

## Core Exercises

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OK, so now we have you exercising on a regular basis. Maybe you are walking daily. Maybe you have advanced to jogging, swimming, weight lifting or exercise classes. Good for you. Keep it up!

Today, I am going to talk about core exercises. Your core is basically your midsection, from your hips and buttocks, to your abdomen and lower back. It supports your body. A weak core is one of the main causes of chronic low back pain. In fact, a weak core can cause or at least contribute to most chronic back problems, and strengthening your core can at least help, if not prevent, most low back pain.

How does one strengthen ones core? Any exercise that strengthens your abdominal muscles will help strengthen your core, but that does NOT mean you should do a bunch of sit ups or crunches. They work only a small part of your core, and if done incorrectly, may cause other issues like neck strain or strain of the psoas muscles (an important core muscle).

**Three of the best core exercises are the plank, side plank and superman.** These three exercises together will work all of the core muscles and are fairly easy to master.

**For the plank**, lie face down on the floor like you were going to do a pushup, only lie on your forearms. The only points of contact with the ground are your forearms and toes. Your body is straight, like a plank. Do not raise your butt or let it sag. Hold this position for as long as you can. Work up to at least 30-60 seconds.

**The side plank** is similar, except you lie on your side. The only point of contact with the ground is your bottom forearm and bottom foot. Stack your other foot on top of your bottom foot. Again, keep your body straight, no sagging. Hold for 30-60 seconds.

**The third exercise, superman**, is just how it sounds. Lie on your stomach, raise your arms and feet like you are superman flying. The only point of contact with the ground is your stomach. Hold for 30-60 seconds.

If done at least three times a week, these exercises will help strengthen your core muscles and keep your body in balance, decreasing your risk of low back pain. If you have further interest in more core exercises, get a Pilates or yoga DVD. They both involve a lot of core work.

Next month...Yoga, not just for women.



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