

**Monthly Health Challenge™**

**Strengthen Your Core**

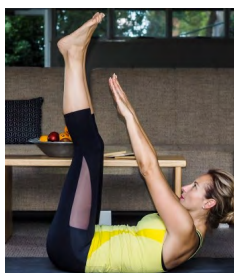


**CHALLENGE**  
Develop core strength with exercise

**Requirements to complete this Health Challenge™**

1. Read "Strengthen Your Core."
2. Practice strengthening your core on at least 22 days this month.
3. Keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

**W**hen Dani Stevens woke up in the morning her back hurt. She chalked it up to having four kids, gaining weight, letting her exercise habits slip a little, and then trying to get back into shape. Some days the pain in her lower back was manageable. And some days it hurt a lot.



More about Dani Stevens: [danistevens.com/tag/core-strength](http://danistevens.com/tag/core-strength)

When the pain started to interfere with her life, she was frustrated. She wanted to lose weight, but chronic pain made it hard. She knew something had to change. She thought she might have a serious back problem that might need surgery. Fortunately, a physical therapist showed her some simple exercises to improve core strength, and now her back pain is nearly gone.

"Literally, my back is so much better, like 100 percent," says Stevens. "I nearly went for an MRI a few weeks ago, until my physical therapist assured me it's my core that needs strengthening."

Your core muscles help support your back. They need to be strong for balance, stability, and everyday living. Your core muscles help you be active – and they are made stronger when you are active. Take the month-long challenge to *Strengthen Your Core* with exercise.



How much do you know about the benefits of core strength? Take this quiz to find out.

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1.   You need core strength to do simple things like put on your shoes, turn to look right or left, bathe, and even sit in a chair.
2.   Studies show that improving core strength can often help reduce lower back pain.
3.   You can make your balance and stability better by developing core strength.
4.   When you are physically active, good core strength can help prevent injuries.
5.   You can strengthen your core with just 10 minutes of exercise a day.

How did you do on this quiz? Your core muscles include your abs and all the other muscles that help stabilize your spine. Developing core strength improves balance, mobility, and posture, and lowers your risk for injuries.

Answers: 1. True. 2. True. 3. True. 4. True. 5. True.

**5 Benefits of Core Strength**

Strengthen your core. You've probably heard the advice before from a friend, at the gym, in a magazine, or online. But what does it really mean? Core strength is sometimes misunderstood as a code word for six-pack abs. But it's a lot more than that. Strong core muscles can help:

**1. Prevent and treat back pain**

About 65 million people suffer from back pain, every day or from time to time. Some will need surgery to fix problems. Some might need to take medicine to manage pain. But for many others, exercises to build core strength can help. Researchers have found that exercises like

curl-ups, leg raises, and push-ups improve core strength and help reduce back pain.

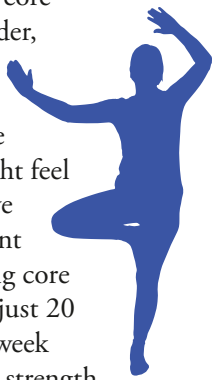


**2. Protect the central nervous system**

Your brain and spinal cord control your central nervous system. And it's critical to protect both. Strong core muscles help stabilize the spine, and protect the spinal cord and internal organs.

### 3. Improve balance and strength

If you don't maintain core strength as you get older, you may notice a decrease in balance and strength. If you're out of shape, you might feel old. But it doesn't have to be that way. A recent study found that doing core strength exercises for just 20 minutes three days a week improved balance and strength.



### 4. Reduce the risk for injuries



It's no secret that professional athletes are in better shape than most people. But that doesn't mean they've all taken the time to develop core strength. A recent study found that professional baseball pitchers with weak core strength are more likely to get injured. Athletes who do core strength exercises as part of their regular training don't get injured as often. You may not be trying to make the team, but building core strength can still reduce your risk for injury.

### 5. Improve posture

Are you among the millions of people who spend a lot of time sitting? How's your posture? If core strength isn't part of your exercise plan, there's a fair chance your posture isn't perfect. Poor posture can literally become a pain in the neck and lower back. But you can do some things to better your posture and reduce your risk of pain. A recent study found that core strength exercises can improve your posture, and even boost your self-esteem when you sit up straight.



You may already know some of the core muscles.

## Ways to Improve Core Strength

Dani Stevens followed the advice of her physical therapist. When her core got stronger, it didn't take long for her back pain to go away. Core exercise helps improve muscle strength, posture, and flexibility. This makes everyday activities easier to do – and less stressful on the body. Here are some ways you can improve core strength:

#### Breathe

Take a deep breath and draw in your stomach. Hold your breath and count to 10. Repeat. This is a simple exercise you can perform to improve core strength anytime throughout the day.

#### Use a stability ball at the office

You probably already sit more than enough if you commute to work, sit at the table for meals, and drive your car to run errands. Too much sitting can weaken your core muscles. So what if you spend a lot of time sitting at work? Forget the chair, and sit on a stability ball. It's an easy way to keep your core muscles engaged throughout the day.

#### Practice good posture

You may not have learned to practice good posture in school, but it's never too late to start. Make a conscious effort to sit up straight when you're at work, in the car, or at the table. When you keep your spine straight and in alignment, you're using core muscles.

#### Do core-strength exercises

Developing core strength is a lot easier than you might think. Simple exercises like planks, leg lifts, push-ups, and easy-to-perform yoga poses can improve core strength. Add a few core strength training exercises to your gym workout, or do them while watching TV. It won't take long for your core muscles to get stronger.

Core strength can have a big impact on your overall health and quality of life. Make the effort to strengthen your core every day. You'll have better strength, balance, and stability. You'll lower your risk for injuries. You'll feel better too.

21 core strength exercises  
[tinyurl.com/kdtzgac](https://tinyurl.com/kdtzgac)

The real-world benefits of strengthening your core  
[tinyurl.com/6hkhy3y](https://tinyurl.com/6hkhy3y)

**Video:**  
Core strength exercises to reduce lower back pain  
[tinyurl.com/nr6ehnr](https://tinyurl.com/nr6ehnr)

Sources: American Council on Exercise.; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.; European Journal of Social Psychology.; Harvard School of Public Health.; Journal of Applied Research.; Journal of Physical Therapy Science.



# Strengthen Your Core

**CHALLENGE**  
 Develop core strength with exercise

### Instructions

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Record the number of days you practice strengthening your core.
3. Use the calendar to record your actions and choices to make developing core strength a regular part of your life.
4. At the end of the month, total the number of days you practice strengthening your core. You must do this on at least 22 days this month to complete this challenge. Then keep up the practice for a lifetime of best health.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™ ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary
HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	HC [ ] ex. min. _____	
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\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I practiced strengthening my core  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity

### Other wellness projects completed this month:

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



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