



FAVORITES

● 16th Ave., Belmar 1-2 ft

● Manasquan Inlet 2-3 ft

● 1st St. 1-2 ft

● Sherman Ave. 1-2 ft

● Hudson Ave. 1-2 ft

● Surf City

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SURF FOREVER TRAINING

Surf Forever: Dr. Tim Brown on Alignment & Posture

Refining body alignment to stay injury-free and improve surfing performance.

Photos: Jeremiah Klein



Cassady Ozimec
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Editor's note: This six-part series, included in your Surfline premium membership, will be rolled out over the coming weeks in an effort to help you #ShredAtHome during these times. (Sign up for a free trial here.) It's produced in collaboration with Dr. Tim Brown, D.C., surf doc to the world's best. The associated articles are intended to explore basic principles of body function related to surfing, and to help you use that information to keep you in the water and injury-free for as long as possible. While intended to be comprehensive, there's no substitute for direct, in-person medical care when dealing with an injury.

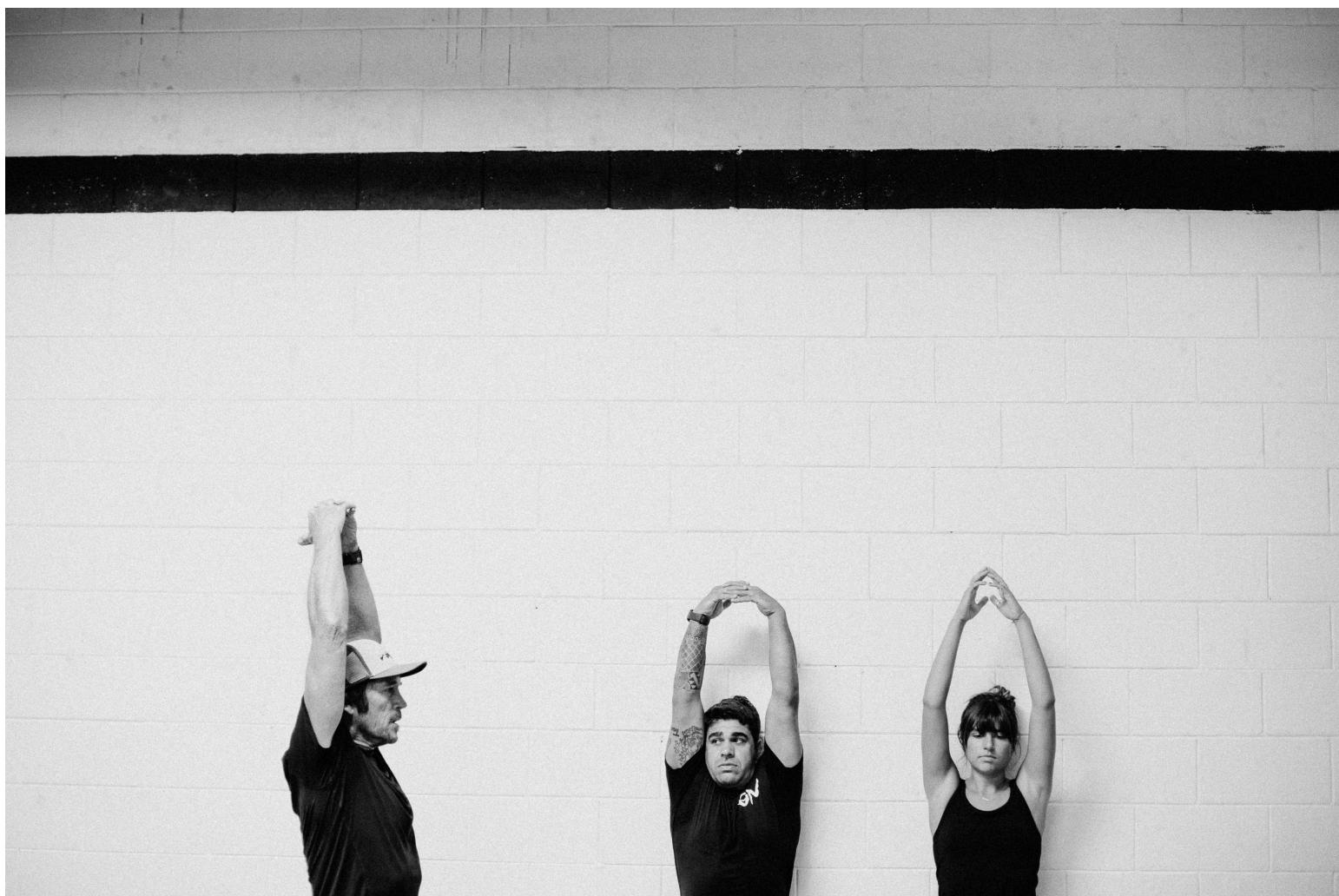
Nearly all sport-related injuries can be traced back to imbalances in a few key areas. Dr. Tim Brown, a seasoned sports medicine practitioner and trainer to some of the biggest names in surf, refers to these as the [five pillars](#) of physical wellness: alignment, breath, mobility, stability and strength. (Features on each pillar will launch every Tuesday for the next five weeks.) Lose one or more of these, and you're left vulnerable to injury. Continue to

participate in your favorite recreational activity regardless, and you're all but guaranteed to hurt yourself. As Newton taught, "every action has an equal and opposite reaction," and given that the human body is an overwhelmingly complicated network of interconnected systems, the more stress we put on our bodies, the greater the chance for these reactions to occur.

