

Monique König

Leon Staeger

CALISTHENICS



MOBILITY

STRONG & SUPPLE

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Calisthenics & Mobility

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Preface

Hey there, bar fans and moving monkeys!

Calisthenics & Mobility is our labor of love. Over the past three years, we've been able to help lots of people acquire a healthier, stronger, and more confident lifestyle by following our workshop series.

In Germany, Austria, and Switzerland we made anyone who trained diligently "as flexible as a monkey and as strong as a gorilla." Due to our participants' exceedingly positive feedback, we thought about how we could inspire even more people to do the same.

This book allows us to bring our movement concept for longevity out into the world to accompany you on your very own Calisthenics & Mobility journey.

Our journeys began in early childhood. To both of us, growing up with competitive sports meant learning early on to work for a physical goal. Character, for each of us, was shaped by discipline, willpower, and performance which could all be accessed anytime. Competitive sports created a positive attitude toward our bodies in motion. Four to five training sessions per week and competitions on weekends taught us that hard physical work can be very rewarding. Our sessions helped us grow physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The joy of movement was so great for us that we both chose a career path that would allow us to share our knowledge and personal experience with you. The essence of our concept is this: reaching your goal healthy and pain-free.

Calisthenics & Mobility refers to the symbiotic relationship between strength and mobility. We'll show you the most-important principles of these two interconnected areas. Both can be viewed as separate elements, but in this book, they should be viewed as an interrelated construct with a correlated and positive effect.

The content of this book focuses on resistance training with one's own body, specifically with calisthenics. This isn't a new type of sport but, rather, a neologism. Calisthenics could be considered the modern

gymnastics. It prioritizes progressive strength increase via the basics (e.g., pull-ups, push-ups, dips, and knee squats).

Mobility training as a fitness-related ability is often neglected in favor of strength.

Most underestimate the fact that a greater degree of motion results in more strength.

Mobility training creates the balance between movement without strength and rigid strength.

At the same time, you'll get more long-term enjoyment from your training, due to fewer injuries, and when you are in pain, you'll have the right exercises at hand.

This book is intended to get you to move. For us, it's not about bulging muscles. Rather, we want you to learn to understand your body.

We'll teach you which technical details of the exercises are important so your musculoskeletal system will enjoy long-term good health. We'll provide you with the most-important know-how so you'll be able to use different, helpful tools from your tool kit.

With all the input you'll receive, please keep in mind the following during your journey:

1. *Anyone* can work with mobility and calisthenics, regardless of age and gender.
2. Every person is an *individual* with different abilities.
3. There's *no* single best method.
4. Don't think about the approach—just start.
5. Comparing yourself to others *won't* help you one bit.

This book does away with lots of preconceived notions in order to give you clear guidelines for your training. Calisthenics is only for tough guys? Flexibility is genetically predetermined? Far from it! We'll show you how to find long-term joy in training and get stronger and more flexible, all while staying pain-free.

In this spirit, do the following:

Stay loose, flex your biceps.

Keep moving, stay sexy.

Monique & Leon

Introduction: Book Layout

Before you embark on your *Calisthenics & Mobility* journey, we'd like to give you some tips on how to use this book.

You can choose to read everything in the order it's presented or skip between sections. The many chapter and section cross-references ensure you won't lose the thread and will, by the end, understand the link between mobility and calisthenics.

We've brought the authentic delivery style of our workshops to this book so we can bring the atmosphere of a live workshop to your home. Besides, this is a book about calisthenics and not about traditional German gymnastics from Saxony-Anhalt.

In this book, we talk about front levers and muscle-ups.

The book is divided into a mobility section and calisthenics section, which are further divided into theoretical and practical segments. The practical segments include image-guided explanations of exercises.

