

Core Strength Workout

By Amber Travsky

The aims of core stability training are to effectively recruit the trunk musculature and then learn to control the position of the lumbar spine during dynamic movements.

Core strength and stability training is essential to sports performance and injury prevention. The body's core muscles are the foundation for all other movement. The muscles of the torso stabilize the spine and provide a solid foundation for movement in the extremities. The main concepts of core strengthening programs involve using many muscles in a coordinated movement.

Core strength and stability training doesn't focus entirely on the abdominal muscles. It is often a misconception that the best workout to get those "six pack abs" is to work up to 1,000 crunches. In reality, the better approach is to incorporate a range of different abdominal and core exercises. If you do the same exercise, such as crunches, over and over to get to high numbers, you may not realize that you've actually adapted some "cheating" mechanisms to make the exercise easier. That's one reason to vary the workout and not spend so much time on a single movement. Mix it up to mix up the various targeted muscle, and to prevent "cheating."

The following is a sample core workout that takes about 20 minutes. Add or subtract components to suit specific needs. The numbers provided are targets. You may need to work up to that number or you may opt to do sets of the exercises with a specified number of repetitions per set.

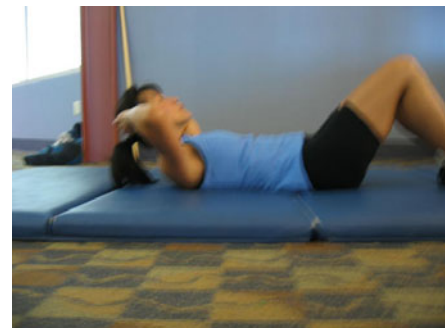
A special thanks to Denise Young, spinning and step instructor, for demonstrating the moves.

1. Warm up crunches.

Lie on your back, hands behind your head and elbows out. Crunch or curl your stomach as you lift your shoulders off the floor. Keep chin pointed upward.

Target number: 50

Alternate: Use a stability ball and do similar movement on the ball.



2. Side Reaches

Lie on your back. Bend one knee and keep foot on floor, raise the other leg up in the air. Reach the opposite arm as you raise your shoulders and stretch towards the outside of your foot.

Target number: 30, each leg.

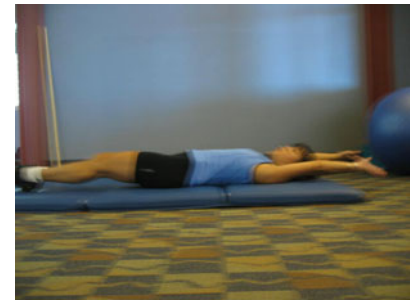


Catapults

A) Sitting with a slight bend in your knees, press your heels against the floor. Extend arms to the front at shoulder height, palms facing each other.

B) With a straight spine and upward gaze, inhale deeply, then exhale and slowly lower your torso to the floor over five counts as you inhale. Arms are overhead.

C) In one smooth movement, leading with the arms, exhale and explode back to the starting position.



Target number: 20

Single leg raise

A) Sit, resting both hands lightly behind you, and lean back until your torso is at a 45-degree angle.

B) Raise one leg off the floor as you extend arms forward at shoulder height.

Target number: Hold for 30 seconds, each leg.



Two-leg raise (also called the Boat Pose)

A) Sit, resting both hands lightly behind you and lean back until your torso is at a 45-degree angle.

B) Keeping your legs together, lift them off the floor as you extend arms forward at shoulder height. Abs are tight, as thighs and torso form a 90-degree angle.

Target: Work up to holding for 60 seconds



Hip raise

a) Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor.

b) Lift your pelvis so that you form a bridge position with a straight line running from your shoulders to your knees.

c) Lift your right leg off the floor and extend it so that it continues the straight line. You should be able to feel your left buttock, your back, and lower abdomen working to keep the position.

d) Hold for 30 seconds then repeat on the other leg. Make sure that your pelvis does NOT tilt at all while your leg is raised. Your hips should be level at all times.

Target: Hold 30 seconds each leg.



Plank

- a) Assume a front-support position resting on your forearms with your shoulders directly over your elbows.
- b) Straighten your legs out behind you and lift up your hips to form a dead-straight line from your shoulders to your ankles. You should be balanced on your forearms and toes, with your lower abdomen and back working to keep your body straight.



Target: Hold for 1 minute.

Aim to be able to hold this position for 3 x 1 minute.

Oblique plank

- a) On your side, balance on your right forearm with your shoulder above your elbow.
- b) With your legs out straight to the left, lift your pelvis so that you are balanced on your forearm and feet. Your body should form a straight line and you should feel the oblique muscles down the side of your trunk working to maintain the position.

You may find it easier to balance if you hold your free arm out. This will also make the exercise a bit easier by altering the distribution of your weight.



Target: c) Hold for 1 minute then repeat on other side.

Spinal balance

- a) Balance on the floor on your hands and knees. Your back should be flat and hips parallel to the floor.
- b) Raise your right arm out in front of you and raise your left leg out behind you, keeping it straight.
- c) Hold for 30 seconds and then repeat on the other side. Concentrate on keeping completely still with your hips square and your back flat.

