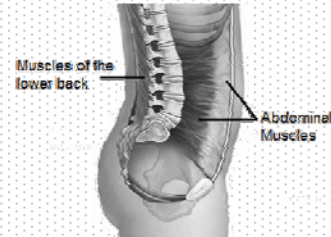


## What are 'Core Exercises' ?

Lots of us have heard of 'core muscles', but many people don't realise that they really *are* at the centre of most physical activities. They carry the weight and do a lot of work, so it's important that they are maintained: a strong core will balance the body and stabilise the system every time you're moving. For this reason, it's important to strengthen the core muscles as well as other muscles in the body: a stronger core can reduce a lot of posture related health problems: here are a few key benefits:



1. Improved muscular endurance of the back throughout the day.
2. Improved posture due to strength and balance in the muscles around the pelvis
3. Improved ability to carry out everyday activities like picking up children, or general housework
4. Improved balance, so you're less likely to fall

Core muscle exercises should be done at least twice a week, and can be done in as little as 15 minutes. Here are a few really basic ones (try and do three sets at first, slowly increasing, and don't forget to breathe !):

**Bridge** – begin lying on your back, keeping your knees bent (feet about 40cm from your bottom) and your back completely relaxed: no arching or pressing the back to the floor. Tightening the abs, slowly lift the hips slightly off the floor. Hold for five seconds and then slowly return to the starting position.

**Rotations** – start in the same position as for the bridge. Tighten the abs while slowly allowing your knees to drop to the left of the body (make sure your hips and shoulders stay on the floor). Hold the position for five seconds, then make the same movement to the right.

**Basic Crunch** - use the same starting position, crossing your arms across your upper chest. Focus on a point directly above you, tighten the abs, and lift the shoulders about 15cm off the floor. Keep the small of your back on the floor. Hold for 5 seconds and return slowly to the starting point

**Quadruped** – Start on your hands and knees, looking down, keeping your hands below the shoulders. Ensure the neck and head is aligned with the shoulders. Tighten the abs, (your belly button should move up towards the spine) lift the right arm off the floor, and reach forward. Hold it for three seconds, then repeat for the left arm. To make this more difficult raise the arm and opposite leg together.

If you'd like some more information, try these websites:

[http://sportsmedicine.about.com/od/bestabexercises/a/core\\_test.htm](http://sportsmedicine.about.com/od/bestabexercises/a/core_test.htm)

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/core-strength/sm00047>

**Finally, and very importantly: if you haven't exercised for a while, or have any medical conditions which might cause problems, check with your Doctor to ensure it's safe to increase your activity levels.**

**Remember, pain is a sign that something is wrong....**

**Alan Clinch**