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## **Getting down to the core of the matter**

**Tyler Dyck**

"Core stability" has become the exercise buzz-phrase of the twenty-first century. You can take a Hard-Core class at your gym, or hear your yoga/pilates/mat-class instructor use the word core in every second sentence. Without a doubt, having a strong core is at, well, the core of a healthy, active physique, but with everyone jumping on the core stability bandwagon I think it's time to get a few of the facts pinned down.

There are many forms of exercise that do indeed contain important core stability components, with ball programs, yoga, and pilates leading the pack. All of these have many positive attributes but they are by no means all-encompassing.

Core stability is the term for well-developed, deep trunk muscles, including the transversus abdominis, multifidus, internal oblique, paraspinal, and pelvic floor muscles. All of these muscles work together to support the lumbar spine and act as a girdle for the lower half of the body. When these muscles are weak, or at least strengthened to different degrees, the low back is susceptible to joint and disk injuries.

So what can you do? Contrary to what you may be hearing from late-night infomercials for exercise balls and strengthening contraptions, true core stability does not necessarily require two hours a day of exercise dedicated entirely to beefing up the core. Building and maintaining strength in the lower abdominal musculature can (and should) be something that spills over into the day-to-day activities of life.

Most of us having busier schedules than we can handle: the last thing we need is yet another activity or chore to add to our list. If you enjoy them, ball classes and other exercise programs led by qualified instructors can be an added bonus, but as I tell all of my patients who need core stability training, core strengthening must be incorporated into activities they are already enjoying.

The best thing you can do to activate the lower abdominals is draw the area below the belly button inwards and upwards as if to hollow out your lower abdomen while trying to make yourself feel as tall and thin as possible--exactly the kind of thing you might do when you're trying to impress a potential date or employer! This

contraction should be light and uplifting and should not make you feel like you are bearing down or holding your breath.

In the beginning I often tell my patients to choose activities or cues that they do often during the day and add-in this physical element. For example, pull your belly up and in every time you walk through a door, come to a red light or a stop sign, or every time you meet someone new (this last one is particularly instinctive, since it's easy to think of this posture as being part of making a good impression). It sounds simplistic, but try this easy trick for two solid weeks and you'll likely find it becomes automatic before the two weeks are up.

For further information on this topic please contact the Fawzia Sultan Rehabilitation Institute (FSRI) in Hawally at 264-2862, or check out our website at [www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com](http://www.rehabinstitutekuwait.com)

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