

The Five Best Core Exercises For a Solid Midsection



By Josh Hewett

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Almost everyone who is interested in getting fit and staying in shape also wants to develop a toned, solid midsection. Strengthening the core muscle group can enhance ones appearance (the much sought after “six-pack”), improve athletic performance, reduce back pain, and maintain better posture. Whether the goal is functional or aesthetic, the quest for a stronger core is very popular. Unfortunately, many people don't know the most effective ways to reach that goal and end up wasting time doing hundreds of crunches or one of the dozens of other abdominal exercise variations. Training your core this way can take a long time and delivers minimal results.



I subscribe to the K.I.S.S. (Keep It Short n' Simple) philosophy in order to accomplish more in less time. To accomplish this we need to implement a simpler, more efficient approach using more effective exercises. In this chapter I will explain the basic anatomy and function of your core musculature and describe what I believe to be the most effective exercises to train your core, and why.

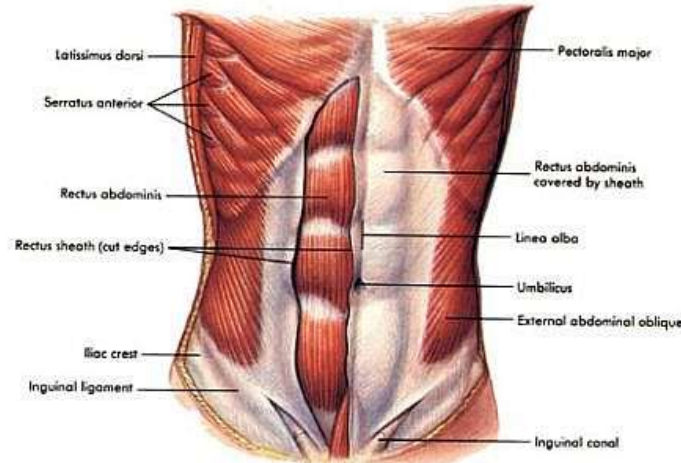
Before we get started, however, it is important to remember that if your goal is to sport a set of ripped 6 pack abs, you will first need to reduce your body fat low enough to reveal those abs. For an intelligent training and nutrition plan for fat loss check out [GetLeanBook.com](http://www.GetLeanBook.com).

OK, time to get into working that core. First of all, let's take a look at the core structure and anatomy. The core muscles are the muscles in the body's center of gravity that support the spine and torso and they are also the muscles that initiate movement. Often people only consider their “core” as being their abdominals; however, the “core” musculature includes your entire midsection, including the following:

- **Rectus Abdominis.** - The abdominal muscle group referred to as your “six-pack”.
- **Internal and External Obliques.** - These run in opposite directions to each other and are on the abdomen and sides.
- **Transverse Abdominis (TVA).** - This is the deepest layer of abdominal muscles that wrap around the waist, located underneath the obliques.
- **Multifidus & Erector Spinae.** - The lower back muscles that support and rotate the spine.
- **Hip Flexors and Abductors.** - The muscles of the hip and inner thigh.
- **Gluteus Medius, Minimus, & Maximus.** - These muscles are often referred to as the butt or “glutes”.

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You don't need to remember the names of these muscles, but it's nice to be able to visualize where they are on your body so you can get an idea of how to train them. These are the muscles in the front, sides, and back of your midsection that run vertically, diagonally, and even horizontally (the transverse abs). The exercises I will be describing to you will target each of these main areas.



The basic action of these muscles when they concentrically contract in isolation is to flex, extend, rotate and side-bend the torso. Their primary function is actually to **resist motion** in these planes, and to maintain posture and **stabilize** the midsection and spine during functional activities. Considering this you need to challenge these muscles isometrically as well, by including exercises which force you to resist movement and maintain core stability.

Let's look at what I consider to be the most effective core exercises. Some of these movements are more advanced, so I will also suggest exercise progressions to help you prepare for them. Here the **Five Best Core Exercises**:

1. **Power wheel rollouts** (resisting extension)
2. **Power wheel knee tucks** (resisting extension)
3. **Hanging knee raises** (flexion)
4. **Resist the Twist** (resisting rotation isometrically)
5. **Deadlifts** (extension; resisting flexion)

With these basic movements you are targeting all the primary core muscles.

