

The TACTICAL CORE

BRIDGE



By Art Hoffman

The dictionary tells us that a “core” is the central or most important part of something. In simple terms, our core muscles stabilize and hold us vertical when we run, jump and stand at the ready. It is the pedestal from which we deliver power, force and speed. Without our core muscles we would be a heap of flesh on the floor.

The core muscles include those that attach to the pelvis, abdominals and back, otherwise known as the lumbopelvic-hip complex. It includes the abdominals, chest/pectorals, hips, back, deltoids, hip flexors and even some glutes and hamstrings that cross the pelvic girdle to extend the hips. In more general terms, the core musculature includes those muscles from the upper back to the hips. Your core muscles are involved in many types of body movement including torso rotation, spinal flexion and abdominal support during heavy lifts and explosive movements.

For optimal tactical performance, our core muscles should be strong and powerful. A strong core helps prevent injury, helps to maintain balance and posture, and allows the body to handle the anterior loads which a tactical operator must often-times bear (rifle, Halligan tool, battering ram). A strong core also helps to prevent overuse injuries to the knees, hips and ankles by providing rock solid stability to the upper body. Recruits should be tested for all of the fitness components, including balance and agility. Candidates with a weak core do not normally perform well in balance and agility tests.

After countless hours in a patrol or military vehicle, your back will thank you for effective and consistent core training.

PLANK



PLANK VARIATION



SIDE PLANK



SIDE PLANK VARIATION



These muscles act as a counterbalance and a turret as you move while holding your patrol rifle on the threat. Core muscles are working overtime stabilizing your spine as you run up stairs after a dangerous suspect. All the muscles protecting your spine and pelvis will be tested to the max if you have to drag or carry a wounded buddy out of the line of fire.

Tactical athletic effectiveness is directly related to the strength of the core muscles. These muscles are the starting point from which power is transferred to the arms and legs. Forceful movements originate from the center of the body moving out to the limbs. For proper posture, remember to keep your core muscles engaged, your glutes tight and your shoulders back.

A strong core is the foundation that allows the tactical athlete to deliver optimal performance when and where it is needed most. Your body is your most sophisticated weapon so maintain it and keep it secure, just like any other weapon system in your arsenal. If you have chosen a tactical career, the single most important key to your success and safety is to get fit and stay fit, starting with your core. Never give up a tactical advantage!

Core stabilizing exercises

I would recommend starting with (or adding to your existing routine) some stabilization exercises to include the bridge, planks and bird dog. These isometric exercises are done in a static position,

BIRD DOG



so those with existing lower back issues can benefit from these simple exercises as well. The goal is to hold each position for one minute or until proper posture and technique break down (torso sag or flex). It may be helpful to have someone watch to make sure you are holding the correct position and proper form. Attempt each isometric position for as long as possible, three times per session, and gradually work your way up to 60-plus seconds each.

Bridge

Lie on your back, with knees bent, arms folded across the chest and the pelvis neutral. Raise the hips, creating a straight line between the knees, hips and shoulders.

Lift your right leg off the floor and extend until it is straight. Support your body weight by contracting the glutes and hamstring of the left leg. Keep your pelvis neutral, and maintain a straight line from shoulder through the foot. Hold the contraction for 3-4 seconds before lowering the pelvis to the floor. Continue to alternate between legs.

Plank

Lie facedown on the floor with legs straight and feet together with elbows directly below shoulders. Then raise the body so that your weight is supported by toes and forearms. Keep your feet together. Hold the position by statically contracting the core muscles. Hold a straight line from toes

to shoulders: focus on keeping your back straight and hips in line. Back sag or hip movement terminates the exercise.

Variation: Lie on your back in the position of “attention,” then raise the body so that your weight is supported by your heels and shoulders. Contract the core muscles, holding a straight line (body inches off the floor) from heels to shoulders.

Side Plank

Lie on one side supporting your weight on one forearm. Hold the spine and legs in a straight line by contracting the core muscles. Hold for the desired length of time, then switch to the other side.

Variation: Maintain the contraction and lift your top leg off the floor. Raise your body higher off the floor by extending your support arm and extending the opposite arm straight as shown.

Bird Dog

Begin on your hands and knees, keeping your head and neck aligned with your back. Raise your right arm until fully extended and parallel to the floor. At the same time, raise the left leg until it is fully extended. The arm, leg and back should all be in the same horizontal plane as shown. Hold for 3-4 seconds, then lower the raised arm and leg to the starting position and raise the opposite arm and leg to same extended positions. «

About the author

Art Hoffman is a 38-year veteran of law enforcement. He currently serves as a SRO with the Butler, Ohio PD. Art’s experience includes firearms instructor, metro narcotics officer, juvenile officer, safety officer, SWAT/tactics instructor, bike patrol, community police officer and police academy fitness instructor. He holds many national fitness certifications and is a multi-sport athlete sponsored by several companies.