



Centers for
Orthopaedics
Experience in Motion

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THE ABDOMINAL PAGE

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The body is made up of different layers of abdominal muscles. The most superficial layers are designed for movement—they bend us forward, to the side and aid in rotating the trunk. The deepest layer of muscle is called the transverse abdominus and is designed for stability.

In order to be able to truly strengthen your trunk, or core, it is important to learn to isolate this transverse abdominus. The most effective way to do this is to “draw in” the abdominals when performing every exercise. This is not a pelvic tilt, but rather maintaining the normal curve of the low back. “Drawing in” is essentially focusing on pulling the abdominals—or your bellybutton—in and upward and holding this in throughout each repetition. As you begin to practice this, you will likely find that you will be able to draw in initially, but that your stomach will “pooch out” as you perform each repetition. This is what you want to try to control.

It is also important to learn to incorporate proper breathing habits when performing abdominal exercises and exertive tasks during the day. As you inhale, concentrate on breathing into your lower ribs/diaphragm—not into your chest. As you exhale, try focusing on the abdominal muscles drawing in to expel the air outward. This can be looked at as the Double E’s—Exhale with Effort.

THE EXERCISES

The Crunch—Lying on your back with your knees bent and your feet resting on the ground and your hands either (in order of difficulty) 1) at your sides, 2) across your chest, or 3) behind your head. Draw in and lift your head and just your shoulder blades off the floor and then lower without allowing your low back to flatten and then arch off the floor. Imagine there is a grapefruit between your chin and your chest when performing as well to avoid straining your neck.

Oblique Crunch—Lying on your back with your left knee bent with foot resting on the ground and the right leg crossed so your ankle is resting your left thigh. Place your hands in one of the three positions and as you perform a crunch, lift up at an angle bringing your left shoulder towards your right knee. The grapefruit and back flattening principles still apply. Switch sides upon completion of the set.

90/90 Crunch—Lying on your back with your knees and hips both bent 90 degrees and your ankles crossed (so your legs are suspended in the air). Hands in any of the aforementioned positions and perform a crunch the same way as listed above.



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90/90 Oblique Crunch—Lying on your back in the same position as above, perform a crunch while bringing your left shoulder towards your right knee and then lower and then alternate and perform the same to the opposite side.

Supine Cycling—Lying on your back with your knees bent in the air and your palms down on the ground just underneath the two butt bones. Draw in and move your legs in a cycling motion in small circles making sure to not let your back arch off the ground. Gradually increase the size of the circles as able without losing the good stable position. Can also progress to hands behind head/neck.

Reciprocal Cycling—Same position as above but with hands behind head/neck, as you bring one knee towards you, bring your opposite elbow towards that knee and then return and repeat the same on the opposite side.

Leg Circles & Squares—Lying on your back with one leg bent and the opposite leg straight, arms out to the sides with palms up. Draw in and lift the straight leg off the floor and make circles with the foot beginning with small circles and gradually increasing the size so the foot height is from the level of the bent knee to just above the ground.

Straight Leg Reaches—Lying on back with ankles crossed and legs straight up in the air.
Place your left hand behind your head and try to reach up towards your feet with your right hand, performing smaller, quicker motions. Repeat on both sides.

Sidelying Bridge—Lying on your left side so your body is straight with your knees bent behind you and leaning on your left elbow with your palm down in front of you. Draw in and lift hips off floor until your body is straight. Hold 5 seconds.
Progress to performing with your legs straight as able.

Plank Position—Lying on your stomach propped up on your elbows. Curl your toes underneath your feet, draw in and press your body off the floor until your body is in a straight line. Hold 5 seconds.

Plank with Leg Raises—Same position as above except once you have lifted up, lift one leg off the floor then lower then repeat the same on the opposite side, making sure to not let back sag in. Can also perform with the lifting leg being bent.

T-position with Rotation—On the floor in push-up position, draw in and then rotate your straight body to one side keeping the arm straight into the position of a “T”. Your ankles will cross over one another so the sides of the ankles are on the floor and



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you will only be on one arm. Make sure to turn your body as a unit keeping it straight the whole time. Return to starting position and repeat the same on the opposite side.

Addendum

It is important to recognize that this is by no means a complete list, but rather one of increasing difficulty and one that requires no equipment. The use of medicine balls, physioballs, machines, pulleys and straight bars and their associated exercises can also complement that which is listed here.