

# STRONGER TO THE CORE







# WELCOME

Welcome to your **5-Day Stronger to the Core Challenge!**

We're so happy that you've joined us.

Your core works hard 24/7 to keep your body balanced and aligned.

But often, our daily lives conspire against it and make our core's job even harder!

Over the next 5 days, we'll be taking a 360° approach that will help balance and strengthen your core from every direction.



# WELCOME

## HERE'S HOW THE CHALLENGE IS SET UP:

First, you'll learn HOW to engage your core (it might be different than you think).

Then, you'll learn the **#1 thing** you can do to make your core stronger and more balanced.

(Hint: It's not doing endless crunches and ab exercises!)

Finally, you'll incorporate targeted exercises to sculpt a strong core.

Every day during the challenge, you'll complete your "Action List" of core-strengthening activities. Use your worksheets to track your success!

*Shana and Judy*



**NOTE:** Be sure to check with your doctor or physical therapist before starting this or any other fitness/core program!

# WHAT IS YOUR CORE

*Exactly?*

Your core is FAR more than just your ab muscles.

It also includes your spine, pelvic girdle, abdomen, and hip joints. Some definitions even include your lat (upper back) muscles.

Plus, your shoulders and chest play a role in your core stability and strength! That means it's helpful to think about your entire TRUNK comprising your core muscles.

When all of these muscles are aligned and working together, your core is stable and strong. And when your core is stable, your entire body benefits! You're stronger, more balanced, and can generate more power when needed – helping to prevent injuries and falls!

But when your muscles are out of balance ... it can lead to instability and core weakness, contributing to pain, lack of flexibility, and injuries.

Here's an example: If you sit hunched over a computer for hours a day at work, it can cause your chest, shoulder, abdominal, and hip flexor muscles to become short, tight, and "activated," while your back and glute muscles lengthen and become less active.

You can see how it wouldn't take very long for this to affect the stability and strength of your core.







# *Your* **3-STEP PLAN**

- 1 Become “Core Aware”**
- 2 Check Posture Several Times a Day**
- 3 Strengthen Your Core Muscles**





# Becoming CORE AWARE

**Here's a pre-challenge exercise to help you connect to your core:**

It'll help you activate and isolate your deepest layer of abdominal muscles, called your transverse abdominis muscles (TVA).

These muscles run between your ribs and pelvis, horizontally from front to back. When they are activated, they form a natural “girdle” around your internal organs and your lower spine, supporting them.

They help stabilize your spine while you use your arms and legs.

This simple exercise helps build awareness of those muscles, and also learn how it feels to engage them.



**NOTE:** Your posture and alignment are **very important** during this exercise, so try to do it near a mirror where you can sneak a peek at yourself or take a video using your phone so you can check for any alignment issues.



# BECOMING CORE AWARE

- 1** Kneel on the floor on all fours, in a tabletop position. Your hands should be underneath your shoulders and your knees directly below your hips. Make sure your back is straight and your head is in line with your spine (your chin will be slightly tucked).
- 2** From here, keep the rest of your body still as you pull in the area just below your belly button so that it moves closer to your spine. It can be helpful to visualize zipping up a pair of tight jeans.
- 3** Making sure to breathe, hold this position for 15 seconds. Relax.
- 4** Repeat for 5-8 repetitions.

You might feel some muscles (including your neck) shift or try to compensate for this drawing-in position. Do your best to keep everything aligned, while still breathing and relaxed.

The “drawing-in” feeling is what it means to engage your abs.



**TIP:** You don't have to kneel on the floor every time you want to engage your abs, but this exercise is one of the best ways to feel them in action.

Now that you know how it feels, you can practice core engagement while standing and sitting.



# POSTURE *Police*

Without question, how you stand, walk, sit, sleep, and move every day (and night) will give you the biggest results in creating a strong and aligned core.

Good posture does NOT mean holding your body stiff, with rigid shoulders and a fully-braced core.

Instead, it's about having core muscles that are strong enough to hold your spine in alignment while you're relaxed (yes, it's possible!).

This is important because poor posture doesn't only cause aches and pains, but it can affect the long-term health of your spine and joints ... and it even plays a role in your breathing and digestion.



# POSTURE POLICE

## WHAT IS GOOD POSTURE?

There are actually TWO kinds of posture.

**DYNAMIC POSTURE** is how you hold your body when you are moving – walking, doing chores, exercising, etc.

**STATIC POSTURE** is how you hold your body when you're not moving – when you're sleeping, sitting, or standing.

Both matter!

Your spine is the key to your posture. It has three natural curves – at your neck, mid-back, and low back.

Your head should be above your shoulders, and the top of your shoulders should be over the hips.

Good posture keeps these curves at their perfect angle.



# POSTURE POLICE

## QUICK TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR POSTURE

### When standing, make sure your:

- Shoulders are back, stacked over your hips.
- Ab muscles are engaged.
- Knees are soft (not locked).
- Hips are in a neutral position – not tipped back (sticking your butt out) or curled under.
- Head is level.
- Arms are hanging down naturally at your sides.
- Feet are shoulder-width apart.

### When sitting:

- **Your chair should support your back.** Use a pillow if your chair doesn't have a backrest that supports the natural curve of your lower back.
- **It should also support your thighs and hips.** You should have a padded seat, and when you sit your thighs and hips should be parallel to the floor, and your feet touching the floor. If your chair or desk is too tall for you, you can place a footrest under your feet.
- **Keep your shoulders relaxed.** Make sure they aren't rounded forward or pulled back.
- Avoid crossing your legs.
- Switch sitting positions to avoid muscle tension.
- Take brief walks every hour.
- Gently stretch your muscles every hour or so to help relieve muscle tension





# 5 Surprising ENEMIES OF YOUR POSTURE (and Your Core)

## 1. YOUR PHONE.

There's actually a thing called "text neck," and it's caused by looking down at your phone.

