

Deep Core Activation

The muscles that make up what we all call the “core muscles” have a very important job to do. Things like lower back pain, hunching shoulders, slouching when sitting and even having the inability to stand up straight, all stems from a weak core. Strong core muscles improve posture and in turn tends to improve all these very common complaints, lower back pain being the biggest one.

Now the core is made up of more than just that 6 pack in the middle, the rectus abdominus. There are also the internal and external obliques on the sides around the waist area. There are the transverse abdominals which are the deeper layer found underneath the obliques. And then you also have the pelvic floor muscles and the long back muscles running from the top of your spine to your pelvis, called the erector spinae. All these muscles fall under the “core” category. So when we are doing ab work, we don't just focus on that 6 pack area. Although these are the ones that often get that real burn with a good workout, we need to be focusing on the deeper core muscles. These are the ones, that when strengthened, will really aid posture, and alleviate back pain. How do we do that?

To find out if you are activating your deep transverse and pelvic floor muscles, there is a great technique you can use.

- 1.lie on your back with your knees bent, feet on the ground.
- 2.using your fingers, find the pointy part of your pelvic bones at the front of your hips. From there, move your fingers in towards the centre about 1 cm and then down about 1 cm. Gently press down towards the ground, into your tummy.
- 3.Now gentle squeeze your pelvic floor muscles, while relaxing the rest of the abdominals.You should feel a small tightening or tension under your fingertips.

This tightening is your deep transverse abdominals contracting. But there are a few things to remember to really isolate those deep core muscles. You need to be able to breathe through the movement. Breathe out on the squeeze, breathe in on the release. You do not want any of your upper abdominal muscles to tighten at the same time, or your buttocks or inner thighs. This can be tricky to isolate but will come with practice. Small squeezes of the pelvic floor and transverse abdominals to start with. If you try too hard, your other abdominal muscles will take over and the exercise will be less effective.

Once you have learnt to isolate these muscles by using the very simple techniques above, you will have a lot more stability in your lower back. From there you can add this technique to other exercises including more advanced abdominal exercises. It is often the abdominal exercises that don't really feel like they are working much that really require the control of those deep abdominal muscles, so they are very much worth doing. And when it comes to strengthening these deep muscles, slow and controlled movements is always best! Give these a go...

Start all these exercises in this same position: laying on your back, feet on the floor, knees bent. Start each movement by bracing your deep core muscles. The aim for all movements is to control the hips, keeping them square with minimal movement.Also trying to avoid upper abdominal pressure as you are trying to isolate these deep core muscles.

- Drop one knee out to the side (as far as you can go with control) and back to the centre. Alternate.
- Lift one leg to tabletop position and back down. Alternate.
- Straighten one leg up towards the sky, keeping your leg straight slowly lower and back up (only as far as you can go with control). 10 on one side, then 10 on the other.
- Lift one leg to tabletop, holding it there, try to lift the other leg to tabletop. Then lower original leg, then other leg.Alternate leading leg. This one is an advanced level.