

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a black sports bra and patterned leggings, stands on a rooftop. She is looking upwards and to the left, with her hands on her hips. The background is a clear blue sky. The entire image is framed by a thick red border.

RESTORE YOUR CORE

*STRONGER
FROM THE
INSIDE OUT*

CORE TRUTH



YOU CAN'T HAVE A STRONG BODY WITHOUT A STRONG CORE

Having a strong core requires much more than having great abs (although that can be a nice side benefit!).

Your core keeps you standing and sitting upright, protects your back, and it even can affect your breathing and digestion.

Plus, nearly every movement you make originates from your core.

Keeping it aligned, balanced, and strong is integral to your health and well-being!

Your core muscles stretch from your pelvic floor up through much of your back, beginning with a set of muscles deep inside your body, near your spine, wrapping in layers around your torso.

If one link in that chain becomes weak or out of balance, it can throw off the rest of the other links, and lead to weakness, imbalances, and even pain and illness. This guide will show you how to restore your core from the inside out.

YOUR CORE AND YOUR POSTURE

A COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP

Your core and your posture have a codependent relationship.

When both are healthy and strong, life is good!

But if one is a little off, it can throw the other out-of-whack, leading to possible pain, injury, and even health problems.

That's because your inner and outer core muscles can support your body in both good AND not-so-great postures.

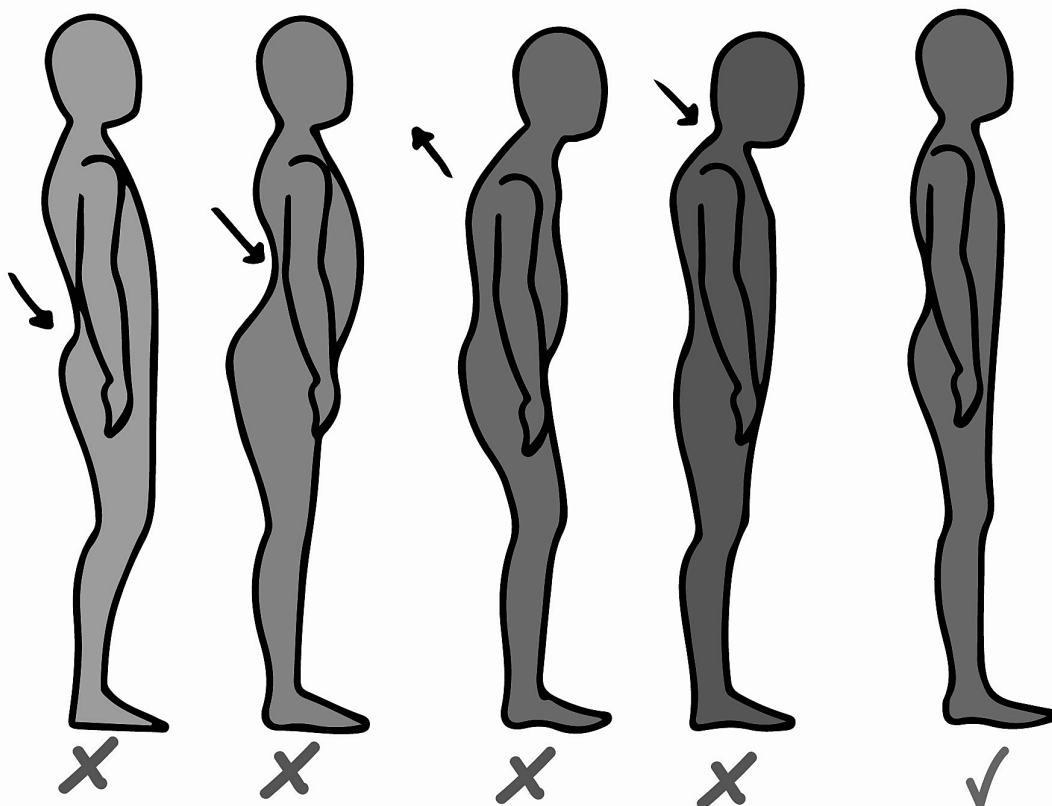
For example, if you sit a lot, muscles in the front of your body (shoulders, neck, chest, hips) can become tight and constricted as your body folds forward, while muscles in the back of

your body (back, glutes, etc.) become weaker.

