



Keeping the Core Strong

Low back pain can be a debilitating problem affecting four out of five Americans at some point in their lives. Think of your core muscles as the sturdy central link in a chain connecting your upper and lower body. Whether you are hitting a tennis ball or driving a car, the necessary motions either originate in your core or move through it. No matter where motion starts, it ripples upward and downward to adjoining links of the chain. Thus, weak or inflexible core muscles can impair how well your arms and legs function taking away power from many of the moves you make. Properly building up your core cranks up the power and a strong core enhances balance and stability to help prevent falls and injuries.

On-the-job tasks: Jobs that involve lifting, twisting, and standing all rely on core muscles. Less obvious tasks like sitting at your desk for hours also engages your core. Phone calls, typing, computer use, and similar work can make back muscles surprisingly stiff and sore, particularly if you are not strong enough to practice good posture or are not taking sufficient breaks.

Sports and other activities: Golf, tennis, biking, running, swimming, baseball, volleyball, kayaking, rowing and many other athletic activities are powered by a strong core.

Housework, fix-it work, and gardening: Bending, lifting, twisting, carrying, hammering, reaching overhead, vacuuming, mopping and dusting are acts that spring from or pass through the core.

Everyday acts: Bending to put on shoes or scoop up a package, turning to look behind you, sitting in a chair or simply standing still — these are just a few of the many mundane actions that rely on your core and that you might not notice until they become difficult or painful. Even basic activities of daily living such as bathing or dressing call on your core.

Balance and stability: Your core stabilizes your body, allowing you to move in any direction, even on the bumpiest terrain or stand in one spot without losing your balance. Viewed this way, core exercises can lessen your risk of falling.

Good posture. Weak core muscles contribute to slouching. Good posture trims your silhouette and projects confidence. More importantly, it lessens wear and tear on the spine and allows you to breathe deeply. Good posture helps you gain full benefits from the effort you put into exercising, too.

Weak, tight, or unbalanced core muscles can undermine you in any of these realms. While it is important to build a strong core, it is unwise to aim all your efforts at developing “six pack” abs. Overtraining abdominal muscles while snubbing muscles of the back and hip can set you up for injuries. If washboard abs are your goal, it is essential to trim body fat through diet and aerobic exercise and build strong abdominal muscles through frequent core exercise sessions.

For assistance in developing a core training program for your employees, contact Sharon Rateike, corporate wellness program coordinator at (920) 568-5244 or Sharon.Rateike@forthc.com.

