

10 Easy Core Exercises to Keep You Strong and Fit

It pays to get your core muscles—the muscles around your trunk and pelvis—in better shape, if only to keep your balance over time. Really, having a strong body core means you'll be better able to manage anything, even doing grocery shopping or playing a round of golf. What's more, core exercises are an important part of a well-rounded fitness program, and they're easy to do at home on your own without purchasing anything extra!

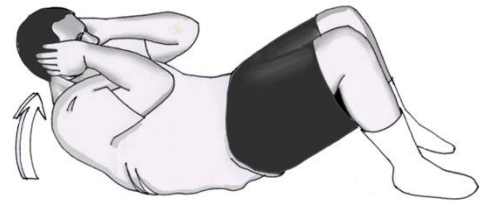
Include all 10 of these easy core exercises in your workouts, doing at least one set of 8-15 reps, but working up toward doing 2-3 sets of each per workout session. For best results, do these exercises at least 2 or 3 nonconsecutive days per week—muscles need a day or two off to fully recover and get stronger—but just not right before another physical activity.

#1: Crunches

Main muscles worked: abdominals

Directions:

- Lie down on your back with your knees bent.
- Place your hands on your head right behind your ears.
- While breathing out, contract your abdominal muscles to lift your head, neck, and shoulders off the floor and curl forward no more than 45 degrees.
- Hold for a moment before returning to the starting position, then repeat.



#2: Waist worker

Main muscles worked: abdominals (obliques)

Directions:

- Lie on your back on the mat with your legs bent, your feet flat on the floor, and your left hand behind your head.
- Stretch your right hand across your body toward your opposite (left) knee and circle your hand three times around your knee in a counterclockwise direction; your right shoulder blade will lift off the mat.
- Repeat the circular movement around the right knee using your left arm, but in a clockwise motion.
- Keep your head in a neutral position and relax your neck to ensure that the contraction is in your abdomen area only.

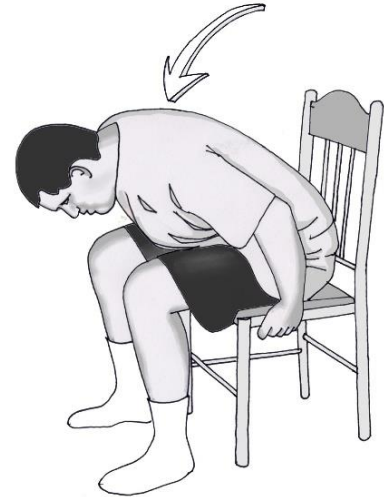


#3: Chair sit-ups

Main muscles worked: lower back

Directions:

- Sit up straight in a chair with your feet on the floor, hands to your sides for support.
- Bend forward, keeping your lower back as straight as possible, moving your chest down toward your thighs.
- Slowly straighten back up, using your lower back muscles to raise your torso.
- For added resistance, put a resistance band under both feet before you start and hold one end in each hand during the movement.



#4: Lower back strengthener

Main muscles worked: lower back, gluts (buttocks)

Directions:

- Lie on your stomach with your arms straight over your head, your chin resting on the floor between your arms.
- Keeping your arms and legs straight, simultaneously lift your feet and your hands as high off the floor as you can (aim for at least three inches off the floor).
- Hold that position (sort of a Superman flying position) for 10 seconds if possible, and then relax your arms and legs back onto the floor.
- If this exercise is too difficult to start, try lifting just your legs or arms off the floor separately--or even just one limb at a time.

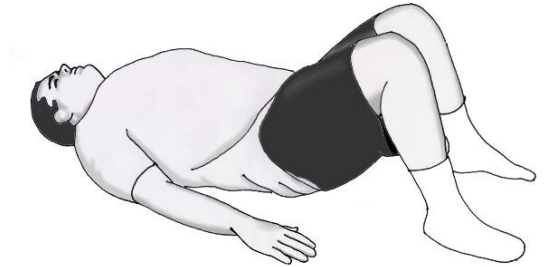


#5: Pelvic tilt

Main muscles worked: lower back, lower abdominals

Directions:

- Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and hands either by your sides or supporting your head.
- Firmly tighten your bottom, forcing your lower back flat against the floor.
- Relax and repeat.

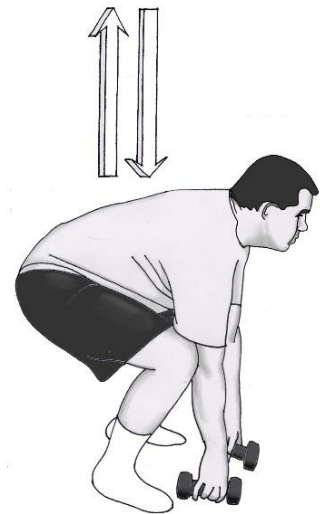


#6: Suitcase lift (or, the proper way to lift items from the floor)

Main muscles worked: lower back, lower body (squat muscles)

Directions:

- After placing dumbbells (or household items) slightly forward and between your feet on the floor, stand in an upright position with your back straight.
- Keep your arms straight, with your hands in front of your abdomen.
- With your back straight, bend only your knees and reach down to pick up the dumbbells.
- Pick up the dumbbells or items in both hands, then push up with your legs and stand upright, keeping your back straight.



