

Efficient Exercises For Core Strength Training

Dr. Clara Derry, DPT and Dr. Michael Derry, DPT

When you think of your core muscles, what do you think of? If you are like most people, those coveted 6-pack abs come to mind. However, our core encompasses much more than our 6-pack muscles. In fact, our core includes everything from our diaphragm, to our back muscles, to our pelvic floor, and of course our front and side belly muscles.

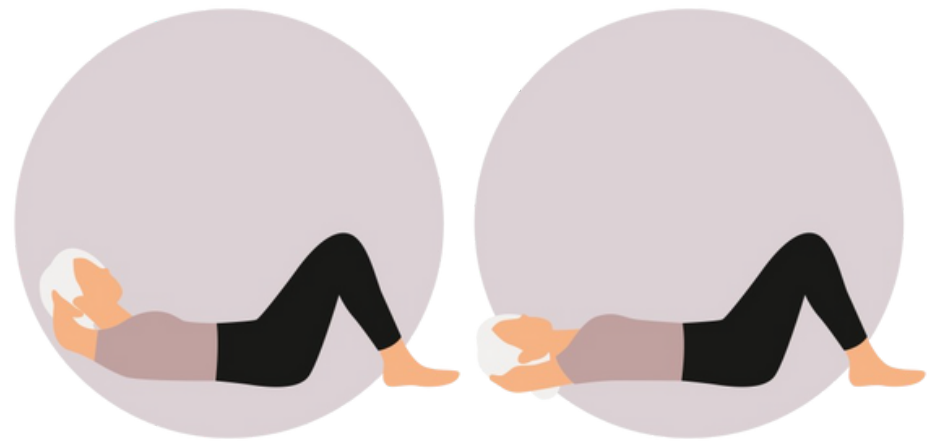
Our core has an additional job that we are all incredibly grateful for: helping us to keep our continence! (A.k.a keep our pee and poo off of the floor). If we expand our view even further to what we call our “core plus” muscles, we can appreciate the partnership our core has with a few shoulder and hip muscles as well.

All of these muscles, beautifully intertwined, work together to create the perfect balance of mobility and stability across our skeleton.

With these in mind, we will help you strengthen your core. It takes about 6-8 weeks for neural adaptations, a.k.a to get stronger.

Essentially, when we introduce new exercises, we have a rapid improvement in strength in the first 6-8 weeks because your body is learning how to engage your muscles better. The connection between your brain and muscles actually gets stronger because of the repetition!

Below, you will find the ten easy core exercises you can start doing today. You do not need any equipment when doing these exercises. All you need is your determination to get that core stronger for an overall strength and wellness.



CRUNCH

HOW TO DO IT

Lie down on the ground or elevated surface with your knees bent. Cradle your neck in your hands. Curl your chest towards your thighs. With control, return to lying on your back.

MAKE IT HARDER

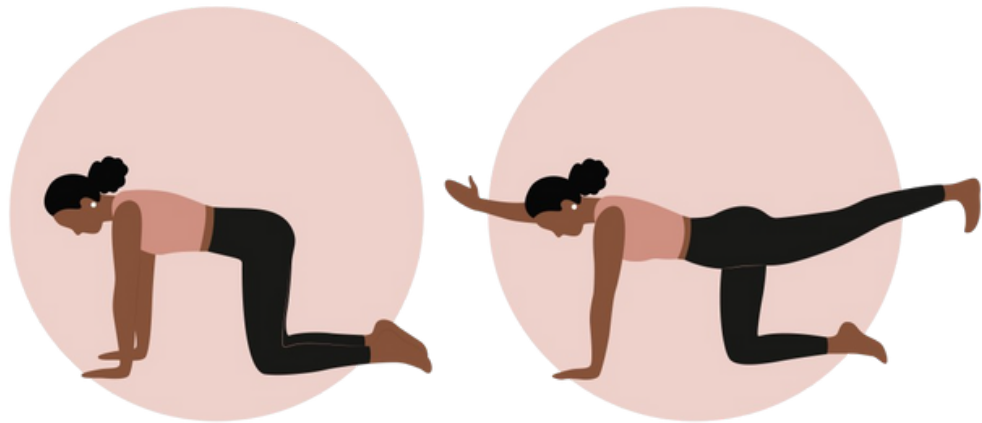
Instead of curling straight up to both thighs, alternate curling towards the right and left thigh.

MAKE IT EASIER

Tuck your toes under something sturdy or have a partner hold them.

