

Core Training Workout and Stretching- Part I, -Jeff Mrochinski, ACE Certified Fitness Trainer

Core training has been a hot item for the last few years. Core training refers to exercises and stretches that focus on improving the function of the lower torso- primarily the abdominals, obliques and lower back area.

Aptly named, the “core” is the center of your balance and energy. Most compound movements of the body are either stabilized by the core (an overhead press, for instance) or have their energy generated by the core (a golf swing, for example). Those who have ever experienced lower back pain or an abdominal strain understand how important a strong functioning core truly is.

There are hundreds of exercises and stretches that are designed to target the core area. In part A below, we will illustrate a few basic movements that you can perform at home with little or no equipment. These will target the sagittal plane movement of the core, that is, the bending of the torso forward and backward. Our next article, part B, will focus on the transverse plane (twisting movements). Please read the disclaimer below before continuing.

Consult a physician before starting any exercise plan, particularly if you are on any medication or have any ailments. If you experience any pain, discomfort or physical difficulties, stop immediately and seek medical attention from a physician or another qualified health care provider. The information provided is not intended to treat any ailments, nor should it be construed as therapeutic advice.

The photo to the right illustrates an abdominal crunch movement. Lie flat on the ground. Lift legs to a 90 degree angle, flattening the lower back. Place finger tips on the back of your head. While exhaling, slowly lift your shoulder blades off the ground for a count of three, moving your rib cage toward your pelvic bone. This will contract the front abdominal muscles. Hold for a second at the top and then lower your shoulder blades for a count of three. Maintain a neutral chin position.



The body plank is an isometric (stationary) exercise. Hold your body in the position illustrated, maintaining a straight spine throughout. Be sure to breath deeply and regularly during the exercise. Beginners can generally hold this position for 20-30 seconds. Advanced clients can hold it beyond 60 seconds.

This exercise, the Arm/Leg Lumbar Extension, targets the lower back. As shown in the photo to the right, the opposite arm/leg is extended. The position is held for 3 to 5 seconds, and then it is performed on the other side. Client goals are to perform 5 to 10 repetitions on each side.



Lying Lumbar Extension- As shown to the left, lie face down on the floor, then raise your chest a few inches off the ground and hold for two counts, then slowly lower and repeat. Perform five to ten repetitions.

Spread Eagle Stretch- As basic as it gets, this stretch requires lying flat on your back and extending your arms and legs. Relax and breathe easy. Feel the stretch through your core and limbs. From this position, pull your knees toward your chest with your arms keeping your back and head on the floor. This will stretch the lower back. Hold each for 15 seconds.

