

Fitness: Strengthening Your Core

Strengthening your core can help improve posture, balance, and the way you move. And it may help protect your body from injury. It's also an important part of your overall fitness plan.

Where is your core?

The core muscles are the muscles of your back, stomach, and buttocks. These muscles support your spine. This area is sometimes called your trunk, just like a tree.

Your core stability helps make the muscles of your trunk stronger to keep your spine and body stable. This helps you stay balanced when you move.

Standing with a strong core may help you feel more confident doing everyday things. For some people, a stronger core means less back pain.

For others, it means being more comfortable at work—whether it's sitting at a desk, lifting boxes, or being on your feet all day.

A stronger core also helps provide a good foundation for doing other exercises.

When you do exercises to strengthen your core, you'll need to know what it means to have a neutral spine.

A healthy back has three natural front-to-back curves that give the spine an "S" shape. The right amount of curve is called the neutral position. And it generally means your ears, shoulders, and hips are in a straight line.

There are a lot of core exercises, but here's one you can do right now. Try it while you work at your desk, drive, or wait in line at the store.

Pull in your belly. Imagine pulling your belly button back toward your spine. Remember to keep your spine neutral—don't let your back bend forward.

Hold for about 6 seconds. Remember to keep breathing normally.

Rest for up to 10 seconds.

Repeat 8 to 12 times.

Some people find it helpful to work with a physical therapist. The therapist can make sure you're using the right muscles and breathing properly. They can also show you more exercises to do that will benefit you.

Like a tree trunk, a strong core helps you stand tall and branch out to better movement and overall health.