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📌 Do More for Your Core: Fitting Core Work Into Your Routine

We hear about how important a strong core is and that we should incorporate core strength training into our fitness routine. But what does this actually mean? And what do core exercises look like? And where exactly "is" our core located anyway?

Imagine you are walking across a parking lot. With each step, the muscles of your back, hips, pelvis, and abdomen contract to absorb the force of each foot strike. Everything is working together. But what if your back muscles are weak? This may distort the way your foot lands which in turn can lead to problems with your foot, knee, hip, and shoulder. Solution? A strong and balanced core.

What is the Core?

The human body is a dynamic and interconnected mass of tissue and like a knit sweater - if you pull on one small thread (or muscle fiber) it impacts everything around it. Similarly, at the center of all movement is our "core" made up of the large muscle groups of the back,

abdomen, hips, and pelvis. Or in very basic terms - the core is the body without the arms and legs.

Go to runnersworld.com for a high level [diagram and description](#) of the core muscle group.

Why Core Strength is Important

Most movement, whether it is standing, squatting, bending, twisting, or reaching recruits some variation of the core muscle set. It is where strength and mobility originate. Visualize a track sprinter. These athletes have a lot of leg strength but the source of their power comes from their core. Volleyball legend Gabrielle Reece says, "In reality, the core is the functional link between the arms and legs. If you don't have the capacity to transfer force...your performance in almost every sport fails."

Why We Overlook Core Work

There are four main reasons why we tend to overlook core work:

First, for those of us who participate in dynamic sports it is easy to skip core work because many of the exercises designed to strengthen the core muscle group are not dynamic in nature. It's not a familiar movement to us and therefore goes against our "sports-specific" training mentality. It's like asking a boxer to go to a yoga class. But part of being a well rounded athlete includes cross training elements into our overall training program.

Second, we think, "I've been doing pretty good so far without having to work my core. Why start now?" But just think how much faster or stronger you could be. Core work teaches key muscle groups to work together and can help prevent musculoskeletal problems from developing. Plus as we age, we all see a natural loss of flexibility in supporting tissues which, if left unchecked, can increase aches, pains, and injuries.

Third, we don't think we have the time to fit in one more activity. For most of us, our schedules are already jam packed with family, friends, work, training, and life. Core exercises can be combined with existing workouts. For example, turn a 60 minute run into 75 minutes and add 15 minutes of core exercises at the end (see below for resources). It can be that simple.

And fourth, we don't know how or where to begin. Should we do these exercises? Or maybe those? Don't over think it. Determine if you want to create your own core strengthening program or get a jump start by taking a class. Check out "How to get Started" for a list of ideas and resources.

How to Get Started

There are literally thousands of exercises to develop and strengthen the core muscle set. Don't get overwhelmed. The important thing is consistency - whatever you start, stick with it in order to see and feel results. There are a couple of ways you can approach core training plan so pick a direction and GO!

1. Create your own core strengthening program with resources found on-line or in books.

"The Core Program" by Peggy W. Brill, PT.

"Yoga - Core Cross Train" DVD by Rodnee Yee

["A Core Workout"](#) by Runners World

(For more exercises from Runner's World, search "core" on their site.)

2. Take a class - and think outside the box on where to look for great core training!

[Core and Calisthenics at Jack and Adams Bicycle Shop](#)

(free)

[Fitness and Core Classes at Castle Hill Fitness](#) (\$)

[Core Strength Training at Rogue](#) (\$)

[Cross Training Core Bootcamp by Ballet Austin](#) (\$)

[Core Yoga by Austin Kula](#) (\$)

A strong core is the result of doing more than just sit-ups. It takes time and patience. But the performance and overall health rewards are oh so worth it.

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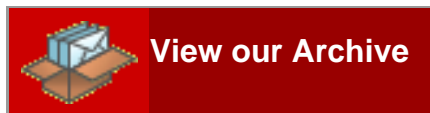
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