1. Power Wheel Roll-Outs

The Power Wheel has been endorsed by many of the industry's leading strength coaches and trainers and is now also my favorite tool for training the core. It was also rated as the "Best Core Trainer in the World" by an independent study at the University of California, Berkeley. Check out the study here: <http://top-form-fitness.com/pwrwheelstudy.pdf>. If you're sick of all of the "ab" gimmicks on the market, this simple piece of equipment is the real deal. To learn more about the Power Wheel, check out: www.StrongestCore.com

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Placing the body in an extended position and adding load has been shown to be the best method for stimulating abdominal strength. During Power Wheel roll-outs the core muscles are engaged isometrically to resist the extension, which makes this an extremely productive AND functional movement.



The rollouts are performed with your knees on the ground and your hands holding the handles on either side of the wheel, as shown. Begin with a neutral spine and the wheel directly below your shoulders. Before you start to roll your arms out in front of you, you must straighten your hips and strongly contract your abdominals to keep your back flat and your pelvis tucked in. You must maintain this stabilization of your midsection throughout the movement to prevent your back from extending.

Once you are extended fully from your knees to your shoulders, you can slowly start to roll your upper body out in front of you, then pull yourself back to the start position keeping your arms straight during the entire exercise. Tension should be maintained through the torso, arms and lats. As you become stronger you can extend your range until you are able to lower yourself all the way to the ground and back up. Advanced trainees can attempt to perform this same exercise from your feet, with your legs straight.

This exercise is more challenging than most people expect, especially if you don't pay close attention to your technique. Therefore it may be necessary to perform some exercise progressions until you are able to do the roll-outs correctly.

Progressions for the Power Wheel Roll-Out:

The Plank - The plank is a great basic exercise for developing core stability. Support yourself from your feet to your elbows with your body completely extended in a straight line. Hold for 30 seconds. I also recommend starting all of your workouts with this exercise as part of your warm up, in order to activate your core muscles in preparation for training.

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Plank on Ball - This is the same exercise as above, except that your elbows are supported on the ball. According to Men's Health magazine, planks on the ball are 30% more effective than regular planks. They're certainly more challenging!

Once you master these progressive exercises you should be ready to perform the Power Wheel Roll-outs!

2. Power Wheel Pikes

This is another great Power Wheel exercise that involves resisting extension through your torso, except this time you place your feet in the foot pedals. Once your feet are secured in the Power Wheel foot attachments, hold yourself in a pushup position with your hands on the floor directly under your shoulders and your legs extended straight out. Again, stabilization is very important and you must not allow your back to cave in during this movement.

Now roll the wheel in towards your hands by bending at the hips and raising your butt upwards. Keep your legs straight and your abs engaged during the movement. Once you have rolled in as far as you can, extend your legs back out again and repeat. This exercise can also be performed with bent knees, as a **knee tuck** variation.



3. Hanging Knee Raises

This exercise was also at the top of the list of best core exercises from the Berkeley study. The hanging knee raise is a classic exercise that many people do incorrectly, but when done right it is safe and effective. These can be performed in a few different ways. You can hold onto a bar overhead and hang freely during the movement. Or you can use those elbow "ab" straps that wrap around your arms and connect to the overhead bar. There is also a piece of gym equipment that is often called a Roman Chair, where you can support your upper body on elbow pads and lean back against a back support. In every variation your legs are hanging freely below you.



To start, contract your abdominals and raise both knees up toward your chest while slightly flexing at the waist. Your knees will bend on the way up, and then extend at the bottom. Perform this movement slowly and with control, without losing tension in your midsection. Your lower back should not arch or extend during this exercise!

Progression for the Hanging Knee Raise

Lying Knee Raise - Also known as the reverse crunch, the lying knee raise is a good progression for those who find the hanging knee raise too challenging. It involves lying flat on your back on a bench and holding onto the top of the bench over your head. With your knees bent, slowly raise both feet off the bench contracting your abdominals until your hips are elevated only an inch or two. Your core muscles should be under great tension at this point. Lower and repeat. Be careful not to swing your hips up, or roll too far up over your chest as gravity will be making the exercise easier in this manner.