Your core muscles can reinforce those postures, which creates imbalances throughout your body.

Now, just imagine doing crunches or sit-ups with a body that has a forward-flexed posture. Your outer core will get even stronger in that posture – making it even worse. Ouch! The same basic process can happen with other posture issues, too.

This is why it is so important to take the time to RESTORE your core by rebuilding it from the inside out, in a way that doesn't reinforce poor postural habits.





BETTER POSTURE = HEALTHIER BODY!

Your posture not only affects how you feel physically but also mentally, right down to your brain chemistry! It also sends a subconscious message to the people around you. Check out these surprising facts..

➔ SELF CONFIDENCE



A Harvard study found that people who stood in “powerful” postures (standing tall with open shoulders) had a 20% bump in their confidence-

boosting testosterone levels and a 25% drop in stress-causing cortisol, raising their confidence and lowering their stress levels. But those who slouched had the opposite experience: a 10% drop in testosterone and a 15% rise in cortisol – and a drop in confidence.

➔ YOUR MOOD

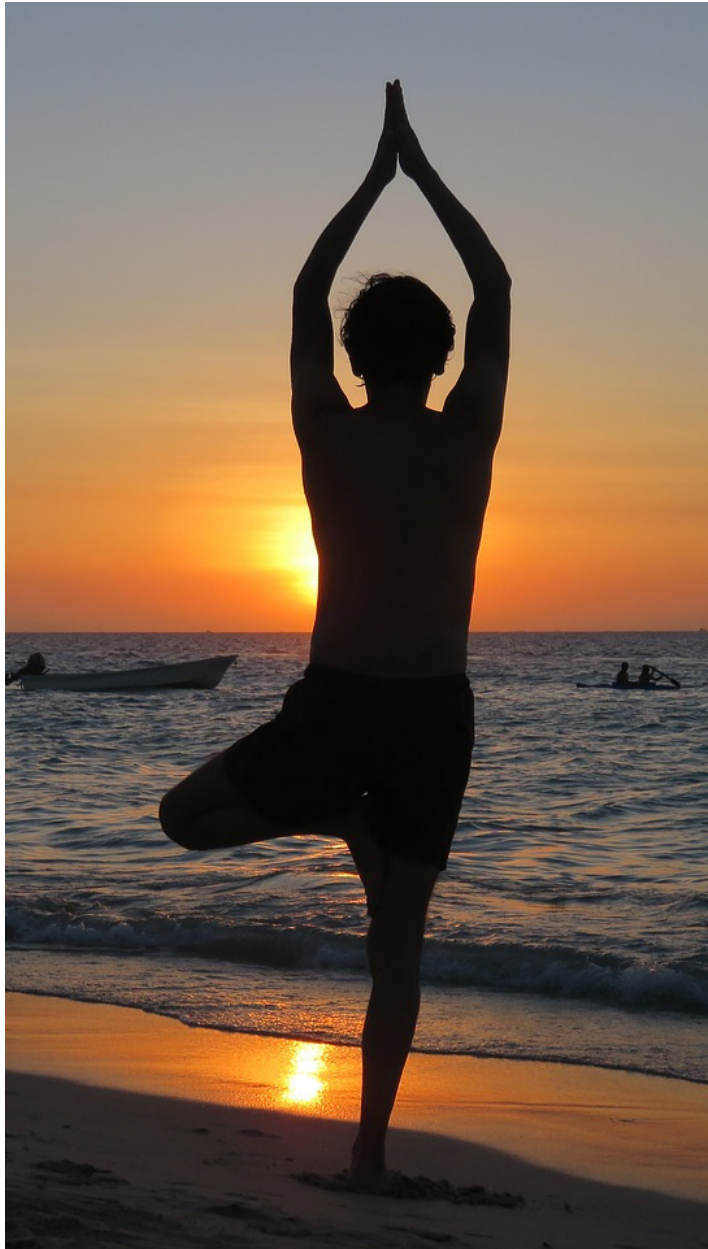


A study from San Francisco State University found that students who slouched while walking down halls reported feeling depressed and having less energy.

➔ YOUR APPEARANCE



Standing with good posture tells the world you're confident and happy – and it also can make you look leaner and stronger.



