



Core Exercise 1: The Plank

This quick core routine begins with the plank exercise. The plank provides a great warm-up that engages all the muscles of the core: the rectus abdominis, the internal and external obliques, transversus abdominis, the hip flexors, the erector spinae and multifidus.

Begin in the pictured position. Keep your torso straight and rigid and your body in a straight line from ears to toes with no sagging or bending. Hold the position 15-60 seconds while maintaining control.

To increase the difficulty and intensity of this movement, alternate lifting one arm out in front of you while maintaining your posture for 10 seconds and repeating on the other side. You can do the same with each leg, by lifting your foot up and holding that position for 10 seconds and repeating on the opposite leg.

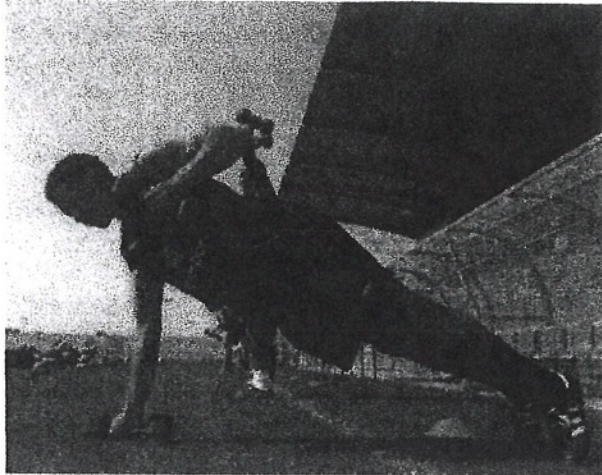


Core Exercise 2: The Side Plank

The side plank engages the often-overlooked muscles that help support the core -- the lateral stabilizers from the ankle to the shoulder. This is one simple and effective exercise to help increase lateral hip strength and stability and keep the obliques and transverse abdominis strong.

Begin in the pictured position and keep your body stiff from head to toe. Hold the position 15-60 seconds while maintaining control, and be sure to do both sides!

To increase the difficulty and intensity of this movement, alternate lifting your top leg up a few inches and holding it for 10 seconds while maintaining your balance.



Core Exercise 7: The Push Up Lat Row

I love combining the ultimate upper body and core exercise - the Push Up - with a solid back exercise – the lat row. This variation of the push up adds a dumbbell row to the movement which not only increases the intensity of the exercise, it also activates the core stabilizers and engages the latissimus dorsi (back) muscles.

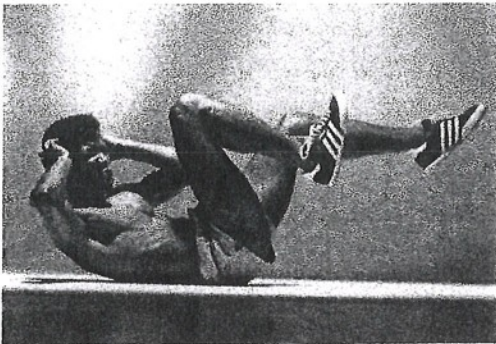
Start in a push up position with each hand on a dumbbell (begin with a light weight to learn the movement). Complete a full push up. Once you return to the start position you will add a dumbbell row; raise one dumbbell while stabilizing your body with the other arm and lower the dumbbell gently to the ground and repeat another push up.



Core Exercise 3: V-Sit Abdominal Exercise

The v-sit is an effective abdominal and core exercise that works the rectus abdominis, the external obliques, and internal obliques. This exercise also engages the hip flexors.

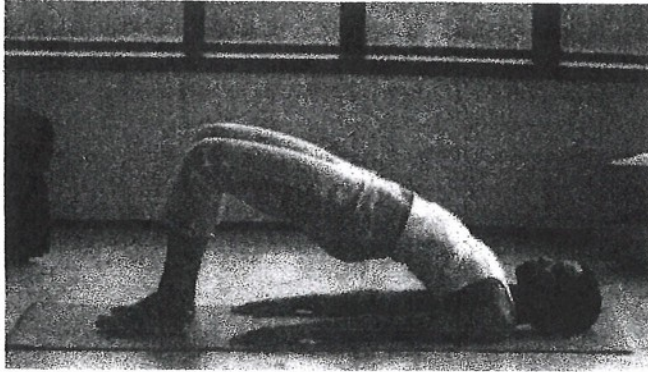
To do the V-sit, start in a seated position on the floor, contract your abdominal muscles and core, and lift your legs up to a 45-degree angle as pictured. Reach your arms straight forward or reach up toward your shins as you are able. Maintain good core posture and a strong spine while you hold the position for several seconds. Rest and repeat several times. As you get stronger, hold the position longer.