It can add as much as a 60-pound load on your cervical spine! As you might guess, this can lead to a MAJOR misalignment in your neck muscles, which has a ripple effect through your entire core.



**THE FIX:** Look at your phone both less often and for shorter lengths of time! And when you do look at it, be mindful of your head position.

# 5 SURPRISING ENEMIES OF YOUR POSTURE (AND YOUR CORE)

## 2. DRIVING.

Proper posture when driving is doubly important, because not only can slouching or sitting too upright behind the wheel affect your core, it's a safety issue.

Research shows that when you're poorly positioned in your vehicle during an accident, you have a higher risk of serious injury.

If at all possible, when you're seated behind the wheel, your knees should be slightly lower than your hips. Also, make sure your lower back is supported – use lumbar support or a lumbar pillow if necessary.

Plus, the seat back shouldn't be straight up and down – instead, it should lean back slightly to put the least pressure on your neck and back.

Also, your chest should be as far back from the steering wheel as possible while still allowing you to easily reach the pedals.





# 5 SURPRISING ENEMIES OF YOUR POSTURE (AND YOUR CORE)

## 3. SLEEPING.

We spend as much of a third of our lives asleep – and as you can imagine, if you sleep in bizarre positions or curled up in a tight ball, it can cause aches and pains.

When you sleep, make sure your body is fully supported. Use a pillow beneath or between your knees to keep your hips and spine aligned and make sure your head isn't propped up too high with extra pillows. Try to remain loose and relaxed!

## 4. CARRYING BAGS OR A PURSE.

Did you know that the average purse being toted around by women weighs about 6 pounds? And many carry totes that weigh double or triple that amount!

Over time, lugging around a heavy bag around can affect your posture – especially if you usually carry it on one side.



**TIP:** Downsize your handbag and make it a point to switch sides when you carry it.

# 5 SURPRISING ENEMIES OF YOUR POSTURE (AND YOUR CORE)



## 5. STRESS.

When people get stressed, we tend to go into protective mode, which can mean hunching up our shoulders and folding them inward, leading to tightness and even MORE stress, because it's harder to breathe.

We also can tighten through our hip area, contributing to back pain.



**TIP:** Do a quick stress-check a few times a day, and take 3-4 long, deep calming breaths to expand your chest and exhale away all the negativity!



# *Your* **CORE EXERCISES**



## **DRAWING-IN MANEUVER**

This is the exercise that was explained earlier, to help you feel your core engage. Each core-strengthening session begins with this move!

## **PLANK**

Lying on your belly on the floor, place your elbows on the floor, directly under your shoulders, with your forearms on the ground.

From here, pop up on your knees and then lift them up from the floor, into the plank position.

Your body should be in a straight line from your heels to the top of your head.

Engage your core, as well as your glutes & quadriceps (front of your thighs).

(Exercise continued on the next page ...)

# YOUR CORE EXERCISES:

## PLANK CONTINUED ...

Double-check that your head is in alignment – your eye gaze should go to a spot between your hands, and make sure you're not pressing up through your back.

Your shoulder blades should be lightly drawn together to avoid hunching.

And don't forget to breathe! Try to hold for 30 seconds.



Giphy credit: [8Fit](#)



# YOUR CORE EXERCISES:

## BRIDGE

Lie on your back with your hands at your sides, palms facing up toward the ceiling. Your knees should be bent and your feet flat on the floor, close to your butt and under your knees.

Engage your ab and glute muscles and push your low back into the floor, then press your hips up. You should have a straight line from your knees to your hips to your shoulders.

Keeping your core and glutes engaged, hold for 2 to 3 seconds before lowering. Repeat for a total of 8-10 reps.



Giphy credit: [8Fit](#)

# YOUR CORE EXERCISES:

## BIRD DOG

Kneel with your knees hip-width apart and your hands flat on the ground under your shoulders.

With your core engaged, Engage your core by doing the drawing-in maneuver.

Maintaining a neutral spine with your abs engaged, reach your right arm straight in front of you while extending your opposite (left) leg behind you.

Think “long” and not “high” when lifting your arm and leg. If you find your back starts to sag or your hips rotate, only lift your leg as high as you can while keeping good posture.

Hold for 2-3 seconds, then return to the starting position and repeat on the opposite side, keeping the movements smooth and fluid.

Repeat for a total of 5 repetitions on each side.



Giphy credit: [8Fit](#)



# YOUR CORE EXERCISES

## SIDE PLANK

Lie on your right side, your legs extended in a straight line from your hips, your top leg stacked on top of your bottom leg.

Place your right elbow directly under your right shoulder.

Engage your ab muscles, drawing in your belly button toward your spine. Lift your hips and knees from the mat, holding your torso in a straight line.


Hold for 15–20 seconds and repeat on the other side.



GIF credit: [GymApp](#)



**NOTE:** If you notice your body bending forward or your hip sagging, bend your bottom knee at 90° to give your body more support.



# STRONGER CORE = *Stronger Body*

We hope this challenge and guide helps you get stronger for the 5-day challenge and beyond!

Over time, you'll notice even MORE improvement not just in your strength and fitness, but in your energy levels and even in your aches & pains.

We firmly believe a holistic approach is the best when it comes to creating a healthy lifestyle you can maintain.

In health,

*Shana and Judy*

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