TIPS

Keep your chin tucked.



BIRD DOGS

HOW TO DO IT

Begin on all fours with your arms under your shoulders, knees under your hips, and eyes looking between your palms. Draw your belly button in towards your spine. Extend one arm forward and the opposite leg backwards, ensuring that your back stays level. Repeat.

MAKE IT HARDER

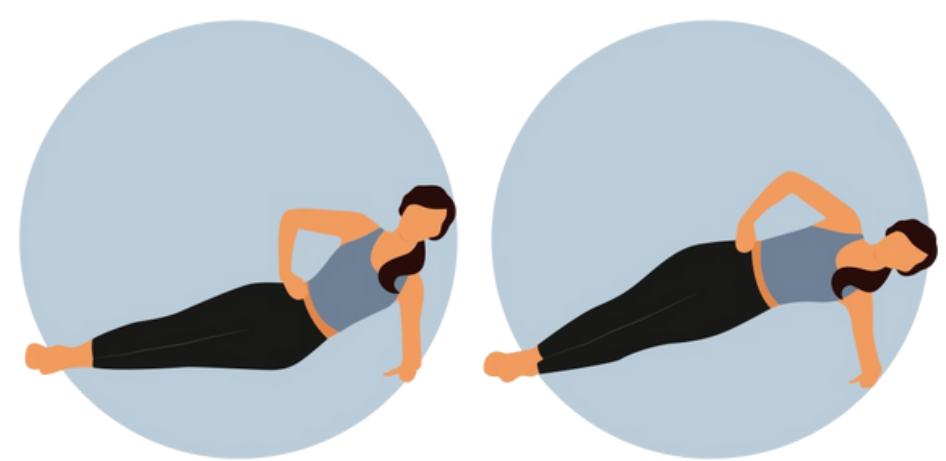
Instead of returning to all fours, bring your elbow and knee to touch in a crunch position under your trunk.

MAKE IT EASIER

If lifting both an arm and leg is too challenging, try lifting only one limb at a time. If you need to modify further, try tapping with one arm or leg instead of holding it in the air.

TIPS

Pretend like you are balancing a glass of water on your back. Your trunk should stay still as you move your limbs.



SIDE PLANKS

HOW TO DO IT

Lie on your side with your feet stacked and your upper half supported on your elbow. Raise your hips so the only contact point on the ground is your feet and elbow. Hold this position.

MAKE IT HARDER

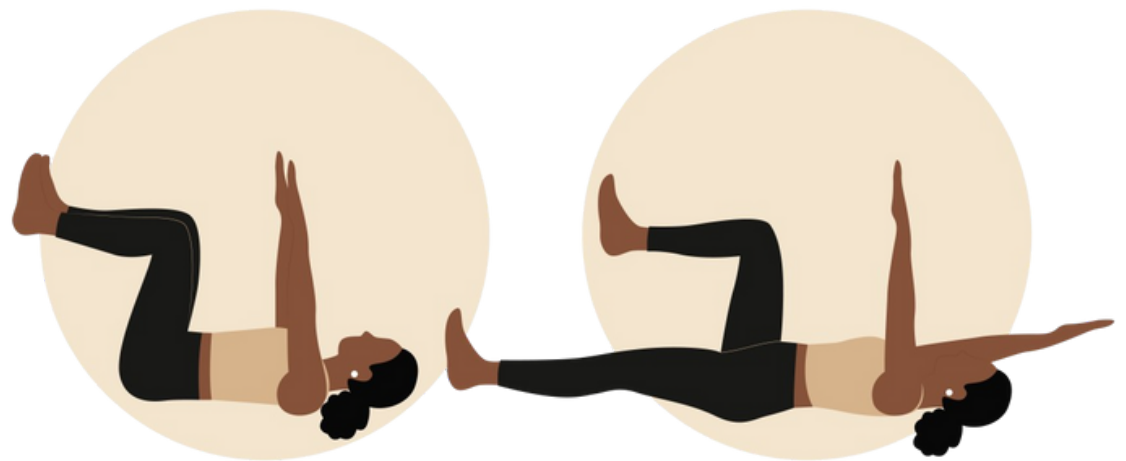
While you are in your side plank, raise your top leg towards the sky and hold for the remaining time.

MAKE IT EASIER

Bend your knees so the two contact points are your elbow and stacked knees.

TIPS

Slip something soft under your elbow to improve comfort. Ensure that your trunk and legs are in a straight line. Envisioning that you are being squeezed between two panes of glass can be a helpful visual.