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On the importance of alignment...

"In the most basic sense, the term "body alignment" (also referred to as "posture") addresses the way the human body organizes energy," says Dr. Brown. "Posture is connected to every subsystem in the human body, therefore careful maintenance of your body's alignment is critical to performing at your highest level. It also influences your body's ability to adapt to changing stresses associated with dynamic activities like surfing, and your ability to recover properly — both from injury and from daily activity."



"The easier it is for our bodies to communicate, the better we feel, the better we perform, and the better our digestive and immune systems function."

“Before we get into the details of alignment, it’s important to understand how joints work. When a joint is aligned properly, we call that being “centrated.” When a joint is centred, the nervous system — the brain, muscles, and everything that’s around that joint — is able to communicate properly, and therefore can protect itself well. When we have imbalances in our muscles, our body gets pulled out of alignment and we lose centration. This loss confuses the nervous system and disrupts the communication between those particular subsystems. The easier it is for our bodies to communicate, the better we feel, the better we perform, and the better our digestive and immune systems function. So, alignment is not just important for surfing, but also for the performance of our nervous system and our body’s built-in defense and maintenance mechanisms. Ultimately, those functions are key not only for sport, but for quality of life.”

On posture imbalances...

“Despite our best intentions, the reality is we’re not surfing 24 hours a day. We each have our own responsibilities, from work to chores to family activities and everything else in between. And no matter how benign they may seem, each one of those activities is an opportunity for us to either enhance our alignment or fall out of it. Unfortunately, most of us tend to skew toward the latter in our daily lives through sitting at a computer, working on devices, doing manual work, or whatever else. This is because our bodies conform to what we do the most. So, if you’re sitting for hours at a time with poor alignment, you can be sure that your body will eventually adapt to that position.”

“We see similar occurrences in surfing. For example, the paddling position — being on our bellies and arching our backs upward for extended periods — is not natural for humans. If we look at lifelong surfers, often times their bodies conform to their surfing habits and deviate from what we’d consider to be a normal posture. Most typically, we see a development known as “dishing,” which is a malformation/adaptation of the thoracic spine (the area between your shoulder blades), named because of the appearance it creates (surfers experiencing this posture conformation have a dish appearance in the middle of their back). Where normally, the thoracic spine exists as a convex curve of approximately 60 degrees, many surfers begin to develop a forward curve that can be as great as 20 degrees. This places significant stress on other parts of the body. So, in experiencing the dishing that paddling creates, we’re creating all kinds of resulting problems before we even get going.”



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“It’s important to remember that a static posture becomes a posture in motion. Whenever the body moves, it’s essential that it remains aligned, no matter what the activity may be. When you paddle on your ribs, it’s easier on your body and muscles because you’re posting up on your skeleton. But unfortunately, when you flare your ribs, you increase the curve in your lower back. And that’s why we see so many lower back injuries in surfing — it’s not just because the hips are tight, but because we paddle on our ribs. When the front of the body is too tight from all the work that we do from sitting to driving, etc., it’s very difficult to open those parts of the body, which surfing requires. The more we’re able to prepare the body for surfing — especially if we work in a sedentary environment every day — the better our resulting experience in the water will be.”

“Postural imbalances make us more susceptible to shoulder injuries, upper back injuries, neck injuries, and so on — simply because the spine is not aligned or moving normally. When the spine is not positioned as it should be, our extremities — arms, shoulders, hands, elbows, legs — have to compensate, and that’s where problems occur.”

On awareness...

“The primary goal in sports medicine and fitness development is to work to minimize the negative effect of sport on the body. My mission is simply to help educate and increase awareness of how the body’s systems work with one another. At the end of the day, all athletes have to participate in their own care to get the best out of their bodies. The only way to effectively do this is through information sharing. This means being around people that are smarter than you in that particular area. Ask questions, be curious and expose yourself to new information, because you never know when it’ll come in handy.”



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How to check your alignment...

“When learning the feel of these movements, it’s helpful to have a partner present to identify any imbalances or deviations in technique. You’d be surprised to find that while you may feel like you’re doing them correctly, an outside observer will be able to recognize

and adjust minor errors more effectively.”

Standing Alignment

“Learning to stand with proper posture is one of the most basic — and essential — changes you can make. Here are a few steps to assess and correct your upright alignment.”



“Posture is connected to every subsystem in the human body, therefore careful maintenance of your body’s alignment is critical to performing at your highest level.”

- While standing, make sure your weight is centered over the top of your ankles. Most people stand with their weight on their heels, which causes the disengaged muscles to lose their tone. When standing straight up, we want our muscles to be sharing the load evenly, which means even distribution between the three points of contact in the feet: the heel, the ball of the big toe, and the ball of the small toe. We don’t want any parts of the body resting or having to over/under-compensate.
- The knees should be slightly unlocked and centered over the ankles.