

# Get to the Core!

by Kathy Mc Elroy, MS, PT Clinic Director, Pacific Physical Therapy, Manhattan Beach

The hottest fitness trend to hit the gyms of late, **Core Training**, includes any program that works the *Transversus Abdominis*, a deep, abdominal muscle often ignored by other exercise programs. This muscle, in particular, has a starring postural role and is crucial in the stabilization of the lumbar spine because it acts with the abdominal obliques as a "muscular corset". Recommended by sports medicine practitioners, core stability is the new fitness buzzword that quickly gets you back to the basics.

The goal of core training is to work the area that supports your trunk and spine. There are sound and valid anatomical reasons for doing core strengthening, due to the dynamic relationship between the spine and the abdominal muscles. By creating a firm and strong stomach, the spine is stabilized so it acts like a girdle of strength.

It is crucial that your core is strong because it comes into play, just about every time you move. A strong, stable core can make other sports, like running and tennis easier. For example, if your spine acts as a powerful base for your legs, you will be able to put more power behind each step and run with less effort. Strengthening the core is important for the overhead athlete as well. Shoulder laxity is a common problem developed by tennis, volleyball and water polo players due to excessive force put on the front of the arm. When an athlete's trunk is strong and used correctly, these forces can be minimized, therefore, decreasing the chances for injury.

Boredom rarely sets in while core training, as the workouts do not adopt just one discipline but embrace many fitness principles, such as Yoga and Pilates – which keep the mind, as well as the body, enlivened and fit. Fitness instructors are incorporating core fitness into other workouts, such as spinning, as it causes a more efficient and posturally correct program. Core fitness appeals to everybody and can help improve flexibility, joint mobility, strength, endurance and coordination. It also helps increase bone density by strengthening your bones, through exercises that rely on the resistance of your own body weight.

Physical therapists have incorporated *Transversus Abdominis* strengthening into exercise programs for many years. A strong, healthy back and trunk is the best defense in injury prevention. Good trunk and abdominal strength is important in non-athletic endeavors as well. Using proper technique and musculature when bending and lifting helps decrease chances for low back injury.

If physical therapy is prescribed or needed, your physical therapist should address core training and postural education as part of the rehab. At Pacific Physical Therapy, the staff of physical therapists designs each treatment program to meet your specific needs.

Our therapists use foam rollers, swiss balls, and balancing exercises to recruit core musculature and keep exercises fun. We often incorporate Pilates principles using

exercises on the mat and the reformer. Progression is then made to encourage trunk stability while doing sport specific training.

Although, "core fitness" is getting a lot of publicity these days, be assured that this is not just a passing fad. Maintaining abdominal and trunk strength always has been and will continue to be a "core" principal in achieving health and fitness.

**REMEMBER: Always consult your physician before participating in an exercise program.**

Kathy Colwell McElroy is a physical therapist and avid tennis player. She is the Executive Director and owner of Pacific Physical Therapy with locations at the Manhattan Country Club in Manhattan Beach and the Pacific Athletic Club on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Pacific Physical Therapy has been helping pro & amateur athletes stay healthy since 1993!