



Why and How to Strengthen Your Core

The core muscles are an important part of a well-rounded fitness program. However, these muscles are often neglected in programs in favor of other muscle groups in the arms and legs. These muscles around your trunk and pelvis should be a part of any exercise program. The following are suggestions to help strengthen these muscles and why they are important:

1. Core muscles help provide balance and stability. They provide a stable platform from which leg and arm muscles can function effectively.
2. You don't need a gym membership or special equipment to strengthen your core. Any activity that uses your trunk with no support counts as a core exercise. Try crunches - lay on your back, bend the knees to 90°, lift your head and shoulders off the floor while tightening your abdominal muscles.
3. A simple gym ball can be used to do abdominal exercises. Sit on the ball with your feet about shoulder width apart on the floor, arms across your chest, tighten the abdominal muscles and lean back until you feel them tighten more to keep balanced on the ball. Keep your back straight and watch your posture!
4. When completing any home and daily activity such as picking up around the house, vacuuming or lifting, tighten your core muscles by bringing your belly button in toward your spine. This will help support you back as well!
5. Strengthening the core muscles help prevent back injury at home or in the workplace. This will reduce the chance for missed work or delayed daily activities, keeping you more productive.
6. Concentrate on proper form and posture. Core exercises are more effective when you do 10-15 repetitions slowly with good mechanics than 20-30 repetitions quickly with poor mechanics.
7. Make sure to stop when you get fatigued. You can fall into improper positioning with an exercise and risk injury. Muscles need time to recover!
8. Try simple bridging to strengthen back muscles- lay on your back with knees bent 90°. Raise your pelvis up toward the ceiling as high as you can until your trunk is in line with your thighs. Hold for 3-5 seconds.
9. Regular daily activities and sports are easier with strong core muscles, with less risk of injury.
10. If you suffer from back pain, core strengthening can help reduce that pain and prevent further injury in the future.

Source:

Mayo Clinic staff. (Oct. 3 2009) Core Exercises: 7 reasons to strengthen your core muscles. Retrieved September 23rd 2011 from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/core-exercises/SM00071>