

Most of us have heard about the importance of working our core and have some idea as to why. Read below how a stronger core can benefit you, and how you can start to reap the benefits today!



The Deep Core

By Holly Blazina

Our muscles have three roles in order for us to perform any movement: stabilization, activation and release. For example, in a forward bend, the muscles on the front of the body activate, those on the back release and those in the core stabilize so we don't fall over. While some muscles exchange roles between activation and release, we can usually refer to certain muscle groups as 'movers' and others as 'stabilizers.'

I've often heard athletic people say they don't stretch enough, even though they believe they should do it more. Their muscles may become increasingly tight over time, putting their joints at risk for arthritis. Ayurveda (the ancient sister science to Yoga), recognizes that people often prefer either a strong, athletic workout or stretching (or for many, neither!). In order to help people balance their temperament and thereby balance their workouts, I like to recommend 'silver bullets' - practices that have high benefits in comparison to the effort required to do them. One of these is deep core work.

Working on the deep core can bring better overall function in a multitude of ways:

1. Stabilize Muscles

For athletes, including those who work out on a recreational level, the movers can become tighter than necessary because they have to both stabilize AND move the body. Have you ever noticed that certain muscles are stubbornly tight, no matter how much you stretch them? This isn't always just because of the sport activities you do on a regular basis. By including some deep core work, the body will become more stable, and whatever stretching you do can finally take effect because the movers don't have to do two conflicting jobs anymore. In some cases, you may not even need to stretch muscles that used to be chronically tight. In my own case, I used to have extremely tight IT bands (the area along the outside of the thigh). The foam roller used to feel excruciating, but now I rarely use it at all. When I do, it's no longer painful at all.

2. Improve Performance

Deep core work can also help athletes improve performance because it creates a better overall synergy between the muscles, making the body more efficient. This can be true at all levels of sport, from recreational to competitive.

3. Reduce Pain

For those with back problems, deep core work can reduce pain substantially in a similar manner described above. It's notable that many seemingly complex issues can simply fall away when the right muscles are doing the job. When the compensatory patterns are no longer needed, they begin to release of their own accord, or with minimal effort. Have you ever had the experience of being sick in bed with the flu, and after a few days, your back goes out? This is because the deep core muscles begin to lose their tone in a short time, and previously set compensations kick in, attempting to keep the body stable. I've noticed that many of the deep core exercises I do are gentle enough to do as soon as I'm moving about after having a flu. They don't take much time or energy, and doing them saves me a lot of both by keeping my back strong!

4. Improve Balance

Those who have difficulty with balance may also find deep core work helpful. Again, when the movers aren't tight, they can adjust more quickly to a sudden change of terrain, such as ice. This is obviously especially important for elderly people, or those with impaired balance for any reason.

There are a whole series of core exercises I use, but I don't do them all every day. Even taking just 5 minutes, three times per week can create a substantial improvement. Below is the first of

one series I do. It may sound simple, but it's really effective, and for many, can be surprisingly challenging.

Lay down on your back with the knees bent & feet flat on the floor. Place your hands on your hip bones and lift one foot a few centimetres off the floor. Notice that there is a muscle between your hip bone and your leg that activates as you do this; it is your hip flexor. Please note that this is the ONLY movement allowed for this exercise. Alternate picking up and putting down the feet with absolutely no extraneous movement, keeping the pelvis absolutely quiet, and watching for tension in the upper body. If you find this impossible, try simply thinking about lifting the leg each time without actually doing it. Once you've done 10 - 20 times on each side, stand up and shake out your legs.

Be sure to maintain a gentle attitude, as some find this frustrating at first. When the movement is being done correctly, it doesn't feel like much, because the core muscles aren't really working that hard.

Do you have questions about how you can increase your core strength and improve stretching techniques? We have answers. Book a complimentary 15 minute consultation with one of our Momentum Health clinicians. We are looking forward to helping you make prevention a part of your workout



Holly Blazina - Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy Instructor

Holly completed a 600-hour Yoga teacher's training program in 2003 through the Yoga Centre of Calgary. Having developed a strong interest in therapeutic Yoga, she completed a 450 - hour course on Yoga and Ayurveda through the American Institute of Vedic Studies in 2012, including a paper on Yoga, Ayurveda and Musicians' Injuries. Holly began teaching her program for artists and musicians in 2008, organizing her own classes and private sessions, as well as teaching workshops through the Mount Royal University Conservatory. She began teaching workshops and weekly classes at MRU Recreation starting in 2009, where she routinely accommodates those with conditions such as repetitive strain, back & shoulder problems, scoliosis, disc herniation's, fatigue, hip & knee replacements, sciatica, knee injuries, pregnancy, excess weight and other physical restrictions. She also has had the opportunity to teach Yoga for a number of athletes at MRU, including the men's volleyball team.