

BACK AND CORE STRENGTH

These back strengthening exercises challenge your back muscles plus all 4 abdominal muscle layers, your hip muscles and deep shoulder stabilising muscles. With this routine, you'll begin to develop the strength you need for good posture and muscular balance.

Focus on the *quality of the movement* as you are learning the moves, and you'll get the most out of this routine of back strengthening exercises. Try to create long, straight lines with your body. The more closely you can match the illustrations below, the stronger you will become.

#1 Bridging

Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor as shown in the illustration below. Raise your bottom upward slowly.

Imagine lifting one vertebra at a time from your exercise mat. Continue lifting your bottom upward until there is a straight line from your shoulders to your knees. Hold this position 10-15 seconds.



Think of reaching your knees forward over your ankles as you hold the bridge. Repeat 3-4 times.

(Modification: Single Leg Bridge. For this exercise, perform a bridge. Then at the top of the bridge, straighten 1 leg. Switch legs after a 5 second hold. Lower to the start position and repeat 4-6 times.)

#2 Tabletop

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Raise your legs, one at a time, so that your knees are directly above your hips and your lower legs are parallel with the floor. Hold this position 10-15 seconds.



Next, return to the starting position, lowering 1 leg at a time. Keep your abdominals firm so that your back is completely still throughout the exercise. Repeat 3-4 times.

(Modification: Tabletop on foam roller; A more challenging version of the exercise.)

#3 Pilates Crunches

From the 'Tabletop' (#2) position, reach your fingertips to the ceiling, as high as you can. Then curl your upper body forward until your shoulders are off the floor. Lift your head in a natural curve along with the body--don't press your chin to your chest.



Reach your arms forward, past your thighs, as you curl up. See the 3rd picture below. *Inhale* and hold this position. Then *exhale*, holding the 'crunch' and reach your arms further forward.

Now reverse directions. *Inhale*, reaching for the ceiling again, then gradually return to the start position. Repeat 4-8 times.

#4 The Dart

Lie on your stomach with your arms at your sides. Reach the top of your head and your feet in opposite directions (as shown by the arrows below) until your upper body, knees and feet are off the floor.

Next, reach your fingertips toward your heels, pulling your shoulder blades down away from your ears. Keep your arms as straight as possible and squeeze your shoulder blades together. *Avoid resting your arms against your body when you squeeze your shoulder blades together.* Make your arm and back muscles work!

Look down so that the top of your head points forward. This will keep the back of your neck long.

Hold this position 10-15 seconds, relax, then repeat 2-3 more times.

(When performed correctly, the dart has the best spine muscle activity of all these back strengthening exercises.)



#5 Forearm plank

Lie on your stomach and rest on your forearms with your elbows directly under your shoulders. Press through your shoulder blades until they are spaced wide on your back (instead of being pinched together).

Next, tighten your abdominals to lift your waist off the floor. Form a straight line through your neck and upper body to your knees. Hold this position 10-15 seconds, then lower your waist to the floor. Repeat 3-4 times.



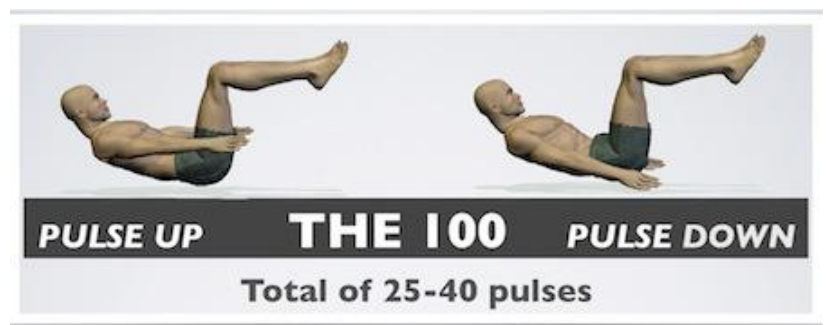
(Modification: To increase the challenge, try this exercise on your toes instead of your knees)

#6 The 100

Start in the Tabletop position (#2). Next curl your upper body off the floor and reach your arms forward past your thighs as you do in Pilates Crunches (#3)

Hold your arms straight, then begin pulsing your arms down toward the floor (without touching the floor) and back up 2 times per second, holding still in the crunch position. The distance for the arm pulse is about 4-6 inches.

Repeat for 30-50 total pulses to start.



#7 Airplaning

From hands and knees position, extend your left leg behind you. Straighten your knee and hold your leg straight out from your hip. Hold your trunk steady as if there were a cup of coffee balancing on your back.

Next, hold your left leg up and reach your right arm forward, maintaining a steady trunk. Hold 3-4 seconds and reach as far as you are able with your left leg and your right arm. Lower your arm and leg and then switch to the opposite side.



Repeat 5-6 times each side with a 3-4 second hold at the top.

(Modification: To increase the challenge for this exercise, touch your elbow to your opposite knee (without letting your leg touch the ground) each time before you stretch your arm and leg out.)