DEAD BUGS

HOW TO DO IT

Lie on your back with your arms straight up towards the ceiling and your knees lifted at a 90 degree angle. Draw your belly button in towards your spine. Lower one arm towards your ear while you extend the opposite leg straight out towards the ground (but don't let it touch!).

MAKE IT HARDER

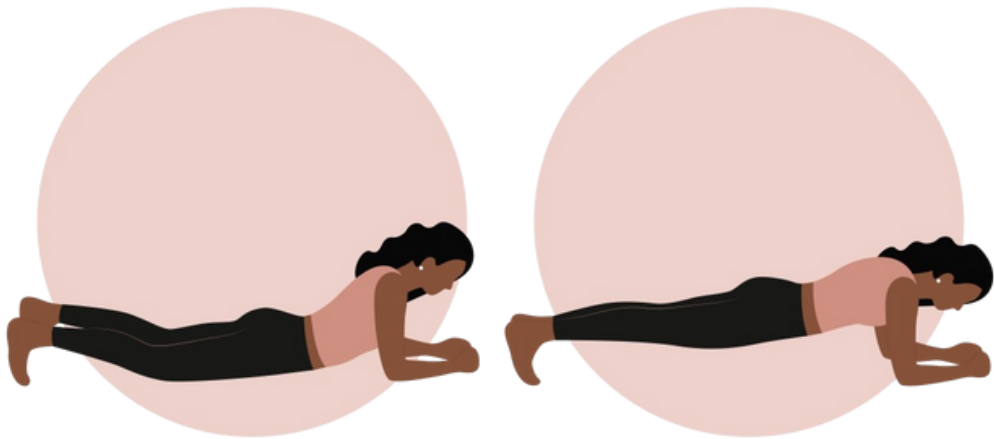
Holding at the extended position of this exercise for several seconds can help to dial in your core contraction further.

MAKE IT EASIER

If moving both an arm and leg is too challenging, try moving only one limb from the starting position at a time.

TIPS

Picture a piece of string running from your right wrist to your right knee and left wrist to left knee. They are attached so they have to move together.



FRONT PLANK

HOW TO DO IT

Lie on your belly, propped up on your forearms. Raise your abdomen off the floor until your spine is straight. The contact points on the ground should be your elbows/forearms and toes. Hold this position.

MAKE IT HARDER

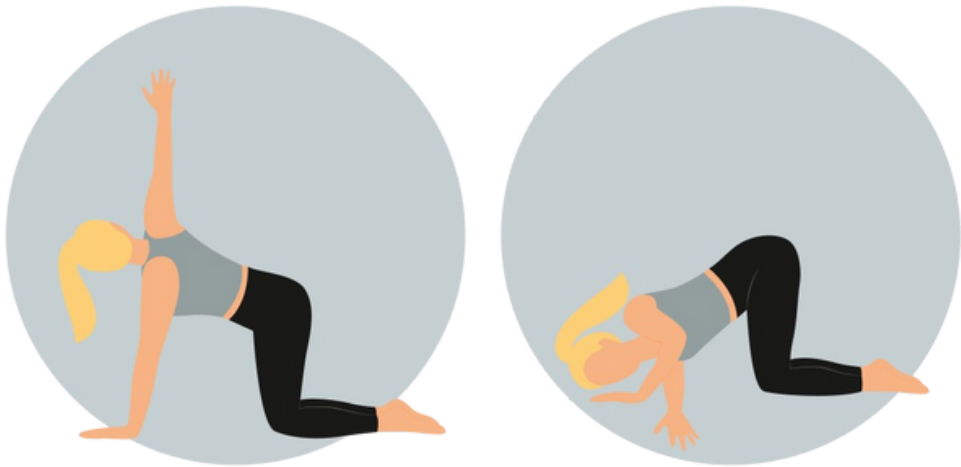
While holding your plank, raise one leg up until you feel your glutes squeeze, keeping your knee straight.

MAKE IT EASIER

Rise onto your forearms and knees instead of toes.

TIPS

Keep your eyes looking between your hands to ensure proper neck position.



THREAD THE NEEDLE

HOW TO DO IT

Start in the traditional side plank position as mentioned above. Raise your top arm towards the ceiling (this is the thread). Next, reach your top arm under your side as far as you can while keeping your balance. Your chest will rotate towards the ground, but your hips should stay still.

