[IMAGE]

Winning Without Weights

No-Nonsense Exercises to Build Core Strength and Tone Your Entire Body

By Jeffrey Tucker, DC

Your core is your center of gravity, located around your trunk and pelvis, and having a strong core is vital to good posture, muscle control, injury prevention, maximum athletic performance and even basic activities of daily living. There are a variety of ways to work the core muscles, and these days, it’s not always necessary to use free weights or weight machines. Body weight, foam rolls, stability balls, bands, tubing and medicine balls are tools that can be used at home, on your own, to create a solid foundation for developing dynamic strength in your torso, shoulders, arms and legs.

For example, body-weight exercises such as squats, lunges, push-ups, and pull-ups can target the small and large muscles that influence the spine. Working out with balls and bands can help develop a lean torso and abs, build muscles in your pelvis, lower back, hips, abdomen, arms, and create flexibility. And using a foam roll can relieve tension in tight, overactive muscles.

Winning Without Weights Couple - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark It doesn’t take very much equipment to get started. In my own experience working out at home on a daily basis for the past 15-plus years, a disk used to move furniture becomes the perfect tool to perform sliding lunges. A chin-up bar replaces a lat machine. A chair or a bench becomes a platform to perform step-ups and step-downs. An 8 lb medicine ball can be thrown against an outside wall while performing a chest press. A padded surface or a rocker board/ balance board can be used to perform single-leg stance movements and improves joint stability. A band with handles works just as well as barbells or dumbbells. (Band training provides variable resistance to the popular exercises we use machines or free weights for, such as pressing, rowing, squatting and many others). A stability ball can be used instead of a flat bench.

What exercises should beginners start with? The National Academy of Sports Medicine recommends starting a workout using the foam roll for what is known as "self myofascial release." Pressure placed on tender points within the muscle are held for 30 seconds. This allows for optimal muscle lengthening and acts as part of the warm-up phase. Next are lengthening or stretching maneuvers. After stretching only tight,

overactive muscles, you then perform basic exercises and progress to advanced strength movements. Maneuvers requiring co-contraction of the small stabilizer and larger mobilizer muscles, such as the"plank" exercise (see below) are great for the abs. Pick exercises that target the front, rear and side muscles of the trunk.

Body-Weight Exercises

Plank: Start to assume a push-up position, but bend your elbows and rest your weight on your forearms instead of your hands. Your body should form a straight line from your shoulders to your ankles. Pull your abdominals in; imagine you're trying to move your belly button back to your spine. Hold for 20 seconds, breathing steadily. *As you build endurance, try to do one or two 60-second sets*.

Side Bridge: Lie on your side with the forearm on the floor and your elbow under your shoulder. For beginners, start with your knees bent 90 degrees. For advanced exercisers, start with your body forming a straight line from head to ankles. Pull your abs in as far as you can, hold the abs stiff throughout and raise the hips off the floor. Hold this position for 10 to 60 seconds, breathing steadily. Relax down slowly. Repeat on your other side. *If you can do 60 seconds, do one repetition per side. If not, try for any combination of reps that gets you up to 60 seconds*.

Winning Without Weights Push-up - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Traditional ab crunch:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and your hands behind your ears. Slowly crunch up, bringing your shoulder blades off the ground. *Perform 1-3 sets, 12-15 repetitions per set*.

Ball and Band Exercises

Everyone wants to learn more "butt" or gluteals exercises. The gluteus maximus and gluteus medius are important muscles of the body and often need extra work. The following are good exercises to target the gluteals:

Gluteal ball bridge: Lie on the ball with your head and upper back resting on the ball, feet on the floor with knees bent. Squeeze your gluteals and then push your hips up until there is a straight line through the knee and hip to the upper body. Shoulders remain on the ball. Beware of rising too high or flaring the ribs, which will push the back into hyperextension. Hold the "up" position for two breaths. Let your butt come down and then repeat. *Perform 2-3 sets, 10-12 repetitions per set*.

