



**STRENGTHEN AND SCULPT
YOUR ABS, BACK, CORE AND
OBLIQUES BY TRAINING TO DO
300 CONSECUTIVE SIT-UPS**

BRETT STEWART

7

WEEKS TO

**300
SIT-UPS**

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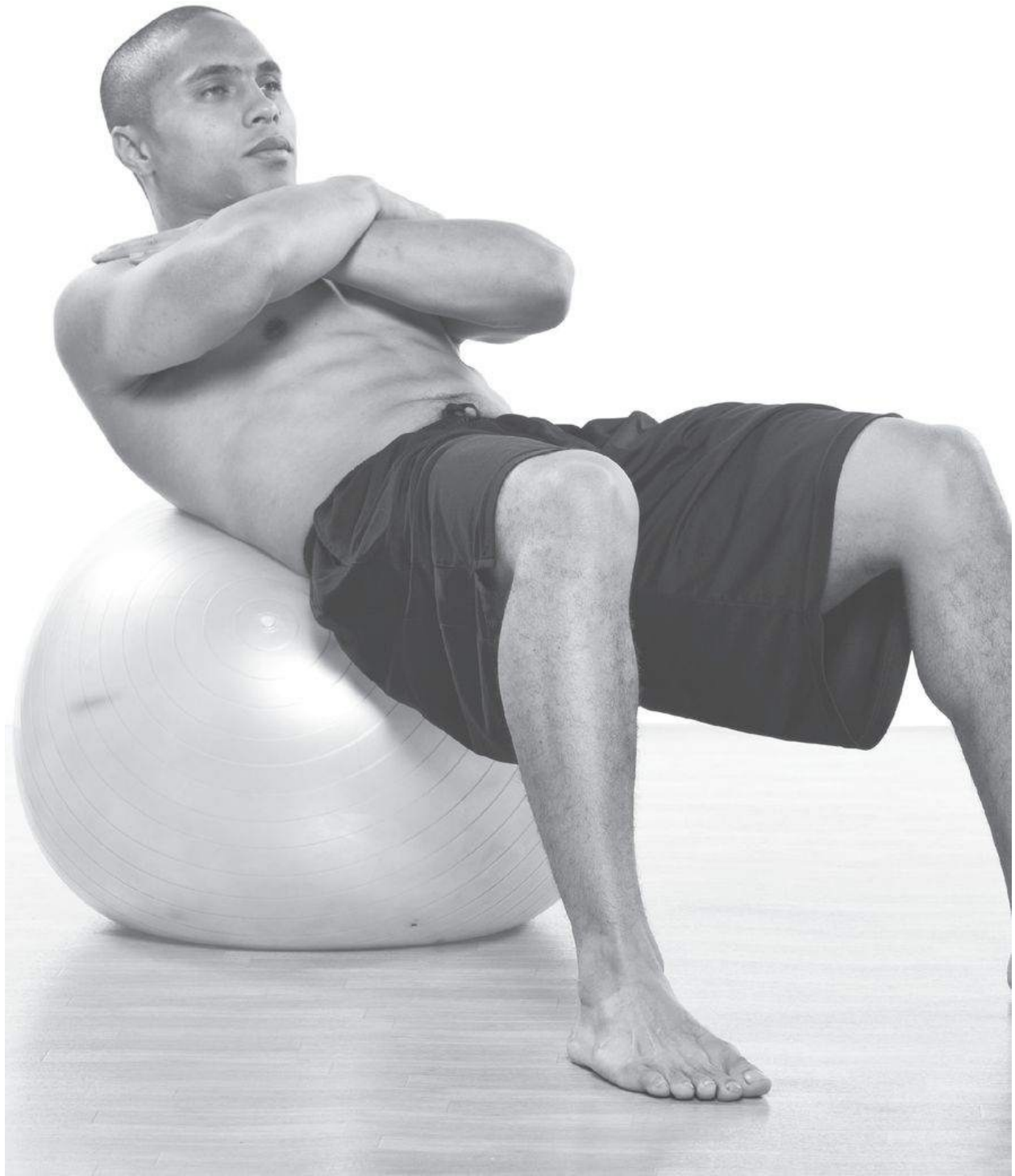
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This book is dedicated to the man who taught me to “measure twice and cut once.” Dad, thanks for giving me the tools and confidence to figure almost anything out—and the guts to give all the other stuff a shot.

“The human body has limitations; the human spirit is boundless.”
—Dean Karnazes, *Ultramarathon Man: Confessions of an All-Night Runner*





PART 1:

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Pick an activity. Better yet, choose three. Let's say you went with "jogging," "jumping jacks" and "playing chess." What muscles do they have in common? That last one should mess up the results, right?

Nope.

Every move you make from the moment you get out of bed—actually, even the act of climbing out of the sack—uses your core. The muscles of your lower torso make it possible for you to stand upright, shift your bodyweight, bend, twist, walk, and move in any direction. Remember the "playing chess" example? You use your core to maintain your posture in a chair and as the base to lift your arm to move the pieces. Needless to say, a healthy and strong core is extremely important to your ability to perform any action.

So, how do you strengthen the muscles of your abdomen and lower back to develop a strong core? It starts with one of the easiest exercises to perform—the sit-up.

Since almost every move you make uses elements of your core, there are literally hundreds of exercises that can be used to strengthen and tone your abs and lower back. I've taken the easiest-to-master and most-effective exercise—the sit-up—and created a program that will challenge you to build up to 100, 200, even 300 reps while learning and performing over 30 other exercises to develop total core strength and improve your posture and athletic ability in the process.

"Wait, I'm confused," you say. "You must be talking about crunches. I've been told that sit-ups are bad for your back and we should do crunches instead, right?"

Sit-ups have gotten a bad rap over the last decade or so, and it's true that performing sit-ups (as well as dozens of other exercises) with bad form has the potential to strain your back. But this book is dedicated to rebuilding the proud legacy of the sit-up as one of the most beneficial exercises for developing your core and putting to rest misconceptions about the danger of sit-ups by teaching proper form.

"OK, smarty-pants, how are you going to accomplish all that and make sit-ups

in vogue again?”

Simple: I'll start by dispelling myths about the dangers of sit-ups and explaining proper form—which just happens to be the same form that's used in basic training physical fitness tests (PFT) by the military—to lessen the stress on your hips and back, provide multiple variations of the move for beginners through experts, and demonstrate over 30 additional exercises designed to strengthen your abs, back and hips to enable you to do 100, 200 or even 300 sit-ups!

In as little as 15 minutes a day, three days a week, by following the program in this book you can improve your posture, boost your strength and athletic performance, lose weight and burn fat to develop the body you've always wanted. It all starts with a simple sit-up. Pretty easy, right?

About the Book

7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups is built around a simple yet effective routine that can benefit men and women of any age and fitness level. By incorporating 30-plus different basic, moderate and advanced exercises, along with proper-form sit-ups, to strengthen and tone the abdominal and lower back muscles, you can be on your way to 100, 200 or even 300 sit-ups in as little as seven weeks!

