

Muscle matters: Build your core to build your health

The organs in your core are essential to life. The muscles in your core are essential to health. Strengthening your core muscles offers many benefits—even if you never develop six-pack abs.

Defining the core

Your core includes far more muscles than your abdominals. Here are some of the key components:^{27,28}

Rectus abdominis (“abs”)

Stabilises your torso and helps you flex your spine and bend sideways

External and internal obliques

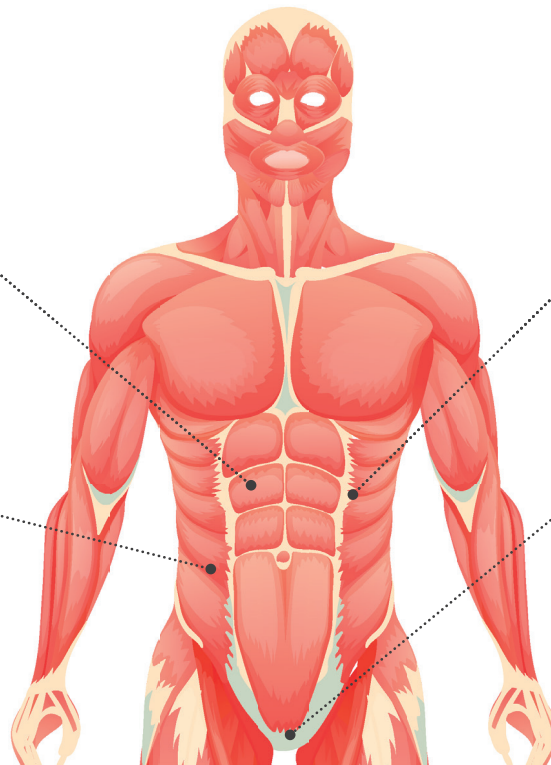
Help you flex your spine, rotate your torso, bend sideways and compress your abdomen

Transversus abdominis

Compresses internal organs, stabilises your spine and helps with breathing

Pelvic floor muscles

Supports your bladder, bowel and uterus; involved in bladder and bowel control and sexual function



Why the core muscles matter^{29,30,31,32}

Your core muscles matter. Here's why.

They protect your internal organs. Much of your core lies below your ribs and is otherwise unprotected.

They support motion. Most full-body movements involve your core.

They improve balance and stability. Our bodies are top heavy; we can walk upright thanks to the core muscles.

They improve posture. By keeping your core in line, they let you stand and sit up straight.

They prevent or reduce low back pain by reducing stress on your ligaments, vertebrae and discs.

27 <https://www.verywellfit.com/abdominal-muscles-anatomy-3120072>

28 <http://www.pelvicfloorfirst.org.au/pages/the-pelvic-floor.html>

29 <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/strong-core-best-guard-back-pain/>

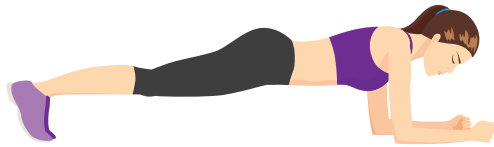
30 <https://sequencewiz.org/2015/10/21/four-main-functions-of-your-core-muscles/>

31 <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/the-real-world-benefits-of-strengthening-your-core>

32 <https://www.summitmedicalgroup.com/news/fitness/Why%20Strong%20Core%20Muscles%20Matter/>

Strengthening Your Core^{33,34,35,36}

All you need to strengthen your core is some time and perhaps a fitness mat. Here are five simple core exercises for beginners.



Plank

Position: Lying on your stomach, raise yourself up on your elbows and toes. Your elbows should be below your shoulders. Engage your core muscles to keep your body straight from shoulders to heels.

Action: There is none. Simply hold this position for 60 seconds, or as long as you can. (The world record is more than eight hours!)³⁷



Dead Bug

Position: Lying on your back, extend your arms towards the ceiling and bend your legs at a 90° angle.

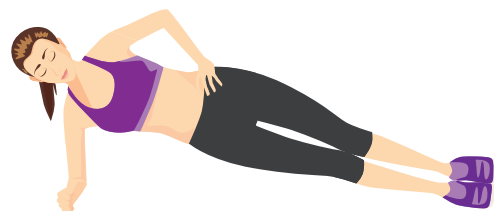
Action: Extend your right arm and left leg away from your body, then bring them back to the centre. Repeat this action with your left arm and right leg. Work up to 12 to 15 repetitions.



Side Plank

Position: Lying on your right side, raise your body onto your right elbow. Your elbow should be below your shoulders. Engage your core muscles to keep your body straight from head to heels.

Action: There is none. Simply hold this position for 60 seconds, or as long as you can. Then change to your left side and repeat.



33 <https://www.puregym.com/blog/top-5-core-exercises-for-beginners/>

34 <https://www.verywellfit.com/how-to-safely-progress-your-side-plank-exercise-4016853>

35 <https://www.verywellfit.com/top-best-ab-exercises-1230723>

36 <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/fitness/in-depth/strength-training/art-20046670>

37 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-51618159#:~:text=A%2062%2Dyear%2Dold%20former,according%20to%20Guinness%20World%20Records.>



Bridge

Position: Lying on your back, raise your knees so your feet are flat on the floor. Place your hands along your sides.

Action: Lift your hips upwards, tilting your pelvis as you go. When your body and legs are in a straight line, hold for ten seconds, then return to the starting position. Work up to 12 to 15 repetitions.



Reverse Crunch

Position: Lying on your back, cup your hands behind your head.

Action: Bringing your knees up towards your chest until they're at a 90° angle. Contract your core muscles to lift your hips off the floor and reach your legs toward the ceiling. Return to the starting position. Work up to 12 to 15 repetitions.

- Consult a doctor before starting an exercise program if you have a serious health condition.
- Discontinue exercises that cause pain. (Discomfort is to be expected as you work muscles in a new way.)
- If you suffer low back pain, here are 12 easy exercises you can try:
<https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/fit-for-duty-corporate-wellness/strengthen-your-back-12-easy-exercises-for-lower-back-pain.html>

You don't have to be a bodybuilder for your muscles to matter. Healthy muscles help prevent or minimize a wide range of physical and mental health conditions. At our Musculoskeletal health resources hub, you can find the flyers and articles offering easy-to-action lifestyle changes to help you build muscle strength and prevent and manage musculoskeletal problems, including low back pain.

Also, Aetna International members can access the Health Hub—register if you haven't already—to quickly find

self-help tools, professional services, member offers, and to submit and track claims and more. Within the Health Hub, you can learn more about the Kaia app, which provides curated, customized guidance from pain-treatment experts, and ClassPass, which offers virtual fitness classes.

For more information about your health care benefits, contact your plan sponsor or one of Aetna International's expert sales consultants for group business or individuals and families.

Straighten up. Stretch out. Stay strong.

Musculoskeletal support resources:

<https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/musculoskeletal-health-support-resource.html>

Health Hub: <https://www.aetnainternational.com/members/login.do>