


CORE

PERFECT PLANK
MERMAID
BRIDGE KICK
BIRD-DOG POINT 'N' CURL

TURN PAGE
TO VIEW
VIDEOS.



**Stand taller, look slimmer,
and wave good-bye to back,
hip, and knee pain with these
simple moves.**

MATTERS

By Selene Yeager

CORE TRAINING has been a buzzword in the fitness industry for years, as athletes have learned that all that power in their kicks, swings, jumps, and sprints generates not from their arms and legs but from the core muscles in their abs, back, sides, and pelvis, which form the real pillar of strength. Well, you don't have to be Hope Solo to appreciate the benefits of core training. In fact, many fitness experts say that everyday active people may have even more to gain.

Your core muscles are literally your foundation, holding you upright. But that's just part of their job. They also act as a steering wheel, moving your body in the direction you want to go. When they're weak—as is the case in many of us nonprofessional athletes who spend our nonexercising hours planted behind a desk or the steering wheel of a car—the hips, knees, and even feet bear the burden, says Robin West, MD, an orthopedic surgeon at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center's Center for Sports Medicine. "I see many women in their 40s, 50s, and 60s who have a little arthritis in their knees and are in a good bit of pain because

their core muscles are weak and can't stabilize their hips and legs while they walk and exercise," he says. "When we make their core stronger, it takes the pressure off their knees, and they feel better. A strong core also relieves a lot of back pain."

You also can't beat an extra-strong core for injury prevention. No matter how fit you are, core work provides an additional layer of protection. In one study published in the *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology*, a group of more than 400 firefighters reduced their time lost due to injury by 62 percent and their number of injuries by 42 percent in just the first year of core training.

Core strength also improves your appearance, says world-renowned trainer Mark Verstegen, author of *Core Performance*: "The core responds quickly to training. After just a couple of weeks, my clients will tell me that people think they've lost weight, because they're standing straighter. They move with greater ease and confidence, whether they're at the gym or carrying groceries down the street."

FOUR FOR YOUR CORE

The following four moves can be done at home on days when you can't get to Curves—or you can do them on the same day, if you prefer.

Perform 2 or 3 sets of the recommended reps of each exercise.

Aim to do these moves 3 days a week.

FIRM YOUR FOUNDATION

THE GOOD NEWS FOR CURVES MEMBERS IS THAT YOU'RE ALREADY AHEAD OF THE GAME.

“Stations on the circuit—specifically, the ab/back, oblique, and lateral-lift machines—strengthen your core muscles,” says Katie Mitchell, Curves director of exercise and research. Those stations, along with the full workout, provide a great core foundation, so to speak.

If you still suffer some aches and pains or want to further flatten your belly (maybe even get that elusive

six-pack), you can supplement the circuit with extra cardio and a few key moves to fortify those pillar muscles even more and make you that much stronger for everything you do, including your Curves workout! “Sometimes women have muscle imbalances where one muscle group is stronger than another, and they'll unknowingly use the stronger ones, like their legs, to assist in movements that are supposed to be working relatively weaker ones, like the core,” says West. By fortifying your core muscles, you can get the most out of every session.

1

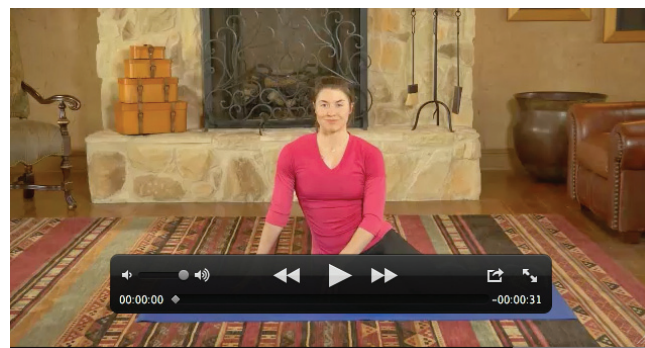


PERFECT PLANK

Targets the tough-to-tone deep abdominal muscles

Lie facedown on the floor, propped up on your forearms with your elbows directly beneath your shoulders. Your torso should be lifted off the floor so your body is in a straight line, supported by your forearms and toes. Your back should not arch or droop. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds (or as long as possible without losing proper form). **Repeat 3 times.**

2



MERMAID

Targets the obliques while also strengthening the back and shoulders

Sit on your right hip with your legs extended to the side, knees slightly bent. Cross your left foot in front of the right. Place your right hand on the floor directly beneath your shoulder, and place your left hand on your left leg. Lift your hips off the floor, extending your left arm overhead, so your body forms a diagonal line. Without bending your right arm, lower your hips and left arm back to start. **Do 4 reps. Switch sides.**

3



BRIDGE KICK

Targets the outer glutes and the hips

Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor, arms at your sides. Squeeze your glutes and lift your hips so that your body forms a straight line. Lift your right leg, extending it as high as comfortably possible without allowing your hips to dip or rise on either side. Lower back to the starting position, and repeat with your left leg. **Do 16 to 20 total reps (8 to 10 per side).**

4



BIRD-DOG POINT 'N' CURL

Targets the back, glutes, obliques, and abdominals

Kneel on all fours, your hands directly beneath your shoulders and your knees directly beneath your hips. Keep your back straight and your head in line with your spine. Simultaneously raise your right arm and left leg, extending them in line with your back so your fingers point straight ahead and your toes point behind you. Contract your abs and draw your right elbow to your left knee beneath your torso, then return to start. Switch sides. **That's 1 rep. Do 10 reps.**