

# Strengthening the Torso

## Add fun to your core moves with these effective exercises.

When designing a group core workout, it's fun to blend traditional isolation exercises with nontraditional stabilization challenges. I cue my participants to think of the core as the entire torso minus the appendages and to remember that the muscles work as a synergistic team. I remind students that the stronger the abdominal group becomes, the stronger the back musculature can become, and vice versa.

As an instructor, how can you deliver a fun, safe and time-efficient workout that targets the core? Keep in mind that 85%–90% of all core musculature is non-vertical. Try the following four exercises to work various muscle groups.

### **SUPERMAN ARM SWEEP**

**Muscles Worked.** This exercise targets the spinal extensors.

**How to Do the Exercise.** Lying prone, draw the lower abdomen toward the spine. While squeezing the glutes together and the shoulder blades together, lift the head and torso off the ground and reach back toward the toes. Start with the arms at your sides, palms up. Hold the back extension; sweep arms horizontally, turning palms down, and end with the arms extended like Superman. Ten to 15 reps should fatigue most people.

For a more challenging option, have

participants teeter-totter forward and back during the Superman phase. As the arms sweep into Superman, lift the thighs off the floor (hip extension) and hold a few seconds. Then sweep the arms back to the starting position, lifting the chest off the floor (back extension), and hold a few seconds.

### **STABILITY-BALL BALANCE DRILL**

**Muscles Worked.** This exercise builds balance in all core stabilizer muscles.

**How to Do the Exercise.** Kneel on a stability ball. Attempt to lift the hands off the ball and place them out in front or overhead while balancing on the knees. Hold for 15–30 seconds; build up to a minute. If this exercise is too difficult for participants, have them remain on all fours or alternate lifting one arm at a time.

### **PARTNER ONE-TWO COMBO**

**Muscles Worked.** This exercise challenges muscular endurance and strength in the rectus abdominis and the internal/external obliques.

**How to Do the Exercise.** Ask people to partner up and face each other. Have them assume a starting sit-up position: knees bent, back on the floor, arms folded across the chest. The first person does a sit-up and throws a one-two cross-punch combo as the other sits up and places his palms facing away in a sparring position to receive the combo. Partners then lower

into the starting position and do 15–20 reps. Repeat, switching roles.

### **PARTNER BAND PULL-DOWNS**

**Muscles Worked.** This exercise challenges muscular endurance and strength in the transversus abdominis (TVA) and the rectus abdominis. It also works the core stabilizers in the neck, shoulder girdle and lumbar-pelvic-hip complex.

**How to Do the Exercise.** Ask people to pair up and go back to back. Instruct them to draw in the lower abdomen (TVA) toward the spine and maintain optimum postural alignment. Cue them to squeeze the buttocks and maintain the drawing-in maneuver. Have them hold a resistance band above their heads (begin with pink or yellow). The first partner holds the two handles; the second holds the middle of the band with two hands. The first person crunches forward while the other holds the band steady to provide resistance. Do 15–20 reps, and then switch roles. Rest, and repeat to fatigue.

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