MAKE IT HARDER

Try to close your eyes and complete the exercise. Taking away your visual input will make you feel more off balance, causing your core muscles to react to keep you balanced.

MAKE IT EASIER

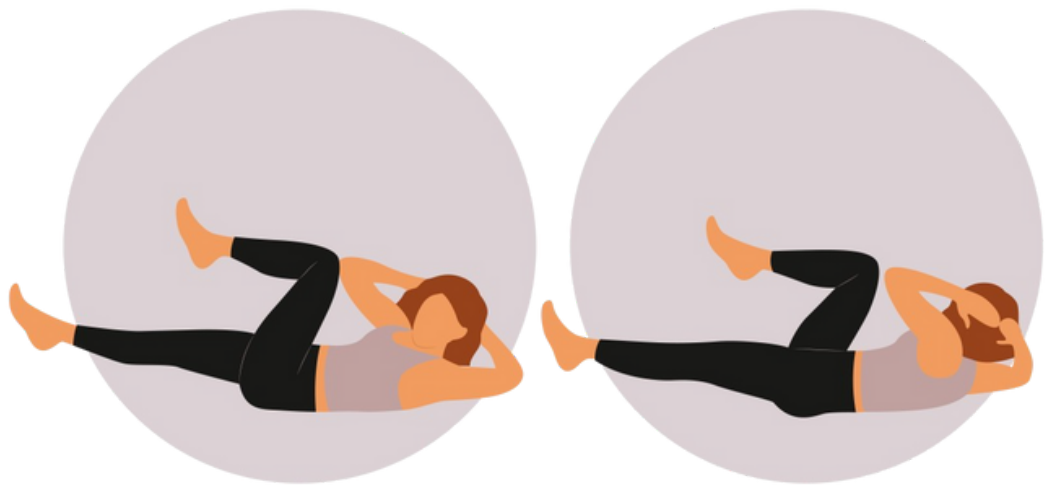
Complete the same exercise steps, but stay on your knees.

TIPS

Slow and steady with this exercise to get the maximum benefit.

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BICYCLES

HOW TO DO IT

Lie on the ground with your knees bent and your hands supporting your neck. Raise your shoulders and feet off of the ground. Alternate touching your opposite elbow to knee while extending the other limb straight out.

MAKE IT HARDER

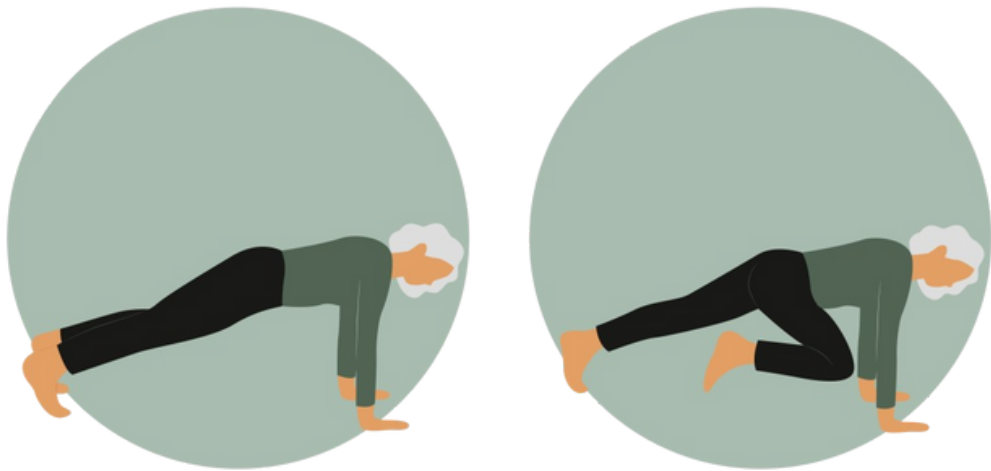
Hold each leg in the extended position for several seconds to increase the demand on your abdominals as gravity weighs down your leg.

MAKE IT EASIER

Leave the upper body resting on the ground and alternate bending one knee while hovering the other above the ground. Keep those tummy muscles tight!

TIPS

The closer to the ground that your legs are, the harder the exercise will be.



MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

HOW TO DO IT

Begin in a plank position. Draw one knee up towards your chest by trying to shorten the distance between your ribs and your hip bones with your belly muscles.

