



You and your Core!

What and where is your core? Most people when they think of “core” think of just the abdominal muscles (Rectus Abdominus, Internal/External Obliques and the Transverse Abdominus). Though we are in the right area, we can extend that thought to include from your shoulder girdle to your pelvic floor, which includes not only abdominals, but also the back muscles. Why strengthen the core? It is important for maintaining good posture and balance and performing many daily activities.

Other components used when strengthening your core

Breathing

Why is breathing so important?

Proper breathing is important to ensure that we are providing oxygen to our muscles, organs and brain. Holding the breath deprives the muscles, organs and brain and can increase blood pressure especially when performing an exercise.

The Pelvic Floor

What is a kegel?

It is a pelvic floor exercise, named after Dr. Kegel who discovered the exercise. These muscles are attached to the pelvic bone and act like a hammock, holding in your pelvic organs. They also withstand any increases in pressure in the abdomen caused by activities such as coughing, laughing, sneezing, lifting and physical exertion. Pelvic floor muscles help to maintain urinary and fecal continence and assist in delay of voiding. These muscles must be able to contract and fully relax to provide proper function. To isolate these muscles, try to stop and start the flow of urine.

How do I do the Kegel exercise?

Once you have isolated the muscles, tighten and relax the muscle over and over, about 200 times a day.

Why would I want to do Kegel exercises?

- Sexual enjoyment is enhanced for both partners
- It can prevent prolapses of pelvic organs
- It can help prevent leaking urine when you sneeze or cough

Short abdominal workout

Remember: before doing any exercises warm up for at least 3–5 minutes. This can be as simple as the following:

Sit in a chair with “good” posture (ears over shoulders, shoulders over ribs, ribs over hips and knees at a 90 degree angle over ankles).

Start by lengthening your spine and growing an inch, maintain your pelvis in neutral and draw your belly button into spine just enough to be aware but not take your breath away. Looking ahead bring chin so that it is parallel with the floor. Breathe in thru your nose and out thru your nose.

Inhale your arms over head and exhale them down several times.

Still in good posture do some head turns from right to left and lower your chin to chest then bring your head back in to a neutral position.

Inhale and bring shoulders up and round to the back as you exhale several times.

Still maintaining good posture, begin by doing some Kegel exercises, “warming up” the pelvic floor and bringing awareness to this area. Match this movement with your breath as you inhale tighten the muscle and exhale as you let it relax.

******* With all of the following exercises remember to draw the belly button toward the spine and pull up on your pelvic floor as you inhale, maintain this position as your exhale and continue to breathe through out the exercise.**

Reverse Crunch

Functional Purpose

Strengthening abdominal muscles for improved posture and balance and less back pain.

Muscles Worked

Abdominals

Lower back (erector spinae)

Instructions

Sit on edge of chair. Place both hands on chest. Slowly lean back without touching the back of the chair. Hold for 3 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat.

Abdominal Twist

Functional Purpose

Strengthening sides of body (oblique muscles) for improved posture and balance.

Muscles Worked

Obliques (sides)

Abdominals

Instructions

Sit on edge of chair. Bring both hands together as in a prayer position. Twist toward the right. Hold. Return to the center, then twist toward the left. Repeat.

Shoulder Bridge

Functional Purpose

Warm up and/or core strengthening and lumbar flexibility

Muscles Worked

Abdominals

Lower Back

Gluteals

Hamstrings

Instructions

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor about hip width apart, heels and toes pointed straight out. Place your arms at your sides and draw your shoulders down your back. Inhale and lift hips to the ceiling, tightening the abdominals and glutes. Imagine a ball in between your knees as you press your inner thighs together. Hold for 3 breaths, lower and repeat 3 times working up to 8 times.

Pilates Hundred

Functional Purpose

Strengthening abdominal muscles and increase spinal flexibility.

Muscles Worked

Abdominals

Back

Instructions

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. **Keep head on the floor.** Reach long with your fingers and lift arms off floor. Move your arms up and down slowly, initiating from the shoulder joint as if you were slapping water. Inhale for a count of five and exhale for a count of five. Take long full breaths, making sure that the inhale and exhale are equal in length. Repeat the inhale/exhale 5 times working up to 10 times or “100” total.

Pilates Single Leg Stretch

Functional Purpose

Strengthening abdominal muscles, hip flexors and increases spinal flexibility.

Muscles Worked

Abdominals

Back

Instructions

Lie on your back with feet straight out on the floor. **Keep head on the floor.** Draw right leg into chest. Alternate your legs in and out, never allowing your feet to cross thru midline of your body. You can use your hands to guide your legs without pulling on them. Repeat 5 times each leg working up to 8 times each leg.

Spinal Balance

Functional Purpose

Strengthening core stabilizer muscles and back of body and balance and concentration.

Muscles Worked

Abdominals

Back

Instructions

From all fours, place knees directly under the hips and wrists directly under shoulders.

Lengthen the neck, and focus the gaze on the floor.

Extend one leg out long, placing toes on floor if unsteady or leg goes parallel to the floor.

Extend opposite arm out, parallel to floor.

Options: Bring one arm out only then alternate arms.

Hold position for several breaths and switch to the other side.

Repeating several times on each side.