Exercise: Increasing Core Stability

What is core stability?
Core stability means that the trunk of your body—your core—is strong and able to support the rest of your muscles as you move. When your core is not stable, you may lose your balance more easily. And you may hurt yourself more easily when you make sudden movements or movements you're not used to.

The main muscles involved in core stability are the inner core muscles in your belly and pelvis. These muscles support your spine and body while other muscles do the work of moving you. The outer core muscles in your back, front, and hips also help with core stability and movement.

How do you strengthen core muscles?
Core stability exercises are easy. It's more important to do them well than to do a lot of them. It's a good idea to have a physical therapist or trained instructor check to be sure you have learned to use the right muscles. Use the following tips when you do any core exercise.

Make sure you're breathing right
When you exercise, try to breathe mostly with your diaphragm, the large muscle that helps move air in and out of your lungs. To learn to breathe with your diaphragm:

1. Lie down on your back and put your hand on your stomach.
2. When you breathe in and out, your hand should move up and down. Notice how it feels to breathe this way.
3. When you start to exercise, try to get the same feeling of your chest and belly moving in and out as you breathe, rather than your chest and shoulders moving up toward your neck and back down.

Make sure your spine is in a neutral position
Neutral spine is posture that maintains the three normal curves in your spine—one in your neck, one in your upper back, and one in your lower back. Your spine should be in this neutral position when you do core stability exercises. To find your neutral spine:

1. Stand in front of a mirror with your hands on your hips. Allow your low back to arch so your stomach juts forward, and your buttocks stick out. Notice how your hands rotate forward.
2. Tighten the muscles around your stomach and buttocks so your low back becomes very flat. Notice how your hands rotate backward.
3. Now go halfway between the forward and backward positions. This is your neutral spine position.
4. Keeping your pelvis in this neutral position, stand tall with your ears and shoulders lined up over your hips.
5. Practice finding this neutral spine in three positions: standing, sitting, and lying on your back with your knees bent. When you can do that, you can maintain good posture for daily activities and for exercise.

Strengthening your core helps you learn to use your inner muscles before you start to move—for example, tightening your stomach before you lift something. A strong core gives you more strength and power for your activities.

**Core exercise 1**

**Pulling your belly in**
You can do this exercise anywhere, in any position. Try it while you work at your desk, drive, or stand in line at the store.

1. Pull in your belly and imagine pulling your belly button back toward your spine. Remember to keep your neutral spine while you do this—don’t let your back bend forward.
2. Hold this for about 6 seconds. Remember to keep breathing normally.
3. Rest for as long as 10 seconds.
4. Repeat 8 to 12 times.

**Core exercise 2**

**Floor bridge**

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Find your neutral spine position, and hold it during the exercise. Pull in your belly, as in the other exercise.
2. Push with your feet and raise your buttocks up a few inches.
3. Hold about 6 seconds. Remember to breathe normally.
4. Lower yourself slowly to the floor and rest for as long as 10 seconds.
5. Repeat 8 to 12 times.