Core Exercise 4: The Bicycle Crunch

The bicycle crunch exercise is one of the best exercises for the rectus abdominus and obliques, according to an abdominal exercise study done at San Diego State University.

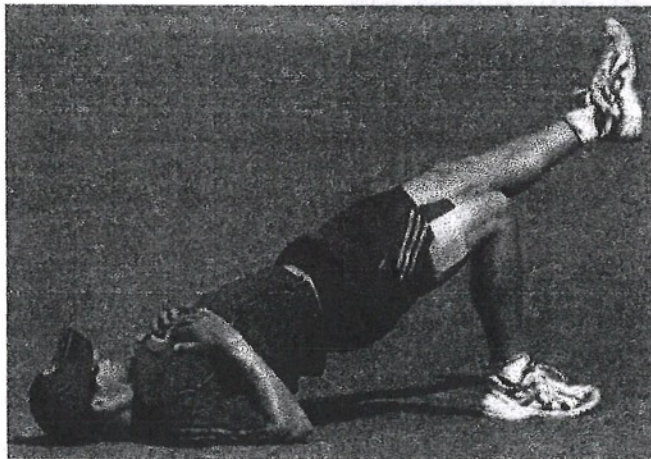
To do the exercise, lay flat on the floor with your lower back pressed to the ground. Rest your hands behind your head without pulling on your neck. Bring your knees up to about a 45-degree angle and slowly go through a bicycle pedal motion as pictured. First, touch your left elbow to your right knee, then your right elbow to your left knee. Perform the exercise in a slow, controlled motion. Repeat 10-25 repetitions on each side.



Core Exercise 5: The Hip Bridge Exercise

The hip bridge exercise isolates and strengthens the gluteus (butt) muscles and hamstrings (back of the upper leg). This, along with the single leg bridge exercise, are good core strengtheners that target both the abs and the low back muscles. The bridge exercise is considered a basic rehab exercise to improve core and spinal stabilization.

Hold the position pictured above for 15-60 seconds while maintaining control. If you do the single leg bridge as well, be sure to do both sides!



Core Exercise 6: The Single Leg Bridge Exercise

The single leg bridge exercise is the next step after you've mastered the bridge exercise. This move is a great way to isolate and strengthen the glutes and hamstrings, but when you do this exercise correctly, you will also find that it is a very powerful core strengthener.

Start on your back, hands by your sides, knees bent and feet flat on the ground, directly under your knees.

Lift up into a bridge position, and tighten your core.

Slowly raise and extend one leg. Keep your pelvis raised and level, try not to let one side dip down.



Medicine ball twist crunch (c)
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The side or twist crunch is similar to a standard crunch with shoulders lifted from the ground and abdominals braced, except you twist the body to one side then the other in alternating crunches. With the medicine ball twist crunch, you hold a medicine ball at the chest and, as you lift, you swing the ball to one side and return. Here's how you do it.

1. Lie on a mat or surface suitable for doing floor exercises.
2. Select a medicine ball light enough to enable you to swing it to one side and return to starting position, yet heavy enough to make you work hard.
3. Lie on your back with your knees bent at about a 90-degree angle and your feet on the floor. You can hold the legs straight out, but keeping the knees flexed gives you more stability.
4. Hold the medicine ball at the chest. Brace the abdominal muscles.
5. Lift the shoulders as you would for a standard crunch, and swing the ball to one side at the same time. Return the ball to the chest as you lower your shoulders to the floor. You may need to lift the shoulders a little higher than you would in a standard floor crunch.



Updated May 16, 2013.

The medicine ball diagonal twist exercise is an excellent exercise for strengthening the core -- the muscles of the abdomen and lower back. The twisting or rotational movement of the ball from high to low across the body provides an alternative pattern of work for the core muscles compared to standard crunches and similar exercises done in the same plane of movement.

Find out more about [weight training fundamentals](#) if you need background information before you try this exercise.