The rule of thumb for any lifestyle modification is that it takes anywhere from 7 to 14 days to create a new routine, and this book will make it as easy as possible to get started—and succeed. Your success depends on building a sustainable routine that's familiar, comfortable and repeatable. Working out is hard enough without having to get up early to drive to the gym, remember how to use complicated machines and figure out your daily workout (not to mention locating your membership card!). You can get an incredible total core workout right in the comfort of your home, saving yourself precious time and gas by not traveling to the gym. You don't even need an expensive rack of dumbbells, bars or how-to DVDs—all you need is your body (you have one of those, right?) and maybe a medicine ball, stability ball or exercise band.

Since they're a bodyweight exercise, sit-ups require you to raise the weight of your upper torso primarily using your abdominal muscles. Two important factors to consider before beginning the program are the initial strength and conditioning of your core (including your lower back and hip flexors) and your bodyweight; the heavier you are, the more weight you'll be forced to raise with every repetition. The good news is that as you progress thorough the program, you'll strengthen your core and burn fat due to a revved-up metabolism and the growth of lean muscle. If you stick with the program and focus on completing each workout, you can reshape your body and lose weight in about 15 minutes a day, three days a week.



If you have any lingering pains or previous injuries—especially in your back—please consult a doctor before you begin. Once you feel you’re ready to progress, do so slowly by listening to your body and stopping at any sharp pain.

Part I is the introduction to the *7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups* program, explaining the benefits of sit-ups and how they fit into overall core strengthening and toning. We’ll explain and demonstrate proper sit-up form for the beginner, intermediate and advanced variations, as well as many of the other exercises you’ll be using throughout the program. The goal of Part I is to get you ready for an exercise regimen that will transform your body and change your physique. The first step begins with preparation and setting goals, followed by warming up and taking the initial sit-up test.

Part II gets you started with either the Level I (4-week) or Level II (7-week) programs. Each is a training plan for all ages and abilities. Both progressive plans build on the previous day’s workout to keep you continually activating a wide range of core muscles. In addition to sit-ups and crunches, there are over 30 total-core-strengthening exercises to develop your abs, lower back and hips to enable you to work toward your goal. Part II also provides step-by-step instruction for all the exercises used in the programs. This section contains the maintenance plan for how to use all the exercises you’ve mastered throughout the book to keep your abs, back, hips and obliques strong and your physique lean

and ripped.

The Appendix is where you'll find the Prep-level program for beginners who need a less-intensive program while they're building up their core strength, confidence and knowledge of proper form. The Appendix is where you'll find the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups log so you can track your progress throughout the plan, and also the section on warming up and stretching.

In addition, throughout the book you'll find tips for improving your sit-up form, strengthening your core and getting the most out of all your workouts. For additional exercises and moves that didn't make it into the book, along with exercise tips and tricks and a quick-start guide with some nutritional advice, visit us online at 7weekstofitness.com.

What Is a Sit-Up?

There are so many variations, misconceptions and general confusion about the exercise, so for the purposes of this book the basic definition of a sit-up will be: An abdominal-centric exercise starting in a supine position with both feet restrained while flat on the ground, the knees bent, and the arms crossed at the chest with the hands resting on opposite upper pectoral muscles. By contracting the rectus abdominis, the head, shoulders and back are lifted off the floor until the upper torso is 30° to 45° in relation to the floor.

What is the difference between a sit-up and a crunch? Essentially, during a sit-up the lower back is raised off the ground, and when performing a traditional crunch, the lower back remains on the ground. Keep in mind that sit-ups and crunches are both staples of this program; just because the book's title has "sit-ups" in it doesn't mean the program is just sit-ups followed by more sit-ups! This book features an additional 30-plus exercises to develop total core strength to enable you to do more sit-ups than you ever thought possible.

By raising the lower back off the floor, the sit-up movement activates the hip flexors and places a greater demand on the muscles of the lower back to stabilize the spine. For some, this extra pressure can cause discomfort in the lower back, most notably if you have a previous back injury, poor posture and weak abdominal or back muscles. Luckily, through training your core with the variety of specific abdominal and lower-back-strengthening exercises in the program and focusing on performing sit-ups with proper form, you can eliminate most if not all of that lower back discomfort.

Sit-ups are extremely beneficial for athletes; they train the body through a full range of motion and challenge the abdominal muscles, activate the hip flexors and engage the lower back and deep core muscles for support. Athletes in any sport that requires running, cycling, throwing, swimming, twisting or jumping (that just about covers every sport, right?) can benefit from incorporating sit-ups into their workout routines. As a running and triathlon coach, I make sure my athletes strengthen their hips, core and lower back. Sit-ups are a secret weapon to target all those muscles in one exercise!

SIT-UPS VS. CRUNCHES

Let's compare sit-ups and crunches side by side so we can illustrate the muscles used, range of motion (ROM) and benefits of each.

SIT-UPS

- Head, shoulders and upper and lower back are raised off the floor
- Muscles used: rectus abdominis, hip flexors, erector spinae
- ROM: full range of rectus abdominis, activation of hip flexors and spinal erectors for stability
- Benefits: strengthen rectus abdominis, hip flexors and spinal erectors

CRUNCHES

- Head, shoulders and upper back are raised off the floor
- Muscles used: primarily rectus abdominis
- ROM: incomplete contraction of rectus abdominis, limited activation of spinal erectors and hip flexors
- Benefits: Targeted focus on rectus abdominis

Note: Traditionally, crunches are performed with the hands clasped behind the head or with the fingertips at the temples, but throughout the programs in this book, crunches will use the same hand/arm positions as those for sit-ups (see page 14).

Proper Sit-Up Form

Throughout the rest of this book, when the term “sit-up” is used, this will be the proper form we’re referring to.

STARTING POSITION: On a padded surface, lie in a supine position (face up) with your knees bent about 90°. Using a partner or fixed object, restrain your feet so they remain flat on the floor during the entire movement. Rest your head, shoulders and back on the floor, and maintain proper curvature of your lower spine, not allowing it to touch the floor.

Note: Restraining the feet activates the hip flexors and leg muscles to initiate the upward movement. This hip flexor activation and wider ROM is beneficial to athletes looking to reap the benefits from strengthening the hip flexors and upper leg muscles. Foot restraint is consistent with military PFTs.

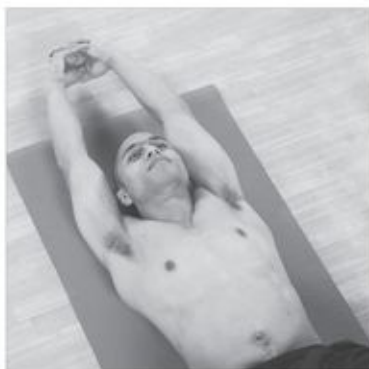
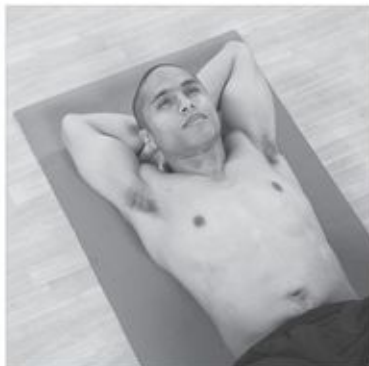
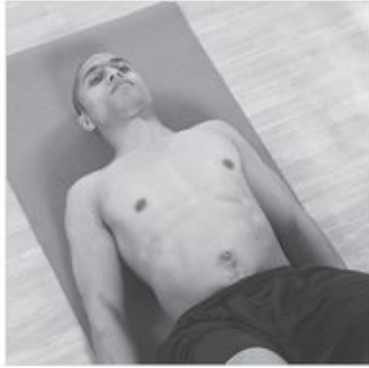
Also remember that you should not be moving forward with each repetition. If you are, then you’re constantly changing the angle of your hips and legs and placing excessive force on your lower back. Since we’re focusing on restrained-leg sit-ups, make sure your partner has a firm hold on your feet and is pressing them to the floor. If you’re using a fixed object, concentrate on keeping your feet and posterior in place and your knee angle the same throughout the movement.



HAND/ARM PLACEMENT

Choose the hand placement that fits your ability level from the list below; you'll notice that "fingers interlocked behind head" doesn't make the list. Check out page 16 to learn why.

- **BEGINNER SIT-UP:** hands palm-down on the floor beneath the lower back or next to the hips
- **INTERMEDIATE SIT-UP:** arms crossed at the chest, hands palm-down on opposite upper chest
- **ADVANCED SIT-UP:** arms extended behind the head, elbows bent, forearms crossed behind the head with hands resting on the top of opposite shoulder blades



- **EXTREME SIT-UP:** arms extended directly overhead, elbows locked and palms facing each other with fingers interlocked

During the sit-up, your upper body acts as a lever, with your abdominals as the antagonist and the waist as the fulcrum. The farther you distribute the weight of your arms toward or over your head, the more weight you're lifting with each rep and the more challenging (and rewarding) sit-ups become. I recommend starting with the intermediate hand position; if it's too difficult to maintain your form, then move to one of the beginner variations. After one week of the program, if you feel that the intermediate hand position is not challenging enough, then move up to the advanced.

TIP: Focus on breathing out on the contraction and breathing in as you return to starting position. Exhaling on the way up actually helps contract the core and braces the spine. Breathe as normally and as rhythmically as you can during the reps so you don't become lightheaded—especially when raising and lowering your head!

Ready? Relax and breathe slowly and deeply. Inhale and get ready to sit-up.

UPWARD CONTRACTION PHASE

Exhale and contract your abdominal muscles to steadily lift your head, arms and upper back off the floor in a controlled manner. Keep your upper back and neck straight and maintain the same position with your hands and arms throughout the movement. Stop the upward movement when your back is approximately 45° in relation to the floor, and pause briefly before lowering your body to the floor.

TIP: If you're using a partner for sit-ups, have them restrain your feet by placing their hands on top of your feet with their thumbs on the inside of each ankle and fingers on the outside. The bones of your feet (tarsals and metatarsals) are very sensitive and easy to break—do not have your partner kneel or stand on your feet. If you're restraining your feet without a partner, make sure the restraint does not hurt the top of your feet; place a towel or sweatshirt on top of your feet before sliding it under the restraint. A sit-up bench is preferred, but an ottoman or couch makes a good substitute.

DOWNWARD “CURL” PHASE

Inhale and begin to lower your upper back and shoulders toward the floor. To lessen the pressure on your lower back and abdominal muscles, you may round your upper back slightly and roll your spine on the floor as you return to starting position. Keeping your abs tight, lightly touch both shoulder blades to the floor before repeating the upward contraction phase. That’s 1 rep.

Crunches

Crunches are a big part of the program and an alternate exercise for those not looking to perform sit-ups. Here's how to perform a proper form crunch:

STARTING POSITION: On a padded surface, lie supine position (face-up) with your knees bent to about 90°. Place your feet flat on the floor; they should remain there during the entire movement. Rest your head, shoulders and back on the floor and maintain proper curvature of your lower spine, not allowing it to touch the floor.



HAND/ARM POSITION

For this book, we'll use the same hand and arm positions for crunches as for sit-ups. Check out “Proper Sit-Up Form” (page 14) and choose which hand position suits your ability level.

Note: It's important not to interlock your fingers behind your head. This often leads to yanking your head forward as you start the movement, placing unneeded stress on your neck and throwing your upper body position out of whack. This improper hand position usually leads to “leading with your elbows”—advancing your elbows in front of your head by bringing them closer together on the transverse frontal plane.

UPWARD CONTRACTION PHASE

Exhale and contract your abdominal muscles to steadily lift your head and shoulder blades off the floor in a controlled manner. Keep your upper back and neck straight and maintain the same position with your hands and arms throughout the movement. Stop the upward movement when your shoulder blades are about 1/2 inch off the floor, and pause briefly before slowly lowering your body to the floor.

DOWNWARD PHASE

In a controlled manner, keep your abdominal muscles engaged while lowering your upper back and head toward the floor; remember to keep your neck straight. Carefully touch the floor with the back of your head. That's 1 rep.

TIP: If you would rather perform crunches instead of sit-ups, then go right ahead. You can still use the programs in this book; note that you'll just need to swap out the sit-ups for crunches. However, note that you'll be missing out on the additional strengthening of your hip flexors, quads, lower back and hamstrings in favor of an easier exercise.

The Muscles behind the Movements

RECTUS ABDOMINIS Commonly referred to as the “six-pack” muscles, the rectus abdominis is a pair of muscles running vertically from its insertion points on the cartilages of the fifth, sixth and seventh ribs and xiphoid process (the bottom of the sternum) down to its origin at the top of the pubic crest. The rectus abdominis is responsible for spinal flexion, or compressing the abdominal cavity and bringing the pelvis and rib cage closer together; this is the major muscle involved in crunches and sit-ups.

Did you know that due to the structure of the tendinous inscriptions and linea alba—the fibrous bands that separate your rectus abdominis vertically and horizontally—it’s possible to develop an eight-pack?

ERECTOR SPINAE This paired bundle of muscles and tendons connects the lower portion of the spine (11 and 12 thoracic and lumbar vertebrae) to the pelvic girdle, and from the sacrum to iliac crests. Extending the spine and maintaining a straight posture is the main function of this muscle group.

HIP FLEXORS A group of skeletal muscles that are instrumental in human locomotion, these muscles work in concert to mobilize the femur and raise the knee in front of the body.

OBLIQUES The obliques are a pair of muscle groups located on the lateral (side) and anterior (front) abdomen on both sides of the body and are connected from several rib cartilages to the iliac crest (the top edge of the pelvic girdle). The obliques aid in the compression of the abdominal cavity via spinal flexion and also are activated in rotation. Strong obliques aid in most athletic maneuvers that require twisting motions.

QUADRICEPS The quadriceps is a large muscle group made up of four muscles on the front of the thigh. It’s the strongest, leanest muscle mass on the body. The “quads” are responsible for straightening the knee joint and are crucial in walking, running, squatting and jumping.

HAMSTRINGS The hamstrings, located on the back of the thigh, are made up of three muscles responsible for knee bending and hip straightening. The hamstrings work as antagonists to the quadriceps to enable walking, running and jumping, as well as maintaining stability in the hip and knee.

Why Sit-Ups?

“You’re writing a book about sit-ups? What are you, nuts? Sit-ups are bad for your back, hurt your hips and should be avoided at all costs—it must be true because the Ab-Banger 3000 infomercial told me so!”

Let’s face it—if you picked up this book, there’s a good chance that either your core isn’t as strong as you want it to be or you’re up for the challenge of performing 100, 200 or 300 consecutive sit-ups. Either way, the programs are designed for you to succeed in your quest. Sit-ups are a great way to strengthen and tone your core, and they’re a familiar exercise that most of us have performed in the past; the descriptions and photos are provided here to help you perfect the form. Add in 30-plus other core-strengthening exercises, and you have a well-rounded program to develop a strong, stable and flexible core and enhance your athletic ability!

“Buy why did you choose sit-ups over crunches for the title of this book?”

It was a conscious decision to choose sit-ups instead of crunches based on the following reasons:

- Sit-ups are an exercise that most of us have performed before. That familiarity means it’s a movement most people will feel comfortable executing—once they develop the proper form.

- National militaries all over the world (as well as most civil servants) use sit-ups in their qualification tests. The sit-up is one of the core exercises used to grade acceptance and graduation from basic training and continues to be a staple in Special Forces exams as well. In combat or protecting our streets, each of those people in uniform has passed PFTs that included—you guessed it—sit-ups.

- Crunches are also a big part of the program, but the term “sit-up” is immediately identifiable. When you pick up this book you should have a good idea what to expect!

“I’ve been told that sit-ups are really bad for women.”

This is an easy one: no. To explain, let’s check out the minimum requirements for the Army Basic Training Physical Fitness Test (PFT):

	2:00 Push-Ups	2:00 Sit-Ups	2-Mile Run
Males 17-21	35	47	16:36
Females 17-21	13	47	19:42

Women cadets are graded exactly the same as the men when it comes to sit-ups! As an added bonus for the ladies, most women have a less heavy muscle mass in their upper torso and arms, and this weight reduction allows for more reps and more advanced hand/ arm position. Most women following this program will advance to the extreme hand position before the men do!

Sit-ups are a key exercise to boost athletic performance in men and women because the muscles of the trunk stabilize the spine and pelvis, which in turn allow for powerful movements of an athlete's extremities. To put it another way, all athletic movements originate from the center of the body and radiate out to the arms and legs. A strong and stable core is the foundation for any rapid or powerful movement of the body.

So, what if I told you that sit-ups can actually reduce back pain? Really, no joke. Strengthening your core improves sitting and walking posture, and helps to prevent injuries from squatting, sitting, twisting, jumping, walking... OK, you get the picture.

Sit-Ups in the Military

All branches of the military use sit-ups or crunches to gauge a cadet's physical fitness. There are compelling reasons for this. First, sit-ups are one of the best ways of assessing core strength while they're also one of the best ways to develop that strength. Sit-ups require you to lift about 50 percent of your bodyweight, utilizing a complete network of muscles and stabilizers working together throughout your abdomen, lower back, hips and legs. Core strength is vital to all athletic movements, especially the demanding requirements of boot camp and active duty of all branches of the military.

Armed forces around the world include sit-ups as one of the core exercises on their physical fitness tests. In the U.S., the Marines have the most stringent Physical Fitness Test (PFT) for a non-Special Forces designation. The minimum number of sit-ups to become a Marine is 40, but 50 repetitions are recommended to achieve a score high enough to pass in "Class 3."

The Marine PFT consists of pull-ups, sit-ups/ crunches, and a timed three-mile run. Points are awarded for each category, with a minimum passing score based on the following age groups.

Marine Corps: PFT Points Required Per Class Designation

Class	Age 17-26	Age 27-39	Age 40-45	Age 46+
1st	225	200	175	150
2nd	175	150	125	100
3rd	135	110	88	65

Marine Corps Physical Fitness Test Points: Male

Points	Pull-Ups	Crunches	3-Mile Run
100	20	100	18:00
99		99	18:10
98		98	18:20
97		97	18:30
96		96	18:40
95	19	95	18:50
94		94	19:00
93		93	19:10
92		92	19:20
91		91	19:30
90	18	90	19:40
89		89	19:50
88		88	20:00
87		87	20:10
86		86	20:20
85	17	85	20:30
84		84	20:40
83		83	20:50
82		82	21:00
81		81	21:10
80	16	80	21:20

Points	Pull-Ups	Crunches	3-Mile Run
79		79	21:30
78		78	21:40
77		77	21:50
76		76	22:00
75	15	75	22:10
74		74	22:20
73		73	22:30
72		72	22:40
71		71	22:50
70	14	70	23:00
69		69	23:10
68		68	23:20
67		67	23:30
66		66	23:40
65	13	65	23:50
64		64	24:00
63		63	24:10
62		62	24:20
61		61	24:30
60	12	60	24:40
59		59	24:50
58		58	25:00
57		57	25:10
56		56	25:20

Points	Pull-Ups	Crunches	3-Mile Run
55	11	55	25:30
54		54	25:40
53		53	25:50
52		52	26:00
51		51	26:10
50	10	50	26:20
49		49	26:30
48		48	26:40
47		47	26: 50
46		46	27:00
45	9	45	27:10
44		44	27:20
43		43	27:30
42		42	27:40
41		41	27:50
40	8	40	28:00

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Can I just do crunches instead of sit-ups?

A. Sure, it doesn't have to be one or the other. This program has plenty of sit-up and crunch variations and over 30 additional moves to strengthen and tone your core. From planks to leg lifts, supermans to hip raises, we cover dozens of different exercises to target your core from multiple different angles and to keep your workouts constantly changing and challenging.

Q. Are sit-ups bad for my back?

A. Let me answer this question again and put it to rest once and for all: no. Your weak back, poor posture or improper sit-up form are the problems, not the sit-ups. This program features more than two dozen different exercises performed in conjunction with sit-ups to strengthen your abdominal muscles, lower back, hips, glutes, quads and hamstrings. Sit-up form is often misunderstood, and this confusion can lead to bad habits that can put undue emphasis on your hips, which in turn causes stress on the lower back. By themselves, sit-ups are no more dangerous for your back than any other bodyweight exercise done with improper form; some of these common culprits for lower back pain and injury are squats, deadlifts and good mornings.

Q. Can I develop six-pack abs doing sit-ups?

A. In a word, no. Sit-ups are a beneficial exercise for strengthening and defining the rectus abdominis muscles as part of an exercise routine, but they're not the be-all and end-all for total core strength. That's why this program has over 30 exercises to strengthen your core. Developing a "six-pack," or extreme definition of your rectus abdominis muscles, requires a lean physique with a low body fat percentage and hypertrophic growth of lean muscle, and sit-ups are just one of many exercises to help get you there. Building the core of your dreams is absolutely possible—I've personally done it—and it requires balanced nutrition and an exercise routine with multiple strength, conditioning and cardiovascular

components. Luckily, you're holding just such an exercise program in your hands. For more on developing a six-pack, see "Setting Your Goals" on page 29.

Q. How many days a week should I do sit-ups?

A. There's a long-standing myth that your core can be worked every day. Let's take a moment and address that. When you place any muscle under repeated stress from lifting weights (time under tension) or repeated movement, microtears begin to form. These extremely small tears in the muscle fibers are actually a positive benefit of working out; when they heal, your muscles grow bigger and stronger. In order for muscles to properly recover, heal and grow, you should wait 48 hours before working out that same muscle group again. Now, I ask you, what is your core made up of? Your rectus abdominis, erector spinae, obliques, hip flexors, quads, glutes and hamstrings are all muscles and need to rest, recover and grow. I recommend a program of no more than four core workouts a week for advanced athletes, and three days a week for beginners.

Q. How does this routine fit in with my regular workouts?

A. That depends on your goals. If you're an athlete that requires sports-specific training, *7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups* is an extremely effective program for strengthening your core and supplementing your sport's workout regimen. If you're a beginner and looking to improve your posture, lose weight and tone your abdomen while strengthening your core, then the program in this book should be combined with 3–4 heart-rate-raising cardio exercises per week such as a brisk walk, bike ride, jogging or swimming for 20 minutes for maximal results. For those of us who fall between these two extremes, this program is the core component (pun intended) of a full-body workout plan. See "Setting Your Goals" on page 29. I recommend completing this exercise program near the end of your workout after lifting weights or bodyweight exercises and before doing cardio or cool-down.

Q. As a woman, I'm afraid sit-ups will make my abdomen too big or ripped. Can I use the program to tone my core without all the bulk?

A. Thanks for the (long) question! This program uses over 30 different moves to strengthen and tone your core from multiple angles; the focus is on all-over core strength and toning. Women have less of a propensity to build bulky muscles due to less naturally occurring testosterone in their bodies, so as long as you aren't

supplementing and working out to the extreme, you shouldn't worry. However, as we cover in "Setting Your Goals" on page 29, it's important to understand that if you focus solely on sit-ups and push yourself to hit 200 or 300 reps, you'll experience hypertrophy (strengthening and building up muscles) in your abdomen. If you're focused on toning, make sure to follow the program and work your entire core.

Q. Should I be sore after every workout?

A. Soreness may be normal if you're a beginner, have recently changed up your routine or are trying a new activity. The initial soreness should lessen overtime; it's not normal to be sore after every workout. If you continue to be sore, you may need to take more days off between workouts.

Q. How should I breathe for each movement?

A. For most exercises we'll cover when to breathe in and out, but overall it's a good idea to breathe out when you're exerting the most force (pushing, pulling, etc.) and breathe in on the recovery. Breathing properly is a big part of being able to perform some of the main exercises we'll be covering in this book, so make sure to focus on breathing rhythmically and never holding your breath during sets.

Q. Will this workout be an effective way to lose weight?

A. Any exercise above what you're currently doing aids in the goal of losing weight and getting into shape. The programs in this book utilize the fat-burning benefits of circuit training and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) to help you lose weight and get into fantastic shape while developing total core strength. When paired with balanced nutrition, you'll be firing up your metabolism to burn excess fat and shred your physique.

Q. What's the best time of day to do the workouts?

A. That's totally up to you and your daily schedule. My personal preference is to perform this program in the morning before I eat and maximize the fat-burning effect of training while my body is burning about 60 percent fat as fuel, which happens during sleep and when you first wake before eating.

Q. What days work best for following this program?

A. Again, this is up to you, but I've found over the years that the success rate goes up exponentially if you pick three days during the week to perform a structured program like the one featured in this book. In order to get the optimal rest of 48 hours between working the same muscle group again, I recommend scheduling your workouts on Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Q. What's the single best tip you can give to someone about to start this program?

A. Create realistic goals ahead of time and stick with the program until you meet them. Whether it's 20 or 200 sit-ups, losing 5 pounds or 50, or building the strength in your core to help eliminate lower back pain and straighten out your posture, commitment, focus and follow-through are the most effective methods to reach your goals.

No one expects you to be a pro at every movement. Some exercises may come naturally while others feel completely foreign. I personally have fought with proper V-sit form and the extreme move of hanging windshield wipers. All you can do is keep working on perfecting the form and get stronger along the way. Don't give up and sit out an exercise if you can't do it—make the investment in yourself and learn the proper form for each move. You'll only reap the benefits.

Before You Begin

Before you start any exercise regimen, it's important that you see your doctor and get their clearance to perform any physical activity. Really, I'm not just putting this here because I have to—it's important and sound advice from a certified personal trainer. (OK, as a CPT, it's required that I ask all my clients to get permission from a doctor before getting started.) Please make an appointment, show up and explain the challenge you're about to embark on. Tell 'em Brett sent you.

Once you begin the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups program, perform it at your own pace and within your personal level of fitness. If you feel extremely fatigued or have an uncomfortable level of pain and soreness, take two to three days off from the workout. If the discomfort or pain persists, you should see a health care professional.

Preparation: What You'll Need

WATER BOTTLE Hydrate before, during and after your workout with water, not sports drinks. The 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups program should take you less than 20 minutes to complete. When working out for less than 45 minutes you shouldn't need the additional calories or salts from sports drinks.

PADDED EXERCISE MAT A padded carpet will suffice, but why not splurge and get a comfortable, padded, nonslip mat? The multiple movements throughout the program will have you on your back, butt, hands and knees, and belly, and the padding really helps to make it a far more pleasurable experience!

TOWEL While it's nice to wipe your brow in between sets, it's even more important to dry your hands of sweat before doing any exercise like mountain climbers or bird dog that requires you to brace your bodyweight with your hands.

TIMER Many exercises in this program are completed at timed intervals. While any timer will do, I sincerely recommend one with a big digital screen showing minutes and seconds and featuring buttons that are easy to reach and start/stop. If you have a smartphone, there are many apps that fit the bill. (The 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups iPhone app just happens to feature a convenient timer as well.)

SPACE Your workout area should be well-ventilated and free from obstructions so you can complete all movements freely without hitting anything.

COMFORTABLE CLOTHES It's usually a given that you want to exercise in non-restrictive clothing, but it's important to note that pants or shorts with a bulky waistband can cause discomfort when performing exercises on your back (like sit-ups, crunches or leg lifts).

STABILITY BALL Get a stability ball (sometimes called Swiss or exercise ball) that's big enough—and strong enough—for you to sit on and do crunches.

You'll use it for a bunch of exercises throughout the book.

EXERCISE BAND There are many options for exercise bands. I've seen exotic models with multiple bands where you can adjust the tension, and I've personally used a rubber jump-rope in a pinch. For the movements in the programs that call for exercise bands, I recommend one that you can easily attach to a fixed object and that has a strength such that you would be able to stretch it about 24 inches. It may require a few trips to the sporting goods store to pick up the perfect one, so feel free to experiment. Please remember, safety first.

MEDICINE BALL Pick a medicine ball with a weight that you can lift easily; 6–12-pound balls all work well depending on your arm strength. Just starting? Pick up a 4 or 6 pounder.

Setting Your Goals

Yes, the title of this book is *7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups*, and no, that doesn't necessarily mean that 300 reps is the goal of everyone who picks up this book—especially you. The programs and exercises are far more expansive than just repetitive sit-ups to hit a specific number. Each move was carefully chosen and designed to strengthen and build your core for many wide-ranging benefits, from sports-specific agility to weight loss to improving your posture. Set your goal and use this program and the exercises to nail it.

MY GOAL: I WANT TO GET ACTIVE, LOSE WEIGHT AND TONE MY CORE.

How to reach it: Start with Day 1, Week 1 of the Prep level and slowly build your core strength and flexibility. Add 10–20 minutes of light cardio 3–5 days a week first thing in the morning before you eat breakfast. As you progress with the program, mix some calisthenics into a morning walk/jog.



Walk for 5 minutes to warm up and then perform some jumping jacks or marching twists to get the blood pumping. Jog for 30 seconds, walk for 30 seconds. Repeat for 10 minutes and then cool down and walk for 5 minutes. Combining the 300 Sit-Ups program with cardio and calisthenics will help you lose weight, tone your core and look—and feel—great.

Even though you aren't focusing on the repetition count of 100, 200 or 300, taking the max sit-up tests at the ends of the Level I, Level II and Prep-level programs is a great way to quantify your progress since you began.

**MY GOAL: I WANT TO CHALLENGE MYSELF TO COMPLETE 100,
200, EVEN 300 SIT-UPS.**

How to reach it: Learn the moves, strengthen your core and follow the program. Each century mark of reps is a challenge in itself; success begins with performing just 1 more good-form sit-up than you did last workout. Allow yourself to progress slowly from workout to workout and build your core strength to be able to perform the max sit-up tests.

MY GOAL: I WANT RIPPED ABS. LET ME REPEAT—RIPPED. ABS.

How to reach it: Balanced nutrition, interval training and the core-strengthening (and -shredding) exercises found in the program.

Without proper nutrition, the programs in this book will get you toned, but to truly be ripped, you need to fuel yourself right. There are numerous different nutrition plans you can follow to lose weight and balance your diet, so this will be a really high-level overview: Eat healthy, lean meats, fresh fruit, vegetables and limit processed foods and sugars. Follow the Institute of Medicine's recommendation and get up to 35 percent of your daily calories from lean proteins, 45 percent from high-quality carbs and 20 percent from healthy fats. It's really not hard to follow, and the results will be noticeable. Many diets will suggest as much as a 500-calorie reduction from your daily caloric intake, and I don't recommend any more than that—your body needs fuel for your daily workouts. Distribute your nutrition into 6 small meals by eating every 2 hours throughout the day. This will keep your metabolism constantly fired up—but don't fall into the trap of packing in additional calories!

TIP: If you want to perform an extreme number of sit-ups, then you need to make sure to strengthen your lower back and hips just as much as your abdominal muscles. Don't skimp on the back or hip exercises during the program; they're essential to building the foundation—your solid core—to allow you to do high reps of sit-ups.

For interval training be sure to “wake up to cardio” to maximize fat burn, and ratchet up your workout a notch or two with interval sprints. Warm up by jogging for 5 minutes, and then perform intervals of running at 80 percent of your maximum for 30 seconds and then walking for 30 seconds. Repeat for 10 repetitions, then jog for 5 minutes to cool down. Do this workout 3 days a week and, as you progress, extend the running intervals and breaks to 1 minute each, up to 20 minutes total cardio.

Warming Up & Stretching

Properly warming up the body prior to any activity is very important, as is stretching post-workout. Please note that warming up and stretching are two completely different things: A warm-up routine should be done before stretching so that your muscles are more pliable and able to be stretched efficiently. You should not “warm up” by stretching; you simply don’t want to push, pull or stretch cold muscles.

Prior to warming up, your muscles are significantly less flexible. Think of pulling a rubber band out of a freezer: If you stretch it forcefully before it has a chance to warm up, you’ll likely tear it. Stretching cold muscles can cause a significantly higher rate of muscle strains and even injuries to joints that rely on those muscles for alignment.

It’s crucial to raise your body temperature prior to beginning a workout. In order to prevent injury, such as a muscle strain, you want to loosen up your muscles and joints before you begin the actual exercise movement. A good warm-up before your workout should slowly raise your core body temperature, heart rate and breathing. Before jumping into the workout, you must increase blood flow to all working areas of the body. This augmented blood flow will transport more oxygen and nutrients to the muscles being worked. The warm-up will also increase the range of motion of your joints.

TIP: Burn more fat when you wake up to cardio: Prior to eating in the morning, your body is in prime fat-burning mode from fasting all night. As soon as you eat anything with carbs, your body releases insulin into the blood stream and you begin to burn glycogen as your primary fuel source. Once that happens, your fat-burning advantage is gone.

A warm-up should consist of light physical activity (such as walking, jogging, stationary biking, jumping jacks, etc.) and only take approximately 5–10 minutes to complete. Your individual fitness level and the activity determine how hard

and how long you should go but, generally speaking, the average person should build up to a light sweat during warm-ups. You want to prepare your body for activity, not fatigue it.

A warm-up should be done in these stages:

- **GENTLE MOBILITY:** Easy movements that get your joints moving freely, like standing arm raises, arm and shoulder circles, neck rotations, and trunk twists.

- **PULSE RAISING:** Gentle, progressive, aerobic activity that starts the process of raising your heart rate, like jumping jacks, skipping rope, and running in place.

- **SPECIFIC MOBILITY:** This begins working the joints and muscles that will be used during the activity. Perform dynamic movements to prepare your core for the upcoming sit-up workout. These movements are done more rapidly than the gentle mobility movements—envision a swimmer before a race or a weightlifter before a big lift. Dynamic movements should raise the heart rate, loosen specific joints and muscles, and get you motivated for your workout.



Stretching should generally be done after a workout. It'll help you reduce soreness from the workout, increase range of motion and flexibility within a joint or muscle, and prepare your body for any future workouts. Stretching

immediately post-exercise while your muscles are still warm allows your muscles to return to their full range of motion (which gives you more flexibility gains) and reduces the chance of injury or fatigue in the hours or days after an intense workout. It's important to remember that even when you're warm and loose, you should never "bounce" during stretching. Keep your movements slow and controlled.

To recap, you should warm up for 5–10 minutes, stretch lightly for 3–5 minutes, perform your workout, and then stretch for 5–10 minutes. We've included some warm-up exercises and stretches that specifically target the muscles used in the program (see page 124).

Avoiding Injuries

Sit-ups are an efficient way to build strength and lean muscle when done correctly by healthy, fit individuals, but, let's face it, none of us is perfect. Due to years of improper posture, sports injuries or even weak musculature, we all have imbalances that can affect proper sit-up form and even put us on the fast track to injury. In addition, any pre-existing injury in the back or core can be exacerbated by jumping into sit-ups too quickly or doing them with improper technique.

It's very important that you focus on proper form and perform the core movements in a slow, controlled manner. If you have a pre-existing condition like lower back soreness, poor posture or a muscular imbalance, take your time and work your way up slowly while focusing on training with good form. If pain or soreness persists, please see a medical professional. Listen to your body. You should be able to tell when you're ready to begin a strength and conditioning program like this one by tuning in to your body. Take it easy and be smart about determining what's normal soreness from a workout and what's a nagging injury that you're aggravating. If you think it's the latter, take a few extra days off and see if the soreness passes. If it doesn't, you should see a medical professional.

Throughout the routine, you should expect to experience mild soreness and fatigue, especially when you're just getting started. The feeling of your muscles being "pumped" and the fatigue of an exhausting workout should be expected. These are positive feelings.

On the other hand, any sharp pain, muscle spasm or numbness is a warning sign that you need to stop and not push yourself any harder. Some small muscle groups may fatigue faster because they're often overlooked in other workouts. With restrained-leg sit-ups, your hip flexors and quads are doing a good amount of work, and for some individuals these areas can tire out before the abdominal muscles when performing max-rep tests. It's important to slowly and steadily build up the strength of your entire core—not just your abs—in order to perform an extreme number of sit-up repetitions.

Here are a couple other symptoms to watch for: pain and discomfort in the lower back and stiffness or pain in the neck. There are several factors that can contribute to lower back pain, and it's important that you know your limits and

seek the advice of a doctor if pain persists or gets worse. A stiff neck can result from straining your neck throughout the movement; try to keep your neck loose and flexible. Recurring pain is your body's way of telling you something is wrong—be smart and listen! There's no medal of honor for continuing to exercise through pain. Stop immediately and make sure to seek professional medical advice.

Initial Test

Let's start off with a test of three simple exercises that will help assess your core strength and overall fitness level: a timed plank, the maximum number of good-form leg lifts you can perform and the maximum number of sit-ups you can perform in two minutes. Why these exercises and why the order?

The plank is a great test of core strength and stability because it's a static position and there's no added stress on your spine. This exercise is a good starting point to engage and begin working the core muscles in isolation.

Then it's time to rest: 1 minute is just long enough for you to catch your breath, drink a little water and prepare for the next exercise, but not enough time for your abdominal muscles to recover fully from the plank exercise. The programs in this book take advantage of the cardiovascular benefits of circuits of high-intensity interval training (HIIT) to help you burn more calories, build your endurance and reshape your body, and these short, timed rest breaks are an important part of that. Keep that in mind when moving from one exercise to the next and pay attention to your rest timer.

TIP: A good workout partner should help push you to do your best and keep you on track with your workouts. Having a partner keep an eye on your form can be extremely helpful and the difference between hurting yourself by performing an exercise improperly and reaching your goals by getting the absolute most out of each set.

The leg lift exercise is performed from a stable position with your back and head on the floor and hands flat on the ground. The movement primarily works the rectus abdominis, but the motion also recruits the hip flexors to raise and lower each leg.

After another 1-minute rest, this progression from a static hold exercise with the plank to a controlled single-joint movement of the leg lift builds to performing sit-ups, which incorporate multiple muscles and stabilizers and a

wider range of motion (ROM).

Taking the Test

Warmed up and ready? Great! Before you begin, it's very important that you familiarize yourself with proper form for each exercise. Read each of the exercise descriptions, view the photos and slowly try each move a few times to make sure you understand exactly what you'll be doing once you get started.

Make sure you're hydrated and relaxed. Take slow, deep breaths to prepare.

The test is important for setting a benchmark for how many repetitions you can complete, or how long you can hold a plank, and also for determining which program to start with: Prep level, Level I or Level II. Be sure to write today's date and the amount of time or number of reps you complete for each of the three exercises so you can refer to your initial test throughout the program to check your progress.

TIP: Did you take a “before” picture? No? Most people resist taking one or simply forget and then regret it later when they've finished the program and want to compare their new physique to the old one. Go ahead, you don't have to share it with anyone—a before picture is a great motivator to keep you on track with your fitness!

A partner will come in handy for holding your feet during sit-ups, starting and stopping the timer during timed tests, and watching your form to make sure you're performing the moves correctly.

Timed Plank

1:00 rest

Max Leg Lifts

1:00 rest

Max Sit-Ups in 2:00

TIP: I recommend taking the initial test 1–2 days before you plan on

starting the program so your muscles have adequate recovery time before you begin the 7-week regimen. Most people find success with a Monday-Wednesday-Friday routine, so take the initial test on Friday or Saturday.



Plank

This is a timed exercise, so place your timer where you can see it when you're in position. The plank is exactly like the top portion of a push-up. Once you get in the proper starting position, you're on the clock.