Winning Without Weights Supine Ball Bridge - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Supine ball bridge:** Lie on your back with your heels on the top of a stability ball, hip-width apart to aid stability. Suck in the abdominals and squeeze up from your gluteals, lifting your hips until there is a straight line from heels to upper back. Shoulders and head stay firmly on the floor. Take care not to lift the hips too high or flare the ribs so your back hyperextends. *Hold for 30 seconds and lower. Perform 2-3 sets, 10-12 repetitions per set*.

Lateral band walking: With elastic tubing around both ankles, stand with toes straight ahead, knees over feet and hands on hips. Draw abdomen in and step to right while maintaining upright posture. Don't rock your upper body when stepping. Step again with the right foot, bringing your feet back to shoulder-width distance. Winning Without Weights Lateral Walking - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Repeat for six steps to the right and then six steps to the left. This exercise strengthens the glutes, core, and abductors and adductors (the muscles of the outer and inner thigh, respectively). *Perform sets of six steps to each side until you feel a slight burn in the gluteal muscle*.

Ball back extension: Training the important posture muscles of the thoracic (middle) and lumbar (lower) portions of the spine also can be done on the ball. Position yourself with your chest on the ball and hook your feet under a leg anchor, or put them up against the bottom of a wall. Hold your arms straight out in front of you. Your body should form a straight line from your hands to your hips. Raise your upper body until it's slightly above parallel to the floor. At this point, you should have a slight arch in your back and your shoulder blades should be pulled together. Pause for a second and then repeat. You can perform this exercise with the arms in a 10 o'clock and 2 o'clock position or a 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock pose. *Perform one set of 12-15 reps*.

Stability ball push-ups: If you want to build big arms, especially the triceps, stability ball push-ups will take you to next level. Do a push-up with your feet on a stability ball. Keep your body straight - don't let your hips sag or stick your butt up in the air. Switching positions and having your feet on the floor and hands on the ball challenges the core further. The instability of the ball increases the level of trunk muscle activation. *Do as many as you can with strict form, until you feel fatigue; at least 10-15 repetitions*.

Band lunge press: If you want more intensity, working with the bands performing pull and push moves is ideal. The band lunge-press helps develop strength, endurance, balance and coordination; there's not much this exercise doesn't hit. With a band securely in place behind you, grip the handles and hold them at shoulder level, palms facing toward each other and elbows bent. Feet should be shoulder-width apart. As

you step forward into a lunge position, press the handles forward and finish the press with outstretched arms. Return to the starting position. Form is key: Make sure your front knee is aligned over the heel in the lunge position and concentrate on keeping your upper body erect, chin up, eyes staring forward throughout, as if you were trying to balance a book on your head. *Do 10-15 lunges with each leg*.

Swimmer's lat pull is a back exercise you'll feel throughout your entire body. Use an anchored resistance band. With feet shoulder-width apart and knees slightly bent, lean over at the hip - don't roll your back - until your upper body is almost parallel with the floor. Extend your arms in front of you and grab the band handles. Dynamically draw your arms down and extend them in back of you until they're at hip level. Winning Without Weights Swimmer Lateral Pull - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Think of the motion of a swimmer doing a butterfly stroke - the arm breaking the surface of the water and then continuing down and back. Slowly reverse the motion. *Perform 1-2 sets, 10-15 repetitions per set*.

Up-chop kneel develops excellent core stability and trunk rotation strength. Kneel with a band or tubing handle attached below hip height. Grasp the handle in both hands to the side of the hip nearest the band. Lift the arms up and at the same time, rotate the shoulders away from the anchor, keeping hips facing forward and arms straight. *Complete 1-2 sets of 10 reps on each side*.

Down-chop kneel is the opposite of the up-chop. Begin with the handle attached above head height, grasping the handle in both hands above the head to the side of the band. Keeping the hips facing front and the arms straight, pull the hands down and turn the shoulders away from the band. *Perform 1-2 sets, 10 repetitions (each side) per set*.

