

Getting to the Core of “Core Strengthening”

By Dr. Christopher Utrup, DC

By now we've all heard the newest workout catchphrase, Core Strengthening. But what does it mean? A strong core is more than “six-pack abs”; it is your body's power zone, or the beginning of all movement. Technically, your body's core is the area around your trunk and pelvis. The muscles that form the core are the deep muscles of the abdomen and lower back, your buttocks, the muscles around the hips and pelvis, and even the smaller spinal muscles. In short, everything between the ribs and hips. Core stabilization is all about training the body to efficiently and safely use these muscle groups to carry out its activities. Core training teaches your body to use the inner muscles before you start any other movement, so that your spine is supported and your subsequent movements are smoother and more coordinated.

Why is Core Stability so Important?

As a chiropractor, I tell my patients that all parts of their bodies are connected, one way or another. The place where all these connections converge is the core. The core allows your body to transfer force from the lower body to the upper body and back again. Therefore, if the core is weak, then pain and/or injury can occur. A weak core can make a person more susceptible to poor posture, back pain and injuries during activity. By strengthening the core, or the connection, one can create greater stability to support the low back, improve coordination and stability, improve breathing, improve posture, increase muscle strength and reduce risk of injury.

How Can I Strengthen My Core?

Core stabilization exercises are easy and fun to do. Core exercises are enhanced by performing them on an exercise ball that suits your body type. To find the correct size of ball, make sure your feet are flat on the floor, your thighs are parallel to the floor and the lower legs are perpendicular to the floor. Core strengthening requires the regular and proper exercise of all 29 of your body's core muscles. Basic exercises that will enhance your core fitness include the:

- Bridge or Reverse Bridge
- Abdominal crunch or sit-up
- Pelvic Tilts and Rotation
- Bouncing

It is important to do your core exercises at least three times per week. It is always a good idea to work with a trained professional check to make sure you are correctly using the right muscles during each exercise.

Dr. Utrup is head of the Core Strengthening Program at InMotion, where he offers one on one training sessions broken into eight-week segments. His program takes participants through 20 minute workouts with a Swedish Ball, and focuses on individual muscles and their respective groups. The program is designed to add new exercises as the participant's stability increases. .