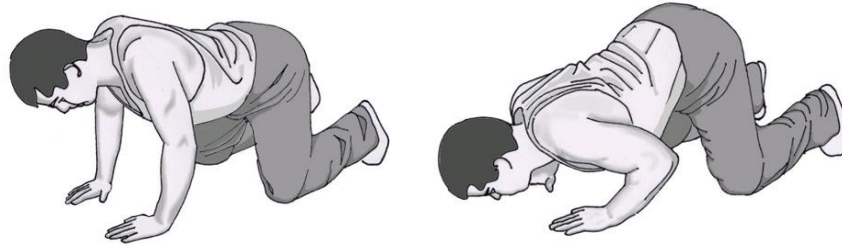
#7: Modified push-ups

Main muscles worked: pecs (chest), deltoids (anterior portion), triceps (back of arm)

Directions:

- Get on your hands and knees on the floor or mat.
- If using a band for extra resistance, position it across your back and hold one end of it in each hand so that it is somewhat tight when your elbows are straight.
- Place your hands shoulder-width apart on the mat.
- Tighten your abdominal muscles to straighten your lower back and lower yourself (from your knees, not your feet) down toward the mat as far as you can without touching it.
- Push yourself back up until your arms are extended, but without locking your elbows.

- If this exercise is too hard, stand facing a wall and place your arms on it at shoulder height and your feet about a foot away; then, do your push-ups off the wall (with or without a resistance band).

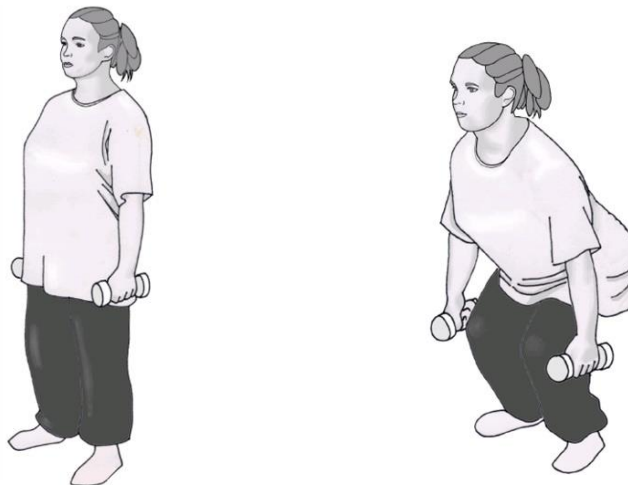


#8: Squats

Main muscles worked: quads (front of thigh), hamstrings (back of thigh), gluts, calves

Directions:

- Stand with a dumbbell (or household item, like water bottles) in each hand and your feet shoulder-width apart, with your toes pointing slightly out to the side.
- If you're using a resistance band, tie both ends of your band onto a straight bar or broom handle, which is placed squarely across your shoulders with the loop of the tied band placed under your feet.
- Keep your body weight over the back portion of your foot rather than your toes; if needed, lift your arms out in front of you to shoulder height to balance yourself.
- Begin squatting down but stop before your thighs are parallel to the floor (at about a 70-degree bend), keeping your back flat and your abdominal muscles firm at all times.
- Hold that position for a few seconds before pushing up from your legs until your body is upright in the starting position.
- Do squats with your back against a smooth wall if needed to maintain your balance.

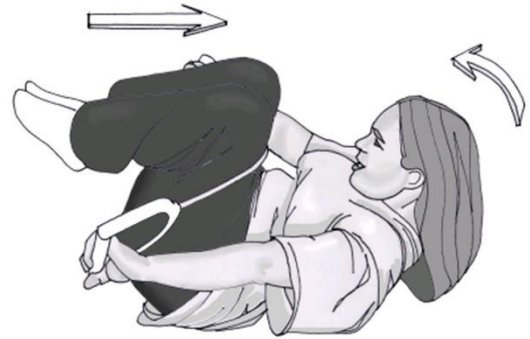


#9: Knee lift

Main muscles worked: quads, hip flexors, abdominals

Directions:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Bend at your hip until your bent knees are positioned straight up over your hips at a 90° angle.
- Tighten your abdominals to hold your lower back flat against the floor.
- Lift your head slightly off the floor and position the resistance band across the front of your thighs, just above the knees.
- Holding the band in your hands, stretch it by pulling your hands out more to the sides.
- Pull your knees in toward your chest against the band to increase the resistance against your lower abs and the front of your thighs.
- Slowly return to the starting position.
- If holding your head slightly off the floor is too hard, relax your neck muscles and rest your head on the floor.



#10: Sit-to-Stand

Main muscles worked: abdomen, thighs

Directions:

- Sit toward the front of a sturdy chair and fold your arms across your chest.
- Keep your back and shoulders straight while you lean forward slightly and practice using only your legs to stand up slowly and to sit back down.
- To assist you initially, place pillows on the chair behind your low back.