MAKE IT HARDER

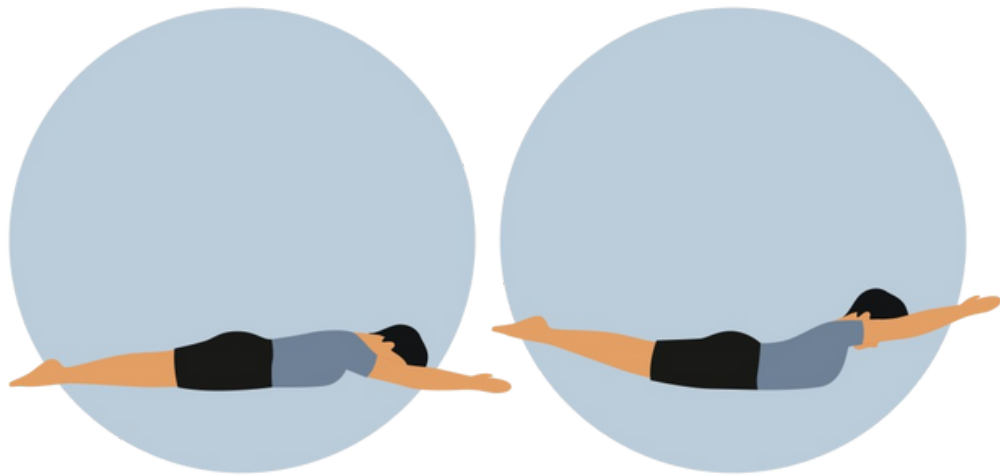
Place your hands on a less stable surface, like a bosu ball, foam pad, pillow.

MAKE IT EASIER

Place your hands on an elevated surface, like a counter or a bench. Complete the exercise as above.

TIPS

If you don't think about using your core muscles to shorten the distance between your ribs and hip bones, you might not feel much. Focus in! Use your core to do the motion.



SUPERMAN

HOW TO DO IT

Lie on your belly with your arms resting on the floor in front of you. Raise your arms, chest, and feet off of the ground so the contact points are your trunk and thighs. Hold this position.

MAKE IT HARDER

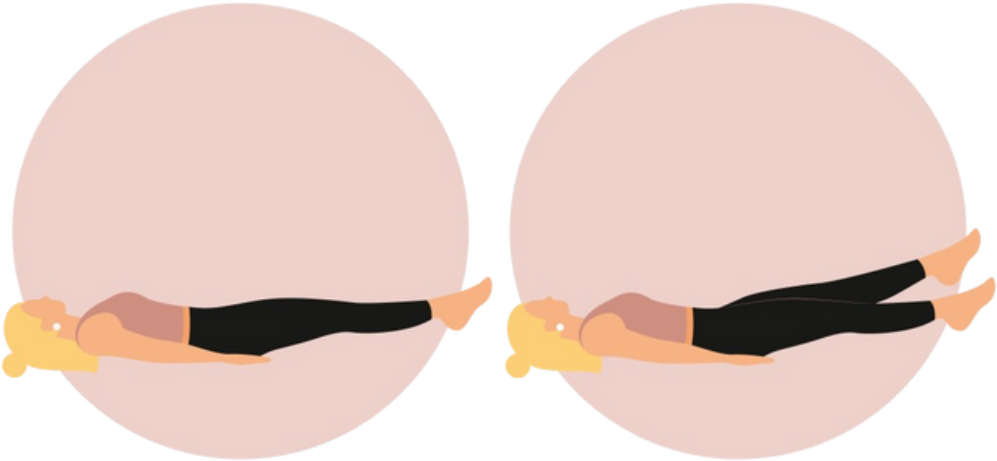
Pretend you are flying to one of your favorite locations. Tilt your body to match the turns you take to get there. Not only will this help you to hold it longer, but it will require more dynamic stabilization.

MAKE IT EASIER

Keep your feet on the ground as you lift your arms and chest off of the table. If you can't quite get the balance right here, you can keep your hands down by your side AND your feet on the ground while you peel your chest up.

TIPS

Keep your eyes on the ground to ensure proper neck position.



FLUTTER KICKS

HOW TO DO IT

Lie on your back with your hands at your side and your legs straight out in front of you. Draw your belly button into your spine. Raise both feet a few inches off the ground while keeping your back glued to the ground. Make small kicks with your legs.

MAKE IT HARDER
OR MAKE IT
EASIER

The closer your legs are to the ground, the harder this will be and vice versa for making this easier. See how low you can go while keeping your back glued to the ground!

TIPS

Quality over quantity here. When you feel your form start to suffer, take a break.