In these practical sections of the book, look for the following symbols, which provide simple illustrations of the most-important technical details for the execution of an exercise:



External rotation



Maintain body tension
(hollow-body position)



Shoulders away from ears
(depression)



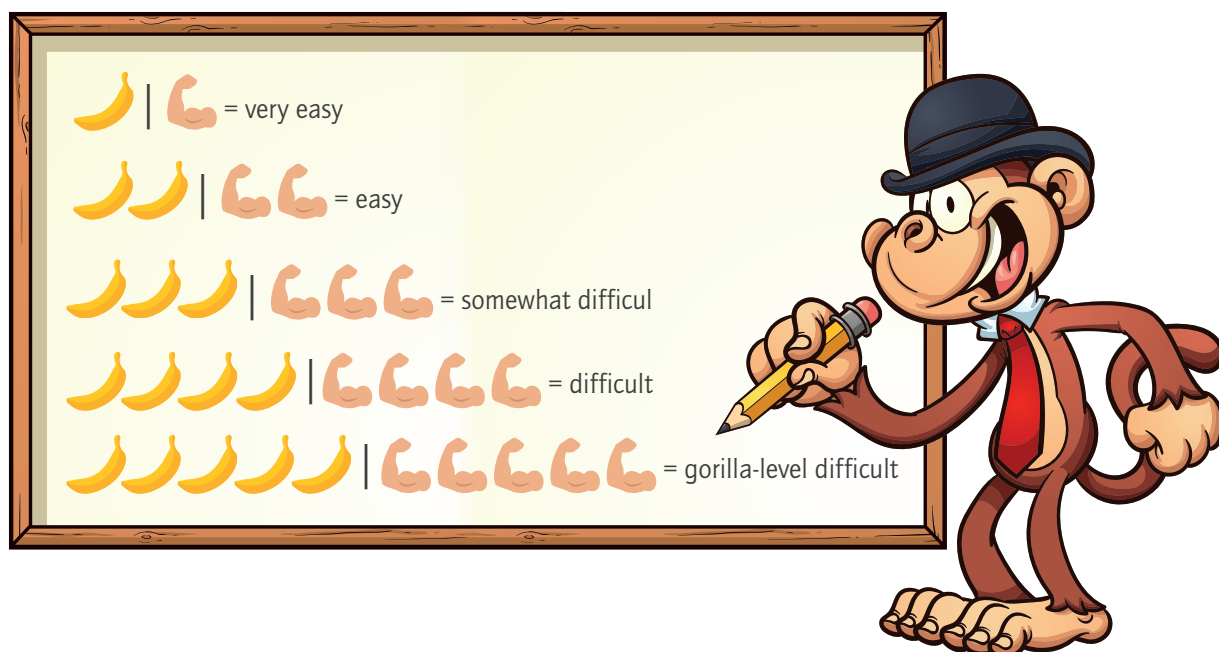
Lengthen your spine



Watch your breath

If you don't yet understand all this terminology, don't panic. We provide detailed descriptions in the following chapters and in the glossary at the end of the book.

Every exercise is also accompanied by a difficulty rating. To be exact, it's a banana scale for Leon's mobility exercises and a biceps scale for Monique's calisthenics exercises.



But enough about legends and instructions. By now you're probably impatiently tapping your feet, ready to dive into your adventure.



MOBILITY

What Motivates Me to Get You Moving

My exercise path started quite early. At age two, I was on the Wildenrath golf course, which was largely built by and then managed for many years by my father. He often reminded me that I had talent and that the other guests on the driving range spoke of “the next Tiger Woods” in my presence. Surely, they were joking!

Nevertheless, I must thank my parents, who—instead of dressing me in polo shirts and plaid pants—put me in a pair of soccer shoes. I can still hear my father saying, “The boy needs to learn a team sport. It builds character!”

So at age three, I was on the soccer field. Although I spent more time picking daisies (for my mom) during those early years, soccer had a formative influence on me. Then, after playing for fifteen years, I hung up my soccer shoes. By the time I graduated high school, after a move, and several personal changes, I found myself in a deep performance slump, which is why I didn’t connect with my new team at Fortuna Köln.

