

Health[®]

April 2012

The 5-Minute Ultimate Core Workout
You rely on your core (a.k.a. back muscles and abs) for virtually every move you make. Here's how to show it some love.

Super-fast results



Who can resist a toning two-for-one deal? That's why we love this strengthening and shaping workout from instructor Maryanne Blake at the Sports Club/LA—Boston, based on her hot ZenCore class. Each move challenges your core—those crucial ab and back muscles you call on every time you turn, bend, lift, you name it—while sculpting other muscle groups, too.

To shore up your core, plus tighten you up all over, pick an upper-body, lower-body and mid-section move and perform the trio twice, 3 to 4 times a week.



Upper body: Push-up alternating knee tap

Start in "up" part of push-up, hands directly under shoulders, body straight. Engage core; bend elbows to lower body toward floor. Press back up; bring left knee to outside of left elbow; pause for 2 seconds, then return to starting position. Do another push-up, bring right knee to right elbow, return to start; that's 1 rep.

Make it easier: Drop knees to floor. Continue for 20 to 30 seconds.



Upper body: Plank jack

***More challenging**

Get into "up" part of push-up position with hands directly under shoulders, body straight from head to heels. Engage core and bend elbows (keep them in toward body) to lower body toward floor. Straighten arms; at same time, quickly jump feet forward to outside of hands; jump back to previous position.

Make it easier: Instead of jumping, walk feet forward (and back). Continue for 20 to 30 seconds.



Lower body: Flying bridge

Sit with knees bent, feet on floor, hands on floor by hips, fingertips forward. Push up into reverse tabletop with knees over ankles, hands under shoulders. Lower hips, pushing them back between arms until legs straighten and weight is evenly divided between hands and feet. Bend knees; push hips back up to previous position.

Make it easier: Lower butt to mat before pushing back up to reverse tabletop. Continue for 20 to 30 seconds.



Lower body: Butt kicker

***More challenging**

From all fours, lift hips to come into Downward Dog; walk feet forward until feet are under hips, hands under shoulders. Keeping feet flexed, raise right foot and try to touch heel to butt; lower it and repeat with other foot. Pick up pace, alternating feet as quickly as possible for 20 to 30 seconds. Next, bend knees slightly and jump both heels up to try to touch butt; continue for 20 to 30 more seconds.

Make it easier: Alternate feet during second part instead of jumping.



Mid-section: Standing knee tuck

Stand with feet together. Lift left leg straight back, hinging forward at hips, reaching hands forward by ears; keep hips level and body straight from hands to heel. Using abs, draw left knee in to chest, bending elbows to pull arms down to knee; return to previous position.

Make it easier: Hold onto chair or counter with one hand. Continue for 20 to 30 seconds; switch sides and repeat.



Mid-section: Rock the boat

***More challenging**

Sit with knees bent, feet on floor, hands on backs of thighs. Tighten abs. Begin to roll down onto upper back, letting feet lift; generate enough momentum to rock back up. Come to standing, then jump, twisting body to left in air. Jump again, twisting back to center; lower back down and repeat sequence on opposite side.

Make it easier: Use one hand to push up off floor. Continue for 20 to 30 seconds.