

Why Strengthen Your Core?

Think of your core muscles as the sturdy central link in a chain connecting your upper and lower body. Whether you're throwing a bowling ball or mopping a floor, the necessary motions either originate in your core, or deeply involve it.

No matter where muscle action starts, it ripples upward and downward to connected links of the chain. Thus, weak or inflexible core muscles can impact how well your arms and legs function. That saps your overall power from many of the movements you make. Properly building up your core makes you much stronger. A strong core also helps balance and stability. Thus, it can help prevent falls and injuries. In fact, a strong, flexible core helps everything you do each day. The stronger your core, the less energy and effort you'll need to put into simple movements.

When you are building a strong core, it's not wise to put all your efforts at getting rippling abs. Over strengthening abdominal muscles while ignoring muscles of the back and hip can set you up for injuries. If washboard abs are one of your goals, it's essential to decrease body fat through diet and aerobic exercise and build strong abdominal muscles through frequent core exercise sessions.

It's important to make exercise an everyday habit, whether it's tossing a Frisbee with your dog, playing a round of golf (and walking the course), or walking **briskly** through your neighborhood.

When you're not active and you have a sedentary lifestyle, over time you'll tend to get stiff, lose muscle mass, and risk becoming even more sedentary. Keeping muscle strength throughout life helps you maintain your ability to do activities of daily living. Some

of the most important muscle groups to keep strong as you get older are your abdominals, side muscles (oblique's) and back.

Weak core muscles can impair how well your body functions, like a negative ripple effect. Other muscles kick in to compensate for your weak abdominals, which can lead to overuse of other muscle groups, tendon tears and poor posture. This can lead to chronic back and hip pain.

You can do core-strength exercises on a carpeted floor or mat. Breathe freely and deeply during each core-strength exercise. Focus on tightening your transversus abdominis, the deepest abdominal muscle and the one you feel contracting when you cough.

Sit-ups or crunches strengthen just a few muscle groups. Plank type exercises recruit a better balance of muscles on the front, sides, and back of the body.

Four of the Best Bodyweight Exercises for a Strong Core

Russian Twist - Sit on the floor, knees bent and feet flat. Hold arms straight out in front of chest, with palms facing down. Lean back so that your torso is at a 45-degree angle to the floor. Twist to the right as far as you can, pause, then reverse movement and twist to the left. Keep the abs tightened at all times.

The Plank - Lie face down on the floor with feet together and forearms on the ground. Tighten abs and glutes. Lift entire body off the ground until it forms a straight line from head to toe, resting on forearms and toes. Hold. (Go easy at first). Slowly return body to the ground, keeping chin tucked and back flat. If this puts any strain on your lower back, do it from your knees instead of the toes.

In and Out Crunches - Lie on back with feet together, legs extended, and hands behind head with elbows wide. Lift shoulder blades and feet off the floor, bending knees in toward chest and lifting upper body in a standard crunch.

Superman - Lie face down on floor with arms in front of body, palms toward the ground. Draw navel in, tighten glutes, and pinch shoulder blades together. Simultaneously lift arms, chest, and legs off the floor. Hold. Slowly return to ground, keeping chin tucked in. Only raise your upper and lower body as high as comfortable. However, remember that the point of any exercise is to stress / strengthen the muscles!