



Your Core - Foundation of your running

Your core strength is more important to your running than you may think. Your core strength is the foundation your body uses to propel itself through physical space. Your limbs are merely levers used to produce movement. Without a solid core to push against, those levers will be inefficient.

Core strength is produced by the major muscles in your abdomen namely your Rectus Abdominis, Erector Spinae, Obliques and Transverse Abdominus. To have a solid core you must strengthen and balance all these muscles. Imbalance between these muscles could contribute to alignment issues, back pain and an inefficient gait so its important not to overwork one muscle at the expense of others. The most common mistake is people work their abdominals but neglect their back and obliques.

So why is a strong core so important?

When you move your legs to produce a forward motion, your legs which are acting as levers have 2 points of contact; the road and your core. When you push on the road there is no 'give'. If your core is weak and you push off against it, it will absorb some of the energy causing inefficiency. The stronger your core the more energy will be translated into forward motion.

If you've ever run in sand you will know how inefficient your running is when the surface you are pushing against is soft. It's the same with a soft core.

Engineers know the importance of a strong chassis in a car to provide better performance. The less energy absorbed into the car itself, the more is put into the road, where it matters and the same is true of your body.

A strong core will not only help your running performance but also will give you better posture, less back pain and will also help you prevent injury.

If you currently do not specifically work your core, start with one workout per week with at least one set for each muscle and work up from there.

There are a lot of exercises you can do for your core. Here are some examples;

Abdominal crunches are very effective. To do them correctly try to shorten the distance between your rib cage and Pelvis. Start with your arms by your side and progress all the way to your arms above your head for more resistance. Crunch slowly for good technique. Don't do sit ups for your abs. These work your hip flexors more than your abdominal muscles.

For your erector spinae try the superman exercise. Lie on your front with your arms up (like superman flying). Raise your right arm and left leg towards the sky. Lower them slowly and repeat with the opposite arm and leg.



Obliques can be worked with side bends. Start with no weight and add dumbbells as you become more advanced. You can also use variations on crunches that have a more lateral twisting motion.

Your transverse abdominus muscles run side to side from your midline like a girdle. To strengthen it stand up straight and pull your belly button in towards your spine, hold and slowly release.

Just as important as working your core muscle is stretching them. You do not want to be hunched over in later life or put up with back pain because your range of motion has been neglected. Just like stretching your leg muscles, you need to work on stretching all the muscles in your body to ensure they stay supple. Stretching is a entire subject to itself but the rule of thumb is to make the muscle you are stretching as long as possible, without pain.

Health Canada's guideline for stretching is that you should be spending 30 minutes, five to seven times per week. That may seem like a lot but it does not have to be 30 minutes concurrent. Just stretch while you watch your favorite TV show.

These were just a few examples of exercises for your core. There are many different ways to work your core. Search the Internet or ask your trainer for more variations.

So, don't neglect your core when choosing your workouts. Your technique will improve and you'll feel less fatigue on longer runs so the effort is well worth it.