In my first book, *Pragmatisch Gesund*, I talk a little about my health problems, which, among other things, caused my athletic interests to change. In short, my growing interest in strength—or, rather, fitness sports—caused me to adopt a one-sided diet that ended up costing me my performance capacity and, in the end, my soccer career. But as it turned out, this difficult time was the best thing that could have happened to me. When in life does one ever get the opportunity to completely redefine oneself and embark on a new path?

The new path led me to a place where I wanted to learn more about people’s health and the human body overall. Where I wanted to help people get out of the hole they’d fallen into, through one-sided diets proclaimed by the fitness industry as panaceas or due to poor exercise habits. During my active soccer career, I tried out lots of different sports, even though I always stayed with soccer.

Thanks to my mom, I was able to try out other sports, such as hockey, tennis, basketball, swimming, judo, and dance. I loved any type of exercise during my free time: table tennis, bowling, cycling, badminton, wrestling with my younger brother, and more. All these experiences with exercise would serve me well on

my new path and lead me to where I am today—my small but awesome monkey gym in the space I share with Monique in Cologne.

Nearly every day, clients come from all over the German-speaking world to my 12-square-meter (130-square-foot) gym, where together we search for the cause of their pain and where, in typical Moving-Monkey fashion, I make them strong, flexible, and pain-free. But how did I get from my soccer career to starting my YouTube channel, **Moving Monkey**, and becoming a student of physical therapy?

Next to one of my best friends, Alexander Wahler, who convinced me to upload my first YouTube video, it was primarily one other man's influence that I embarked on the exercise journey, and his name is Ido Portal. Over the years, a number of others have certainly joined the ranks as mentors from whom I've been able to learn, but it all started with him.

After Ido's workshop in Munich in late 2015, my head was practically spinning. I even told him in person that everything was whirling around in my dreams the night after the first day of that workshop. I was effectively able to experience my beliefs, views, and, last but not least, my body get turned upside down, spun around, and newly aligned.

Ido's response, in his typical terse and concise manner was this: **"It's a scary place, the place of change. But it's worth it!"**

In retrospect, I have to admit he was right. My greatest takeaway from my days with Ido was that we should pay more attention to the way we move (quality of movement, variety of movement, and **movement culture**) rather than chasing the next workout.

Even today, this philosophy still guides my actions and way of thinking. Not just with respect to Moving Monkey but also in my everyday life. After all, we humans are made to move, and our greatest gift is that we possess a body that's capable of doing so much.

I want to spark in you the same enthusiasm that burns inside me for movement and the human body. Maybe after reading this book you'll start to add a little morning mobility routine to your day. Or you'll choose to take the stairs instead of the elevator.

Some people start with lots of baby steps, and others prefer to take a few big ones. What's clear is that everyone is on their own journey at their own pace. And every journey begins with movement—namely with the first step.



