



28-Day Core Challenge

Why You Should Strengthen Your Core Muscles

Here are six reasons you should add core exercises to your regular workouts.

They are an important part of a well-rounded fitness program.

Aside from occasional sit-ups and push-ups, however, core exercises are often neglected. Still, it pays to get your core muscles (the muscles around your trunk and pelvis) in better shape.

They improve your balance and stability.

Core exercises train the muscles in your pelvis, lower back, hips and abdomen to work in harmony. This leads to better balance and stability, whether on the playing field or in daily activities. In fact, most sports and other physical activities depend on stable core muscles.

They don't require specialized equipment or a gym membership.

Any exercise that involves the use of your abdominal and back muscles in coordination counts as a core exercise. For example, using free weights in a manner that involves maintaining a stable trunk can train and strengthen several of your muscles, including your core muscles.

They can help tone your abs.

Want more-defined abdominal muscles? Core exercises are important. Although it takes aerobic activity to burn abdominal fat, core exercises can strengthen and tone the underlying muscles.

Strong core muscles make it easier to do most physical activities.

Strong core muscles make it easier to do many activities, such as swing a golf club, get a glass from the top shelf and bend down to tie your shoes. Weak core muscles can also leave you susceptible to poor posture, lower back pain and muscle injuries. Strengthening core muscles may also help improve back pain.

They can help you reach your fitness goals.

Aerobic exercise and muscular fitness are the primary elements of most fitness programs. But to have a well-rounded fitness program, consider including core exercises in the mix as well.

***Please consult with your doctor before beginning an exercise program.**



Core Exercises

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Bridge



A bridge is an example of a classic core exercise. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Keep your back in a neutral position, not arched and not pressed into the floor. Avoid tilting your hips. Tighten your abdominal muscles. Raise your hips off the floor until your hips are aligned with your knees and shoulders. Hold the position for a few seconds. Repeat.

Plank



Slowly lift your torso and thighs off the floor. Keep your torso and legs rigid. Do not allow any sagging in your ribcage or low back. Avoid hiking your hips into the air or bending the knees. The shoulders should be directly over your elbows with your palms facing down. Continue to breathe, keeping the abdominals strong while holding this position. If you experience any pain in the low back with this movement, stop the exercise immediately and consult with your doctor.

Superman



Lie on your stomach with your legs outstretched behind you. Reach your arms out overhead with your palms facing each other. Relax your neck and align your head with your spine. Slowly raise both arms and legs a few inches off the floor. Hold this position briefly.

Bicycle Crunch



Lie on your back with knees bent, feet on the floor, and hands behind your head. Press your lower back into the mat and tighten your ab muscles as you lift your head, shoulders, and upper back off the floor and simultaneously move your right elbow and left knee toward each other while straightening your right leg. Draw your right knee back up and immediately move your left elbow and right knee toward each other while straightening your left leg. Repeat.