

Are You Under-Reacting? Training to Improve Reaction Time

You're sitting at a red light with a car in front of you. As the light turns green you get ready to step on the accelerator, but the car in front of you doesn't move. You anxiously anticipate them going but nothing happens. You honk your horn and finally they start to move.

You're waiting to pull out into traffic and once again there is a car in front of you. You see a gap in the steady stream of cars. You anticipate the car in front of you pulling out into traffic as there is plenty of time available to do so. But, they don't move. A missed opportunity to get moving, now you must continue to wait.

Chances are very good you've been in one of these situations. Or perhaps you are the person with the slow reaction time. I used examples involving traffic but examples can be found in many instances of everyday life. So what is happening? You might think that people are too consumed with their phones, which is sometimes the case. But this type of thing has been going on before cell phone usage was so commonplace. The answer to why this is occurring is modern living.

In mans early days as hunters and gatherers there was a need to be alert to, and quickly react to, threats in the environment. If you were walking on the savanna you would need to be able to quickly react if a lion had his eye on you for dinner. Today, we have no predators to worry about and most of our days are spent seated in front of a computer. Since this eliminates the need to quickly react, most of us have become de-conditioned to the ability to do so.

You may be thinking; "If modern living doesn't require this trait for survival what's the problem with not being conditioned for quick reaction?" The truth is it is still essential for survival and injury prevention. It's just that the threats come in different forms. If you are driving down the road and suddenly a car coming towards you swerves into your lane you need to be able to quickly steer yourself out of harm's way.

If you slip or lose your balance for any reason you want to be able to react and recover quickly to avoid falling and risking injury.

These are just some examples but the fact of matter is that being able to improve your reaction time will never be a negative for anyone. It can only help improve your everyday life. The human body is an amazing machine. It can be reprogrammed through repetition. If you need to improve or develop a new skill you can do so by repeatedly doing an action that simulates the skill or action. So, to improve reaction time and the ability to be more alert to your environment you do activities or exercises that require these skills. Doing so on a regular basis teaches the mind and body to work together more quickly and efficiently.

Examples of types of exercises which increase alertness and improve reaction time are plyometrics and those incorporating a medicine ball. Quite basically plyometrics are jump training exercises. They are most commonly done by athletes, but you don't have to be an athlete to have the skills be applicable to your life. The action of jumping requires the brain to send a signal to the muscles to quickly contract and perform an action, which is something that all of us need to do at different times in our daily lives.

An example of a plyometric exercise is the straddle box jump. See demonstration here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOLPDGzwdAk>

Doing exercises with a medicine ball requires your brain and body to work together to react to, and deal with, an object coming at you. The brain sees the object coming at you via your eyes. Instructions are then sent to your body telling it how to respond. The more this is done the quicker the communication between the brain and body. An example of this type of exercise is the medicine ball chest pass. See demonstration here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L10PvGiZ_QU

These are just examples, there are a variety of exercises which can be done. The specific exercises would depend upon the abilities and needs of the individual. You may think to yourself; *I can't do these types of exercises, I don't have the coordination*. That's because you haven't done the exercises to develop your coordination, which is all the more reason to do them. I have seen remarkable improvements in my client's abilities when performing these types of exercises, including one who is autistic and had very poor motor skills as a result. After doing a medicine ball pass with me for 3 months he was able to catch, react and throw like he had been doing it all his life. Improvements can be made in everyone. It just takes repetition.

Don't ever think that you can't make improvements. Regardless of age or abilities if you are willing to put in the effort, you can make your body a more efficient one.