

crunch time

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Caroline's Ultimate Core Workout **Part 1**

Are you stuck in an abs routine that involves a lot of 'crunching' but don't have a six-pack to show for it? Then ramp things up with my ultimate 'crunch free' core workout.

These exercises are designed to target your entire core - that's not just your abs. I'm talking all of your internal stabiliser muscles of the back, hips and shoulder girdle as well as the abdominals - no area will be left uncovered!

Although getting a great six-pack is high on many fitness trainers' agendas for aesthetic reasons, it's equally important for functional reasons and for the prevention of and rehabilitation from injury.

Your core is also crucial for sports performance. It functions as a sort of straight-jacket bracing your torso, if your core is weak, then your body will be inefficient at controlling and transferring power between its' limbs, the ground and an object (as when, running throwing and jumping, for example).

Why have I not included any crunches in the workout? Well most people spend all day sitting at a desk, driving in the car or sitting on the train traveling to and from work, they then sit to eat, watch television and so on. In these seated positions we are constantly in a state of flexion (bent forward). So why repeat the same posture and movement in the gym, which is essentially the same as when you perform a crunch? As human beings we've evolved to be in an upright position, so our gym time should be used to encourage a strong and healthy posture through extension and the stabilisation of a neutral - neither overly rounded or flexed and natural - posture. This will help to counter possible injury, everyday back-pain and poor posture. The following exercises train your core in the most effective way possible.

How to perform the circuit:

Equipment: Gymball and medicine ball

Start by performing one set of each of the exercises, taking 30 seconds' rest between each. Build up to performing three circuits, gradually reducing the rest time between exercises. Start with 1-2 minutes' recovery between each circuit and gradually reduce this as well as your fitness develops.

Abdominal exercises can be performed as an isolated workout or prior to, or following another of your workouts, such as a cardio session. You can even drop them into a whole body circuit. However, be careful not to over fatigue your core before performing exercises that may require its support, for example weight training and in particular overhead lifts.



1. Lying Leg Lowers

Lie on your back and lift your legs to 90-degrees holding a gymball between your feet. Keeping a slight bend in your knees and your back in neutral (maintaining the natural curves of your spine) lower the ball to the floor and then back up to your start point.

Do: 20 reps



2. Gymball Leg Roll-Outs

Place your shins onto the gymball whilst supporting your weight on your hands with your arms straight, but unlocked. Roll the ball up your legs as you move your body backwards, keeping your back flat and your core strong. Roll back to the start position. Perform continuously.

Do: 20 reps

Progression: start with the tops of your feet on the ball to extend the range of movement.



3. Gymball tucks

Start in the same position as for exercise 2. Bring your knees towards your chest creating a 'tuck' position, squeezing your abs as you do so. Roll back out to the start position and repeat.

Do: 20 reps

Progression: keeping your core strong hinge from your hips whilst keeping your legs straight to pike your body, before returning to the start position.



4. Gymball Back Extensions

Place the gymball under your hips and press your feet against a wall or have a partner hold them to stabilise you. With your hands to your ears and elbows out extend your back. Lower slowly with control. Perform continuously.

Do: 20 reps

Progression: Hold your arms overhead at a 45-degree angle to increase the resistance.

5. Gymball Arm Roll-outs

Kneel on the floor with your elbows on the gymball. Clasp your hands together. Roll the ball forwards keeping your hips flat and your core strong and then roll back again. Perform continuously.

Do: 20 reps

Progression: performing the exercise on your feet dramatically increases the difficulty.



6. Gymball Reverse Hyper-extensions

Place the gymball under your hips and place your hands flat on the floor in front. Raise both feet together, squeezing your glutes throughout as you do so. Control the lowering of your feet.

Do: 20 reps

Progression: hold for a count of 3 seconds at the top of the movement.



Next Issue: Caroline provides another great selection of core building exercises

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