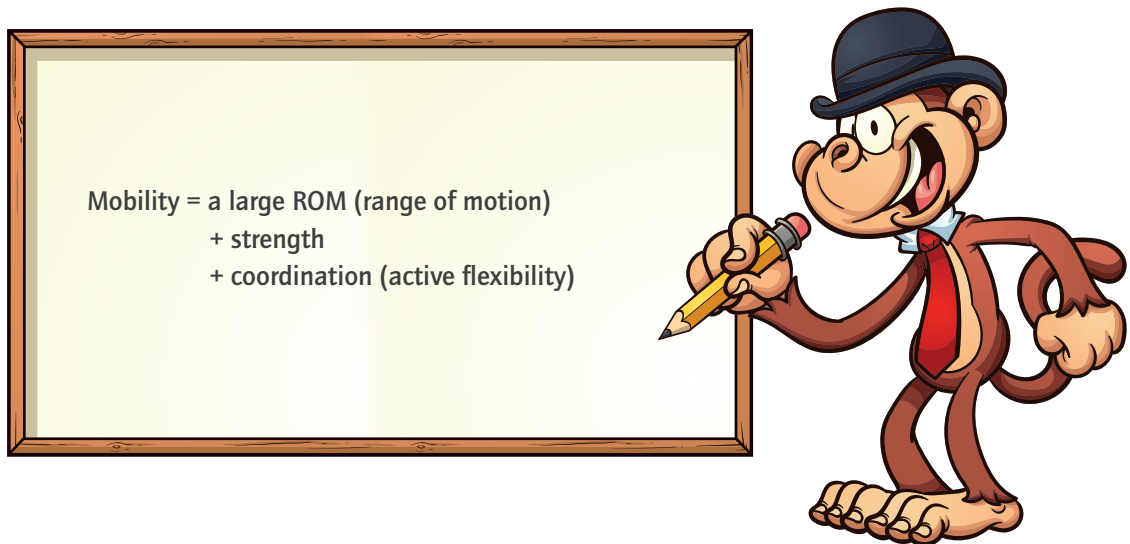


1 Mobility—Modern Flexibility Training

When I start our Calisthenics X Mobility workshop, I always begin with the following question: "Can someone give me the definition of *mobility*?" Almost all our workshop participants have watched one of my videos on YouTube, which is why most of the responses go in the right direction. The following catch phrases are then tossed around:

- "active flexibility training"
- "like stretching, but with strength"
- "range of motion"

Mobility training clearly focuses on movement. Unlike stretching, where a position is held for an extended period, mobility training always requires active control over a certain distance. Here's a simplified formula:





Next, I always demonstrate a practical example. Imagine I let myself slide from a standing position down into the straddle splits and then returned from the splits to a standing position by using only my leg strength.

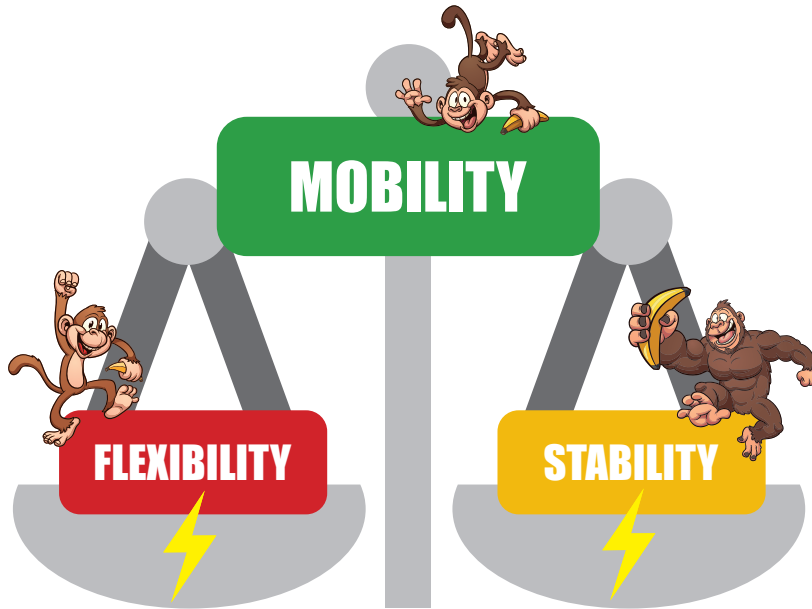
This type of mobility stands in contrast to passive mobility, which is called *flexibility*. Imagine holding on to one ankle while standing and pulling it toward your backside. You'd be passively holding your leg at this range of motion without tensing the muscles in your legs.

Of course, we don't start the workshop by practicing the splits. To achieve long-term mobility and strength, we must understand how mobile our bodies should really be.

Mobility and strength are always mutually dependent. Imagine a seesaw with flexibility on one side and stability on the other. Since the body is a dynamic system, much like a seesaw, we need a mix of flexibility (passive range of motion) and stability (strength) to keep our balance. The sweet spot is called mobility.

