coordination, fine motor skills such as writing and the old-fashioned 'patting your head and rubbing your tummy'. Typically in exercise we consider coordination as the string of movements in gymnastics and dance for example, but also refers to walking as we incorporate balance and limb placement; and in swimming moving the arms and legs within the sequence of a stroke. As with the note above about reaction time; coordination can be practiced and improved with the help of a physio or PT.

#### Balance

I have already written a blog on the importance of core strength for improving balance, which you can see [here](#) if you missed it. Balance is two-fold: both the ability to hold the body in position when stationary but also whilst in motion eg walking. I'm finding balance a bit of a challenge at the moment and I certainly can't stand on one leg anymore. Finally here I can give some practical pointers without a huge cautionary note. I use a small medicine ball and practice standing on one leg holding it to my chest with both hands, then slowly moving the ball out in front of me, then to the side - all whilst on one leg. If I'm feeling particularly daring I'll put the ball in one hand with arm outstretched to the side and bring it back to the centre of the body: all whilst on one leg. Let's say it's not as easy as it sounds; it tests balance whilst both static and in movement.

#### Agility

Agility means the ability to change the position of the body quickly and move in a different direction, and is essentially similar to reaction time in that it is specific to the movement being practiced. It effectively combines a number of the other aspects of skills based fitness: speed, reaction time, coordination and balance. This is definitely one which requires one-to-one work with a physiotherapist or PT.

## What about other factors which can affect

## these skills?

Regardless of our MS there are a number of other factors which affect our ability to perform these skill-related aspects of fitness, including:

- Age
- Gender
- Heredity (genetic potential inherited from our parents)
- Physique (body type)
- Activity level
- Diet
- Additional illness aside from MS (comorbidities)
- Drugs (prescribed and recreational)
- Stress

Whether this post is particularly relevant to you at the moment or not, it is reassuring to know that there are exercises that we can do to improve these elements of fitness which can make a difference to our MS. To reiterate my usual point about safety; please consult a physio or PT to make sure you are practicing the most relevant moves for you: they will also assess your movement in completing them to make sure you don't cause yourself any damage: as always, safety is paramount.

### As always, the last word from me...

Do let me know if you have found this post helpful. Send me an [email](#); join me on Twitter (@healthylifems) or send me a message through the contact page on the website, I'd love to know what you think.



*Diana xx*

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### References:

Active IQ (2016) 'Principles of exercise, fitness and health' in *Fitness Instruction: (gym)*. London: Active IQ

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Thank you for reading :)

**Diana** xx

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