

HEALTH

Education

The Importance of Core Strength

Whether sitting, standing, walking, jumping or running, the core is involved in almost every movement we make. The core is the central hub connecting the upper and lower body where most motions originate. We may think our extremities do the majority of the work, but most movement begins at the center of the body and moves outward. Building a strong core foundation is not just important for athletes, but for anyone at any age.

Most people know the abdominals are part of the core, but the core also encompasses the muscles in the lower back, the obliques, and those which support the pelvis and hips. Many of these muscles are layered under others making it hard to see tone and definition. Neglecting these “hidden” muscles can create deficiencies in balance, stability, and support.

Let’s take a look at why core strength is essential for everyone.

Improve Posture

We tend to sit for hours and hours each day. Due to a weak core, we tend to round our shoulders and slouch forward. Focusing on developing our core can help create better posture while sitting and standing. Good posture helps us look taller and decreases wear and tear on the spine. In addition, better posture can help you breathe easier as well as improve digestion and circulation.

Improve Stability and Balance

The core muscles surround the spine and pelvis creating a lot of support and stabilization. Strengthening these muscles can help stabilize your body while standing on even or uneven terrain and can possibly help lessen the risk of falling.

Prevent Injuries

A weak core can contribute to a variety of injuries. Many injuries occur when the muscles that move each part of our body become imbalanced. Some muscles may end up short and tight, whereas others may be overstretched and weak. Due to decreased strength, the body may overuse other muscle groups to compensate and produce the desired movement. Lower back pain can often be attributed to the lack of a strong core. By creating well-balanced strength our bodies become more resilient.

Perform Activities More Efficiently

Whether performing activities of daily living or those which are more athletic, you will need to use less energy and effort if you have a strong core. Swinging a baseball bat or unloading the dishwasher requires your core muscles to work together to perform the movement safely and effectively. Weak muscles require more energy to move. Training all of the major core muscles to work together can help improve the strength and flexibility of muscles in other areas of our body.



How to Improve Core Strength

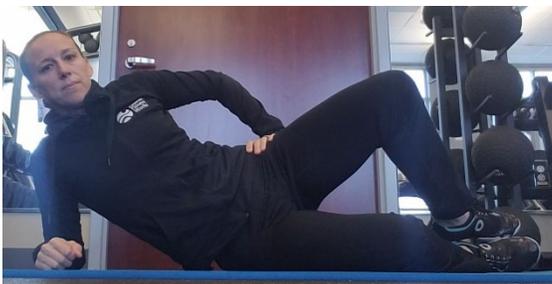
To improve core strength, incorporate a variety of exercises to target multiple core muscles. Since we move in a variety of planes (front and back, side to side and rotate), it's important to perform exercises in each plane. Limiting core training to simple crunches or focusing on exercises to create "six-pack" abs isn't going to produce a well--rounded core.

Plank – a great static exercises to work your inner core. Assume beginning position of a push up, with elbows under shoulders. Engage the core to lift your body and maintain a straight line from shoulders to toes. Squeeze the glutes to stabilize the body. Hold this position for 30 seconds.



Side Plank – this challenging pose promotes balance and strength while focusing on your obliques. Lie on your side with your bottom elbow underneath your shoulder and your forearm perpendicular to your body. Position the top foot in front of the bottom foot. Lift your hips up to form a straight line with your body from head to toe. Hold this position for 30 seconds. Repeat on the opposite side.

Bird Dog – this anti-rotation core stability exercise requires glute and shoulder strength as well as coordination. Kneel on the floor positioning your knees and feet hip-width apart. Position hands directly under shoulders shoulder-width apart. Extend your right arm in front of your body while slowly extending your left leg behind you until both are parallel with the floor. Slowly lower each down to the floor and then repeat other side. Repeat this movement 10 to 15 times per side.



Clam Shells – benefits of this floor exercise include activating the gluteus maximus to help bring more power and stability to your hips. Lie on your side with your knees bent 90 degrees; feet and hips stacked and head resting on your arm. Lift the top knee up, while keeping feet stacked. Repeat this movement 10 to 15 times, keeping pelvis stabilized throughout the movement.

References:

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From Corporate Fitness Works Team Leader, Becky McGraw