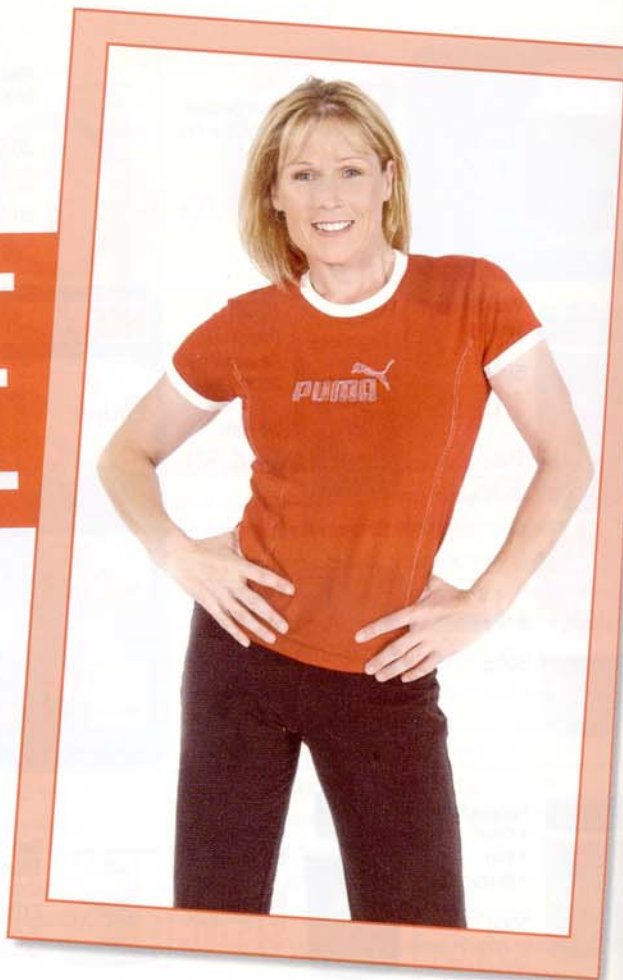


CORE

The Centre of Stability



There seems to be a lot of talk about core strength and core stability, and this awareness seems to be more than just a trend. According to some fitness experts and core advocates, strengthening the core muscles can improve appearance, athletic ability, overall wellness and energy level. But what is all the fuss about?

What are core muscles?

Core muscles are generally referred to as the torso muscles that support your spine, maintain your balance, promote healthy posture, and enable you to move your arms and legs with ease and power. The core includes muscles in the abdomen, back, pelvic floor and hips. Some of the core muscles are very deep, buried beneath surface muscles that usually get more attention, workout-wise. So it's possible that even if you've crunched your way to six-pack abs, your core muscles could still be relatively weak.

Why worry about your core?

Core strength enhances your overall fitness level. Your body moves more

efficiently and gracefully (picture professional dancers, whose vigorous training works their core muscles). You gain more power in athletic moves and other exertion. And you're less prone to injury and muscle pain. When your core muscles are weak, other muscles compensate by doing work they're not intended to, and you're more likely to wind up with chronic back problems or injuries such as a twisted knee.

How to strengthen your core

Pilates. The exercises in Pilates – whether on the reformer beds or on floor mats – focus directly on the core muscles.

Yoga. Some types of yoga include positions that involve contracting (and thereby strengthening) the core

muscles. Be sure to ask specifically about core strength training before signing up for any class.

Stability ball. When working out with one of these, you have to balance yourself on the ball while performing exercises; this engages and works your core.

Balancing products. Fun new products like core boards challenge you to balance yourself in ways that strengthen your core muscles.

Gymstick. A new product out on the market (which I am using in the workout today) that is fun and effective to use. The gymstick works the entire body and challenges your core muscles. For stockist info check out *Hot Products* on p. 94.



1 Standing Rotations

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent and place the straps through each foot. Hold the gymstick behind your upper shoulders. Rotate your upper body to the right then left in a continuous motion, keeping your head neutral and hips as stable as possible. Perform 2-3 sets of 20 repetitions each side.



2 Side Bends

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent and place the straps through each foot. Hold the gymstick with your arms extended above your head. Gently lean to your right side so you can feel the stretch down the left side of your body. Hold for 10 seconds, then return back to the start position. Repeat on your left side.



6 Single Extensions

Lie on your back with the straps through each foot and your knees bent into your chest. Place the bar across your upper chest. Simultaneously, extend your right foot and press the bar over your head to form a straight line from your foot to your hands. Return to the start position, then repeat using your other leg. Perform 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions each leg.



7 Standing Balance

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly bent. Place the straps through each foot. Hold the gymstick in front of your chest. Take your right foot slowly off the ground and lean forward to counteract your balance. Extend your right foot backwards, simultaneously press your hands forward out in front of you. With a controlled movement, slowly return back to the start position. You can do 10 on each leg or alternate your legs during the movement. Perform 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions each leg. **F**



3 Sitting Rotations

Sit on the floor with your knees slightly bent and place the straps through each foot. Hold the gymstick behind your upper shoulders. Lean back slightly. Rotate through your upper body to the right then left. Keep your head in a neutral position. Keep the movement continuous and controlled. The further you lean back the harder it is. 2-3 sets of 20 repetitions each side.



4 Crunch with Bicep Curl

Lie on your back with your knees slightly bent and place the straps through each foot. Hold the gymstick with an over-grip position. Roll the exercise band around the stick so that it is not too loose to start with. Simultaneously crunch and bicep curl and then lower back to the start position. Then repeat. Perform 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions.



5 Leg Bends

Lie on your back with your feet extended in the air and place the straps through each foot, with the gymstick just behind your upper shoulders. Slowly lower your right leg, just above the ground not touching the floor, then gently lift your right leg back up to meet your left leg. Repeat using your left leg. Perform 2-3 sets of 10-15 repetitions each leg.