

Concentrate On Your Core, Exercise Your Body from the Inside-Out **The American Institute of Cancer Research 09-14-2007**

Whenever you walk or run, your core muscles are active, keeping you upright, balancing your body as your weight shifts, and absorbing the impact as your feet hit the ground.

Your body's core forms the foundation of all your movement. If your core is weak, you are susceptible to poor posture and injury. Lower back pain is also more likely to occur.

Your core muscles lie deep within your torso and pelvis. They are layered, overlapping and connected to each other.

Unlike weight lifting, a core-strengthening program exercises your whole system at once. You also don't need any equipment. The strength you use in holding a position, as well as the gravitational pull of your own weight, work out the core muscles. You'll be surprised at how great an effect a simple routine can have on your daily living activities.

The Core Benefits

The major core muscle is called the transversus abdominis. It is deep in your abdomen and circles your torso. To feel it contract, pull your belly button toward your spine. Hold the contraction for 10 seconds, then release. Repeat several times. You can do this exercise anytime, anywhere.

Breathing is important while you do core exercises. Practice breathing deeply from your diaphragm before starting core exercises. Sit or stand with your back straight and shoulders relaxed. Exhale through your mouth for 6 seconds, expelling as much air from your lungs as you can. Then inhale for 6 counts, feeling your belly and chest expand as your lungs fill with air. Repeat 3 times, then breathe at a more normal pace throughout your exercises.

Leg Press

Lie on the floor with your knees bent and the soles of your feet on the floor. Raise your right leg off the floor with the knee still bent until your leg forms a 90-degree angle. Rest your right hand on the kneecap. Push against your knee with your right hand while pulling your knee toward your hand with your abdominal muscles. Hold for 3-4 deep breaths. Repeat with the left leg and hand.

Abdominal Crunch

Lie on your back and place your feet on the wall, so that your knees form a 90-degree angle. Cross your arms on your chest. Keep your gaze fixed forward. Using your abdominal muscles—not your neck—lift your chest as far as you can off the floor, even if it is only an inch or two. Hold for 2-3 seconds if you can, then release. Repeat 8 times. Remember to breathe deeply throughout this exercise.

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