YOUR POSTURE'S SURPRISING ROLE IN YOUR HEALTH

➔ HEARTBURN



Slouching puts pressure on your abdomen, which can force your stomach acid to go in the wrong direction – up your esophagus, causing heartburn, according to Harvard Health.

.....

➔ INCONTINENCE



That abdominal pressure works in the other direction, too. The downward pressure can strain your pelvic floor muscles, which can cause urine to leak out when you cough, sneeze, or laugh.

.....

➔ CONSTIPATION



There's also evidence that the compression caused by slouching can slow your digestion, potentially leading to constipation.

➔ CIRCULATION



Slouching also can affect blood flow through your body. It can even contribute to a serious circulation problem called Thoracic Outlet Syndrome, which is when nerves and/or blood vessels in the neck and upper chest become irritated or compressed. It can cause pain, numbness and other other symptoms.

3 STEPS TO A RESTORED CORE

Your core has two layers to give it extra stability and strength.

Restoring your core begins with your innermost muscles.

STEP 1: STABILITY + MOBILITY

In this phase, you work your deep core muscles, to strengthen your support system.

STEP 2: STRENGTH

This phase is all about strength and safely working your outer core muscles without creating imbalances.

STEP 3: POWER

This is important not only for sports but also balance and reaction times. This is the fun phase – and it brings with it a lot of amazing benefits.

Form is EVERYTHING. Whenever possible, get an assessment from a qualified professional and also learn how to do the exercises properly for YOUR body. Doing exercises incorrectly can actually reinforce muscular imbalances. Let's dive in!

GAME PLAN



YOUR STARTING POINT

Signs your core needs work:

- Low back pain
- Tight hips and shoulders
- Poor posture
- Weakness in extremities
- You hold your breath when you work your core
- When jumping, laughing or coughing you find yourself running to the bathroom.

STRONG



CORE TRAINING TIPS:

- Use the power of your smartphone. Video yourself while doing core exercises to see what changes you need to make to perfect your form.
- Build a mind-body connection so you know what good form feels like.
- Breathe. It will activate important deep muscles.
- Train how you want to look, with excellent posture.
- Take your time and be patient!



FEEL

STABILITY

This is where you build a firm foundation for your core by strengthening your innermost ab muscles. Working these muscles takes focus and attention, but you will love the results.

Tips:

- If these exercises seem too easy, double-check your technique.
- Build a mind-muscle connection.
- You can do these exercises every other day.
- Breathe!

THE PLANK



- Lie on the floor on your stomach and rise up on your forearms, your elbows directly under your shoulders.
- Abs braced and spine long and strong, rise up to your knees. Your head should be aligned with your spine. If you are new to planks, stick with this level and hold for 20-30 seconds.
- To make it more challenging, ground your toes into the floor and lift your knees. Press back into your heels and activate your thighs to help keep your body aligned.
- Avoid rounding your shoulders or "sinking in" toward the floor.
- Avoid letting your hips drop toward the floor.
- Hold for 20-30 seconds to start and build up your time as you get stronger.

BIRD DOG



- On hands and knees, with hands shoulder-width apart and knees hip-distance apart, brace your core.
- Reach your right leg behind you, keeping your leg at hip level, while extending your left arm forward.
- Hold, release and repeat on the opposite side for a total of 10 reps each side.

SIDE PLANK

- Lie on your side with your legs stacked on top of each other, bottom knee bent. Then, prop yourself up on your side, with your elbow directly beneath your shoulder.
- Be sure to keep your abs engaged so your hips don't sag, and hold your head in alignment with your spine.
- You can make this more challenging by lifting your top arm or rising up on your bottom leg.
- Focus on keeping your body in a straight line and be sure to keep breathing!.



GLUTE BRIDGE



- Lie on your back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip distance apart.
- With your arms by your sides, lift your hips up as you contract your hamstrings and glutes.
- Hold for 30 seconds and slowly release back to the floor, one vertebra at a time.

FLOOR COBRA

- Lie prone on the floor, elbows bent and hands stacked so your forehead rests on the back of your hands.
- Keeping your feet on the floor, use your glutes and core to lift your chest off the floor, holding for 2 seconds before slowly lowering. Repeat 10-12 times.
- Keep your chin tucked slightly.



GLUTE-ENGAGEMENT SQUATS



- This squat variation focuses on your breath to help engage and strengthen the pelvic floor.
- Stand with feet about hip-width apart, holding a ball or dumbbell at chest level.
- Brace your core and exhale as you lower into a squat position. Watch your form to make sure your knees stay aligned over your second toes.
- When you reach the bottom of the position, inhale and contract your glutes as you come to standing.
- Repeat for 10-12 reps.

STRENGTH

It can be tempting to start with this phase, which includes many favorite ab standbys (not just the exercises below, but also the Captain's Chair, Russian twist, incline sit-ups, etc.).

Avoid that temptation with the knowledge that you'll get even **BETTER** results with those exercises if you build a strong, stable inner core first. As always, focusing on form is key.

Remember: you can build amazing core muscles, but if a lean midsection is your goal, your nutrition will play a major role.

Tips:

- Focus on your abdominal muscles so other groups (like hip flexors or shoulders) don't take over.
- Go slow in order to feel your muscles at work.
- Ab muscles need rest too! Take at least a day off between core workouts.

CRUNCHES

- Lie on your back on the floor, knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.
- Place your hands behind your head, gently cradling the base of your skull, elbows pointing out.
- Keeping your low back toward the floor, engage your abs and lift your shoulder blades off the floor. Keep your neck long by focusing your gaze between your knees.
- Concentrate on squeezing your ribs toward your hips.
- Slowly lower, and repeat for 15-20 reps.



WINNER OF 'MOST EFFECTIVE AB EXERCISE' TITLE

AB BICYCLES

In a study commissioned by the American Council on Exercise, the "bicycle maneuver" was named the most efficient ab exercise.

That's because lab experiments show ab bicycles engage the most ab muscles at the same time, including your rectus abdominus (front abs) and obliques (muscles along your sides).

Bonus: bicycles also are less apt to call on other muscles, such as your hip flexors, to help out with the work.

- Lie on your back on the floor, your lower back pressed to the ground.
- Put your hands behind your head, gently cradling its base, elbows reaching out to the sides.
- Bring knees up to a 45-degree angle and slowly go through a bicycle pedal motion.
- Draw your left shoulder to your right knee, then your right shoulder to your left knee.
- Note: make this easier by maintaining a 90-degree bend in your knees.

STRENGTH



POWER

The third phase of restoring your core incorporates athletic movements to help not only with developing power, but improving balance and reaction. As a bonus, they will help sculpt your midsection.

Have you ever almost fallen, but caught yourself just in time? That's a practical use of core power!

Having a stable, strong core will allow you to take these movements to the next level.

MEDICINE BALL WOOD CHOP



- With your feet slightly wider than hip distance, bring a medicine ball toward your left hip.
- Contract your core, and rotate or “chop” the ball upward to just beyond your right shoulder, using some force, like you’re swinging a bat or golf club. (Be sure to keep your arms extended from your body.)
- Use your core muscles and not your arms.
- Keeping the ball under control, “chop” downwards.
- Repeat for a total of 10-15 reps.

MEDICINE BALL EXERCISES

POWER-PACKED CORE TRAINING

Medicine balls can be a fun way to build more core power into your workouts.

In addition to the slams shown below, if you're working with a trainer or friend you can add a variety of ball tosses – either front or rotational.

Tossing a heavy ball requires you to "load" and "unload" your muscles as you catch and release the ball, boosting your heart rate and your muscle recruitment.

Start with a lighter ball (4-10 lbs) and increase to 30-40 lbs as you gain strength. Do less than you think you should the first time trying them, because chances are you will feel muscles you had forgotten about the next day!

MEDICINE BALL SLAMS

- Hold a medicine ball, stand with your feet shoulder-width or slightly wider apart, core engaged.
- Lift the medicine ball over your head, extending your arms up and slightly behind you.
- Forcefully slam the ball toward the floor as hard as you can, exhaling as you throw.
- Repeat for 10-15 reps.



POWER

CORE RESTORE

STRONGER CORE,
STRONGER BODY



Not all of these exercises will work for everyone. Never hold your breath while completing an exercise and always check with your doctor before beginning any new exercise regime. Get guidance from a professional if something doesn't feel right.

Design Fitness Centre develops and delivers exercise programs/classes to the 50+ Community in Kitchener-Waterloo who want to maintain, improve and restore strength, mobility and function so that they can continue to be active and live their most vibrant lives

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