Medicine ball slams are a great ab exercise. This exercise involves complete integration of the total body. It will also teach you power development from the ground up and get your heart racing. Take a medicine ball and get in an athletic-ready position (knees slightly bent, ball held with both hands in front of you, as if you'd just caught it) . Bring the ball overhead really fast and slam it down to the floor or ground as hard as you can. Make sure you do a few slow reps first to get a feel for the bounce of the ball, since you have to catch it. *Perform 2-3 sets, 10-12 repetitions per set*.

Other Tips to Maximize Results

If you work out with another person like your kids or a spouse, you can practice speed and agility drills. Speed is the rate at which something is done or occurs. Agility is the ability to move our body quickly in

many directions and speeds with great control. All forms of tag and chase games improve reaction time.

Diversifying your workout will provide new stimulus to muscles and variety of movement. It's important to change your workout program every 8-10 weeks. One of the biggest mistakes I see my patients do is repeat the same workout over and over again. Show me variety! Often time's client's workouts were the first workout they ever learned and it's the same workout they were doing several elections ago.

Whenever you work out, check yourself for muscle weakness and imbalances from the right side to the left side. Asymmetries cause problems. Exercises that balance your muscles help to avoid injuries, especially those involving the back, groin, hamstrings and knee. A combination workout consisting of foam rolling, band and tubing exercises, medicine ball training, and stability ball exercises can improve your spine and help increase power and performance.

Most people are familiar with Pilates and yoga; these are systems that provide stretching, strength training (especially for the core area), balance training and endurance. Home exercise programs should include the same fitness challenges and include cardiovascular training (walking, bike, elliptical), reactive training, and speed/agility training.

Getting fit and, training without actually going to the gym is possible when you follow a proper progression and give yourself enough variety of exercises. Becoming your own personal trainer, identifying and fixing muscle weaknesses will benefit your core strength and overall fitness. Your doctor can give you more tips on which exercises and equipment will best help achieve your individual fitness goals.

The Power of the Exercise Band

A recent study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research suggests a short-term resistance exercise program utilizing exercise bands is as effective as a weight-machine program in increasing strength and reducing fat. The study, which compared the effects of each type of exercise program in 45 previously inactive women (average age: 51-54) for 10 weeks, yielded similar results in terms of functional capacity (assessed by knee push-up and 60-second squat tests) and loss of fat mass. The study authors concluded, "[Exercise bands] can thus offer significant physiological benefits that are comparable to those obtained from [weight machines] in the early phase of strength training of sedentary middle-aged women."

Exercise	Repetitions/Sets/Duration	Rest (Between Sets)
Foam Roll	30 seconds per tender point	N/A (one-time warm-up)
Plank	1 or 2 (build to 60-second holds)	None
Side Bridge	1 per side, 60 seconds each side	None
Traditional Ab Crunch	Build to 3 sets of 12-15 repetitions per set	None
Glute Bridge on Ball	2-3 sets of 10-12 repetitions per set	None
Supine Ball Bridge	2-3 sets of 10-12 repetitions per set	None
Lateral Band Walk	6 per side or until you feel fatigue	None
Back Extensions on Ball	12-15 repetitions	None
Stability Ball Push-Up	10-15 repetitions or until you feel fatigue	None
Band Lunge Press	10-15 repetitions per leg	None
Swimmer Lat Pull	1-2 sets of 10-15 repetitions per set	30-60 seconds
Up-Chop Kneel	1-2 sets of 10 repetitions per set	30-60 seconds
Down-Chop Kneel	1-2 sets of 10 repetitions per set	30-60 seconds
Medicine Slams	2-3 sets of 10-12 repetitions per set	30-60 seconds
Note: Total workout time should be approximately 30-45 minutes. Be intense! Be consistent! Change your workout routine every 8-10 weeks. You can complete the entire program three to four times per week, or pick a few each day to create a daily 20-minute workout.		

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