4. Resist the Twist ©

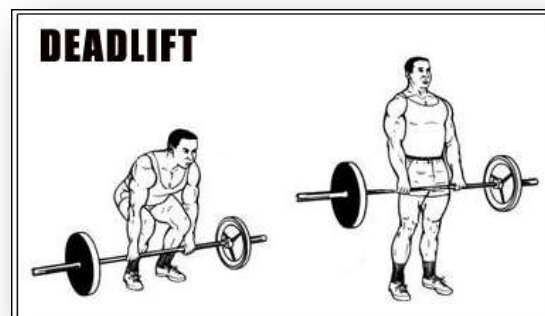
Rotational strength and stability is an important element of developing a powerful, toned core. This is a variation of another great core exercise called the **Pallof Press**. I call it **Resist the Twist** because, well, essentially that's what you're doing. I know... not very creative.

With this exercise you are going to stand perpendicular to a cable machine holding the handle of the cable with both hands in front of your chest. This can also be performed using heavy resistance tubing in the same manner. Start with both arms bent, holding the handle close to your chest. Then extend both arms straight out in front of you and brace yourself against the rotational pull of the cable. Hold this position for 5 to 10 seconds without moving, keeping your core tight, your arms extended, and your spine neutral. Then bring the hands in toward your chest again and repeat.

This exercise can also be done in a tall kneeling position (do not sit your butt back). Be sure to keep your body tall and the origin of the cable or tubing should be at chest level.

5. Deadlift

You may not have considered the deadlift to be a **core exercise**, but it is an excellent compound movement that requires bracing (rigidity) and is crucial for developing the posterior chain (the other half of your core). The deadlift works virtually every muscle, with emphasis on the quadriceps, hamstrings, gluteus maximus, and most muscles in the back. The remaining muscles are involved in stability control. I believe the deadlift should be included in most training programs. You can include it in your circuit training program. It will build powerful back and legs and causes a strong co-contraction of the anterior core (your abs).



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As with all of the exercises I've described, technique is very important with the deadlift. Start by standing with the bar in front of you, so that it is over top of your feet. Use a slightly narrower than shoulder width stance with your feet facing forwards. Lean forward to grasp the bar with your hands slightly wider than shoulder width apart. Make sure your knees are bent and your back is flat.

Your butt should be 'sticking out' and your chest should be open. Keeping your back straight (or slightly extended) and your arms straight, lift the bar to a standing position using your legs and back muscles. The bar should stay close to the body during the lift. At the top, press your hips forward and open up your chest to complete the lift. Use control when lowering the bar to the ground.

Conclusion:

Those are my **top 5 best core exercises**. As part of an integrated approach to exercise and nutrition, these exercises will contribute significantly to achieving a stronger, leaner looking waistline. They can be incorporated into a complete training program such as the one outlined in my book [Get Lean: Permanent Physique Transformation](#), or they can be performed separately as a stand-alone core workout.

The exercises I've shown you were chosen based on solid research, exercise science, as well as personal experience. They were not picked at random because they looked cool in a fitness magazine. Building powerful core muscles will also increase your gains in every area of your workouts, because your core is the central area of your body which supports every other part of your body.

When it comes to training your core, this is what really works!

Stay Fit,

Josh Hewett

Note: this ebook is a short excerpt from the **FPA Report on Fat Loss Strategies**. For the free full report, subscribe at www.StrongerAndLeaner.com.

About The Author:



Josh Hewett, BA Kin, is a certified trainer, public speaker, competitive strength athlete, and the author of "[Get Lean](#)". He is the owner of www.Top-Form-Fitness.com and the founder of Team Barbarian Strength Athletics (OPA affiliated). His articles have been featured on several popular websites, including Elite FTS, The Diesel Crew, Straight To The Bar, QFAC, and many others. Josh has been working in the fitness and physical conditioning industry for over 20 years, and has helped hundreds of people reach their fitness and performance goals using his proven training system.