In medicine, we refer to **homeostasis**, meaning a state of equilibrium. By definition, it's subject to dynamic self-regulation.

These are fancy words that ultimately describe the fact that our bodies vacillate between flexibility, mobility, and stability. Thus, our joints also have different functions. Some primarily provide stability, while others primarily provide lots of mobility.



Here's what this teaches us about our mobility training:

1. Not every joint must be pushed to be as mobile as possible. (In fact, in some cases, this can even cause damage and lead to pain.)
2. Feeling less flexible on some days than others is completely normal. We're all subject to natural fluctuations.

In section 2.1, "How to Become More Mobile," I explain how you can create a harmonic balance so you don't have to move through your daily life with tight muscles and pain. But first I want to briefly talk about how mobility training has become so popular.

ORIGINS OF MOBILITY

Mobility training is gaining increasing popularity. With mobility training, the focus is very much on the health-preserving aspect. For an athlete, be it recreational or professional, injuries are always a setback. Injuries lead to a sharp decline in athletic performance and, in some cases, can even trigger depression. An athlete's sport is often a huge part of his or her identity and is directly linked to self-confidence and overall satisfaction.

Someone who loves her sport and is injured will do anything to quickly return to her previous performance level.

For a long time, the problem was that the subject of "prevention" was written off as rather boring. People preferred to push the limits of their performance capacity and to do so at every training session. Until they couldn't.

Once the injury had occurred, the search for the cause and a solution began.

In the past, this was a real problem. In 2009, YouTube didn't yet have the number of high-quality help videos about pain that it has now. The first descriptive videos about sports came from bodybuilding, a sphere that still provides the bulk of sports videos on the internet.

The bodybuilding hype has always motivated more people to go to a fitness center. Due to the influence of social media, the makeup of that population got increasingly younger. And then they started to “pump away,” having only a smattering of knowledge.

Here's the problem: just working out all the time doesn't make for a healthy body.

Then, a few years ago, the alleged savior of injured shoulders, backs, and hips came on the market: the foam roller.

Now, apparently, every pain was caused by tight muscles, connective-tissue adhesions, and trigger points. No one had an actual plan as to what to do with these rollers and, later, the trigger balls. So people lay down on the rollers and pushed and rolled everything that hurt.

Whether foam rollers make sense or not is discussed in more detail in section 2.5, “Why Foam Rollers Won't Make You More Mobile.”

Over time, it became clear that foam rollers weren't the answer, and the search continued. Yet many still used the rollers for warm-ups or for mobility training. Despite their questionable effectiveness, the rollers were part of a very positive development. More and more athletes were thinking about preventative health measures. This also helped introduce the concept of mobility.

And then there was a second major influence on making mobility more popular:

MOVEMENT CULTURE

Created by Ido Portal, movement culture is a philosophy of movement that's characterized by much of what has to do with movement. Because of him, I landed on this topic also, and he's one of my greatest role models with respect to my work as a trainer and athlete. Movement culture made a couple things popular, including **animal moves** and a movement concept that added the strength component to mobility training.

Most athletes now include mobility training in their training regimen, though unfortunately, they often still prefer static stretching to active mobilization, completely missing the effect of mobility training. Nevertheless, it's good that more and more people are opening up to the idea of mobility training, thanks to rolling and more. It doesn't matter whether they're bodybuilders, CrossFit athletes, or calisthenics athletes.



2



2 Understanding Mobility

2.1 HOW TO BECOME MORE MOBILE

For many, flexibility is a blind spot. Yet there are thousands of books about strength training.

Nearly everyone involved in fitness has held a dumbbell at some point.

But when it comes to mobility, most people think only of stretching. Actually, the ability to achieve a certain amount of mobility isn't just another type of training but also a very good indicator of the body's overall exercise capacity.

To better understand this, let's take a look at which factors affect mobility and why some athletes are very stiff despite doing strength training.

Mobility is grounded in the brain.:

