

[IMAGE]

## Getting to the Core of Good Health

Your core – the muscles around your abdomen and pelvis – is a pivotal area of the body to keep in shape. Why? Because the core is a key player in whole-body health, pure and simple. Most physical activities depend on stable core muscles, which, in turn, promote balance and stability. Without a stable core, your low back, hips, pelvis and abdomen are more prone to dysfunction and injury.

Fortunately, training the core is easy; so easy, in fact, that you don't need a gym membership, fancy equipment or anything else except your own body and a little space. (You can also perform a variety of core exercises using light dumbbells, a stability ball, an exercise band, a kettlebell, etc.) Here are three bodyweight-only exercises guaranteed to work your core and improve your overall health in no time:

**The Plank:** Position yourself on the floor in a push-up position, except instead of using your hands for support, use your forearms. Keep your back as straight as possible, elbows even with the shoulders. Look straight down, not to the side or out in front of you (this will strain your neck). Hold the position for as long as possible (as little as 10 seconds is fine the first time out), and build up to 30, 45, 60 seconds or longer. To make this exercise more challenging, you can raise one arm off the ground, straight out in front of you for a few seconds; or do the same with the legs, lifting each off the ground for a few seconds.

**The Glute Bridge:** Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent. Squeeze your glute muscles (buttocks) as you push your hips up off the ground. Stop pushing when you can visualize a straight line from the knees and hips to the upper body. Keep your shoulders on the floor and make sure your low back is not overly extended. Concentrate on squeezing the glute muscles and keeping the abs tight throughout. Try to hold the bridge pose for up to one minute; once you've mastered that, you can do multiple one-minute sets.

**The Bent-Leg Knee Raise:** Lie on your back with your head and neck relaxed. Grasp something heavy (a piece of furniture, etc.) with your hands, which should be above your head. Now use your lower abdominal muscles to raise both knees up toward your rib cage / face, then slowly lower down to the starting position and repeat as soon as your feet touch the floor. Make sure you do not "roll up" too far as you bring the knees toward the chest; it will stress your lower back. Start with a few repetitions and build to 12-15 per set.

Ready to get started on these and other core exercises? Before you do, talk to your doctor of chiropractic, who can recommend a comprehensive exercise program suitable to your needs and make sure you're on the right track when it comes to performing the exercises correctly.

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