

# How to strengthen your core

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When you're starting or recharging a running program, you may be tempted to focus only on leg strength. But there's another major group of muscles that's just as important to your overall strength, endurance and power—your core muscles.

These are the muscles around your pelvis, [lower back](#), hips and stomach. They work together to provide stability and balance. To play sports and participate in most [physical activities](#), a strong core is a necessity. A strong core also plays a role in posture and preventing injuries.

## Building a strong core

What can you do to build and maintain strong core muscles? Here are some tips:

- When performing core exercises, use a mat or lie on the carpet.
- Take deep, slow breaths and exhale with the effort of the movement to activate your core muscles.
- Try yoga or Pilates. These activities require the use of your core muscles, build strength, and help with balance and flexibility.
- Implement a well-rounded fitness program that includes not only core exercises but also aerobic and plyometric exercises, and strength training.

## Basic core-building exercises

These are some basic core-building exercises to work on. Repeat each of these core-strength exercises about five times, building up to 10–24 repetitions. If you have back problems, osteoporosis or other [health concerns](#), talk to someone on your health care team before doing these exercises.

### Bridge

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Breathe out as you raise your hips off the floor.
- To check if you're doing this [exercise](#) correctly, make sure your

- hips are aligned with your knees and shoulders.
- Hold this position briefly, lower hips and repeat.

## **Bridge with stability ball**

- Lie on your back with your legs resting on top of the ball. Inhale deeply.
- Exhale to tighten your core, lifting your hips and buttocks off the floor into a bridge. Hold steady for three deep breaths. This works your core muscles and the muscles along your backside—the gluteal muscles and hamstrings—as they contract to hold you in place.
- Return to the starting position and repeat.
- For added challenge, raise your right leg off the ball. Repeat with your left leg.

## **Segment rotation**

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your back in a neutral position. Keeping your shoulders on the floor, let your knees fall slowly to the left. Go only as far as is comfortable. You should feel a stretch, but not pain. Hold for three deep breaths.
- Return to the start position. Repeat the exercise to the right.

## **Quadruped**

- Start on your hands and knees. Place your hands directly below your shoulders, and align your head and neck with your back.
- Exhale to engage your core as you raise your right arm off the floor and reach ahead. Hold for three deep breaths. Lower your right arm and repeat with your left arm.
- Exhale to engage your core as you raise your right leg off the

floor. Tighten your trunk muscles for balance. Hold for three deep breaths. Lower your right leg and repeat with your left leg.

- For an added challenge, raise your left arm and your right leg at the same time. Repeat with your right arm and left leg.

## **Bent over rows with free weights**

- With one foot on the ground, bend over and place the other knee on the edge of a chair. Let one arm hang straight down from your shoulder; hold a free weight in that hand. Use the other arm for support.
- Exhale as you lift the weight, bending your elbow and keeping the weight parallel to the floor.
- Keep your shoulder down and back, and away from your ear.

Not only does adding [free weights](#) build core strength, but it also gives other muscle groups a workout.

## **Weighted arm swings**

- Stand in a lunge position with your right foot forward. Hold a weight in each hand.
- Keeping elbows bent, swing the weights forward and back. This motion mimics pumping your arms when you run.
- Change your stance so your [left foot](#) is forward and repeat the arms swings.

## **Beyond core strength**

Core strength is key to your running performance, but so is power. These exercises focus on the muscles that generate the power to climb hills and add bursts of speed:

## Jump lunges

- Stand in a low lunge position with your right foot forward.
- Jump straight upward, switching your leg position and landing back in the lunge position.
- Repeat these lunges, alternating your leg position each time. Avoid holding your breath.

## Sideways tape jumps

- Place a strip of tape on the floor. Stand on one side of the tape.
- With both feet, jump sideways over the tape, landing with slightly bent knees and toes pointing forward.
- Repeat, returning to your starting position.
- Once you've mastered the two-footed jump, try it with one leg. You also can add hand weights.

## Strong body, strong run

With a strong core, you're setting yourself up for a successful big run—and overall improved strength, stability, power and endurance.

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