

GETTING TO THE CORE

Contrary to popular belief, core training does not train the abs (in the traditional manner that isolate and contract the abdominals). Let's get that clear right out of the gate. You are no more training your 'core' by doing crunches than you are by doing bicep curls.

The core muscles include not only those in your abdominals and back, but also muscles in your pelvic floor and hips. Many of your core muscles can't be seen because they're buried underneath other muscles. The transverse abdominis, for example, is hiding underneath your rectus abdominis and encases the whole area below the belly button. While the rectus abdominis is sitting on top looking good (theoretically!) , the transverse abdominis is working hard, keeping your posture upright and acting as a girdle to protect many of your internal organs. You can't see the erector spinae, either - it's behind you, supporting your back. The pelvic floor muscles aid in stabilizing your spine. All these muscles, and more, recruit to keep your trunk stable while your limbs are active. Further, it is not just the recruitment of these deep-trunk muscles but how they are recruited that is important. Twenty-four muscles attach in the area that we refer to as the 'core', and most of them attach diagonally.

Strong core muscles keep your back healthy. They hold your body upright and improve posture and balance. If the core muscles are weak, your body doesn't work as effectively, and other muscles have to pick up the slack. This can result knee, neck and shoulder injuries or your classic "bad back." A weak core can make you old before your time. With a strong core, you may be old in years, but you won't walk old. A balanced body will give you an extended range of motion and the ability to stabilize your body from any angle, preventing injury. If you're active in sports, a strong core will aid you in your power moves, and your whole body will function more efficiently.

I believe that it is crucial for any person who wants to begin to resistance train that they begin in the core. To resistance train a poorly aligned body with a weak core can promote more physical degeneration and pain. Learning to train from the core will teach your body to use it's most powerful engine to move the limbs safely - protecting joints, ligaments, and tendons. One of the first results is improved posture -and better posture increases flexibility, allows more room for the organs, and increases blood flow through improved circulation. Improved posture makes a person look and feel better immediately.

Much of core training involves using body weight movements - an organic, functional way of moving that boosts the metabolism, makes you more flexible, and increases your power and strength - all before adding resistance training to the mix. Don't get me wrong - I love lifting iron - I just have this notion that training the body to be able to *move itself first* is critical when it comes to how you are going to function out in the real world. This gives a person a much stronger base to build on, along with a stronger sense of self.