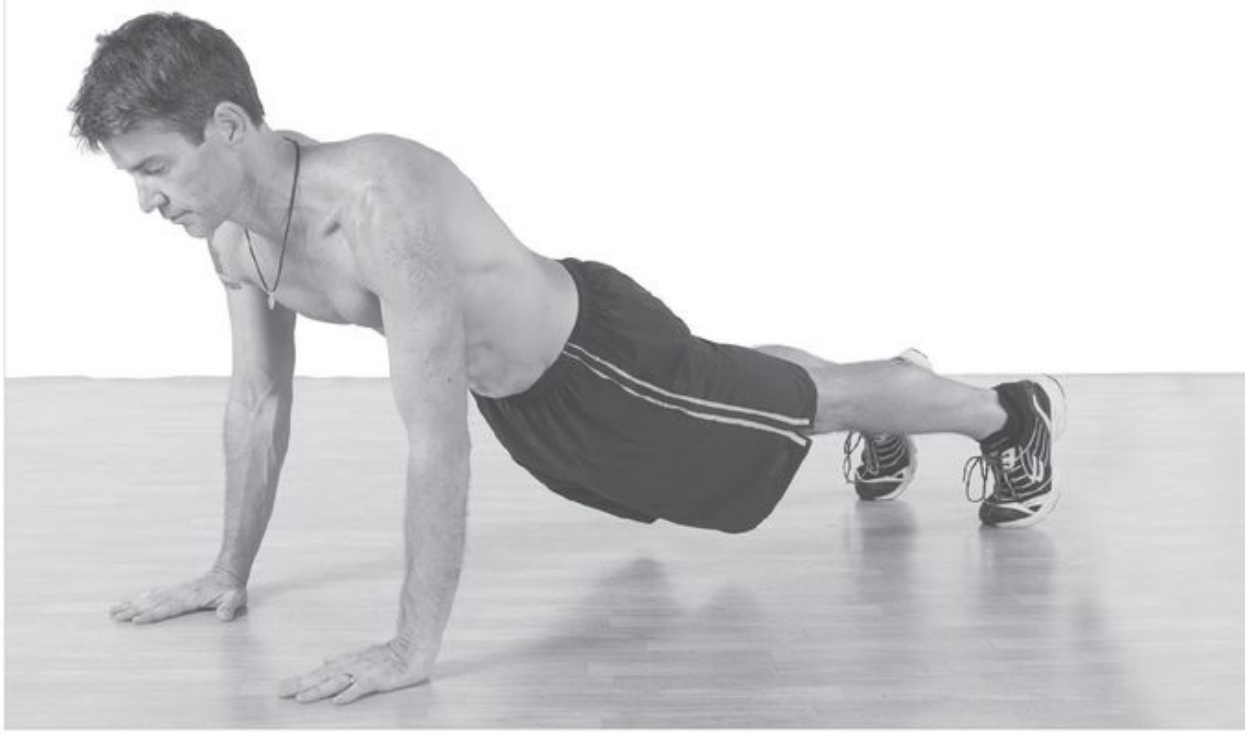
THE POSITION: Place your hands on the ground approximately shoulder-width apart, making sure your fingers point straight ahead and your arms are straight but your elbows not locked. Step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet. Engage your core to keep your spine from sagging; don't sink into your shoulders.

Look at your timer and note the time. Remember to breathe and maintain the position for as long as you can. Be sure not to let your butt sag. If you have a partner or mirror, take a peek at your form. Once you can no longer keep your back flat, lower your torso to the floor and note the time.

Date: ____/____/_____

Timed Plank: []

Grab your towel and water, rest for 1 minute and prepare for your second exercise, max leg lifts.



Leg Lifts

1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended along the floor and your arms along your sides, palms down. Contract your lower abdominal muscles and lift your feet 6 inches off the floor. Hold for 3 seconds.



2 While keeping your left foot in place, lift your right foot 6 inches higher (it should now be 12 inches off the floor). Hold for 3 seconds.



3 Simultaneously lower your right leg back to 6 inches off the floor while raising your left foot 6 inches higher. Hold for 3 seconds. This counts as 2 reps.



Repeat for as many reps as you can complete with good form. Stop if your knees bend or you can't hold each leg in a raised position for 3 seconds.

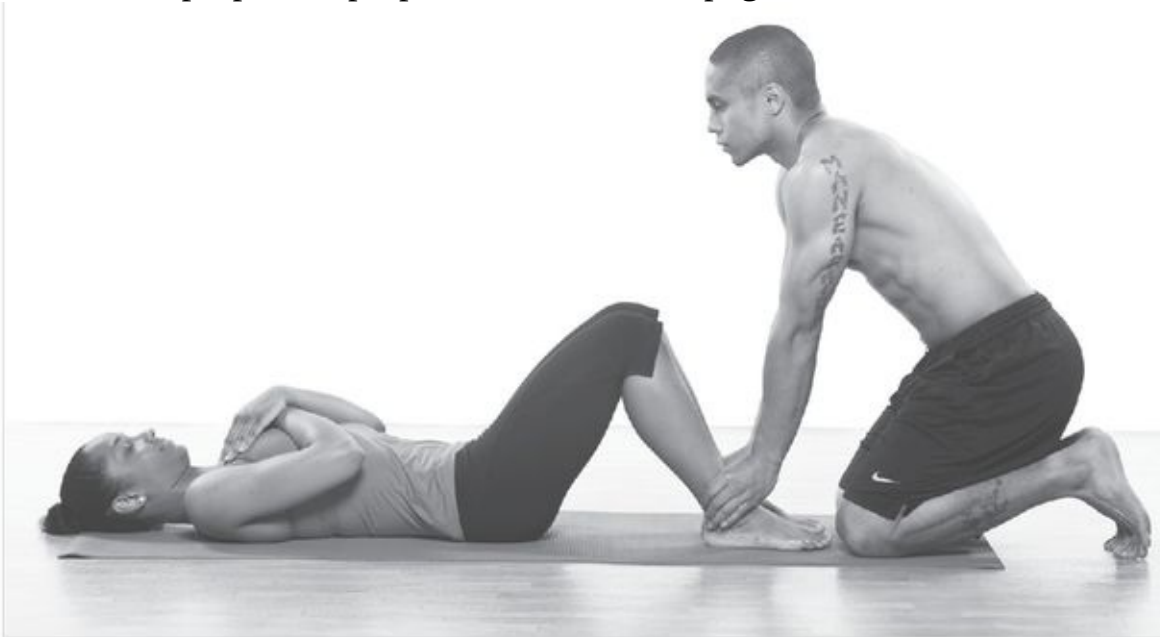
Take a break for 1 minute, sip some water and breathe in and out slowly to lower your heart rate. Write down the number of leg lifts you completed below, and prepare for the final test, max sit-ups/crunches in 2 minutes.

Date: ____/____/____

Leg Lifts: []

2:00 Max Sit-Ups

Before you begin, make sure you have reviewed how to perform a good-form sit-up on page 14. You can also do this portion of the test with crunches; just be sure to follow proper the proper crunch form on page 16.



1 On a padded surface, lie face-up with your knees bent to about 90°. Using a partner or fixed object, restrain your feet so they remain flat on the floor during the entire movement. Rest your head, shoulders and back on the floor, and maintain proper curvature of your lower spine, not allowing it to touch the floor. Set your timer for 2 minutes. Place your hands and arms in the position that best suits your ability level (see page 14).

2 Exhale and contract your abdominal muscles to slowly lift your head, arms, and upper back off the floor in a controlled manner. Keep your upper back and neck straight and maintain your hand and arm position through the movement. Stop when your back is at about a 45° angle to the floor. Pause briefly.



3 Inhale and return to starting position. You may round your upper back slightly and roll your spine on the floor as you do so. Keeping your abs tight, lightly touch both shoulder blades to the floor.

That's 1 rep.

Perform as many reps as possible in the 2 minutes, and write down that number.

Date: ____/____/____

Sit-Ups: []



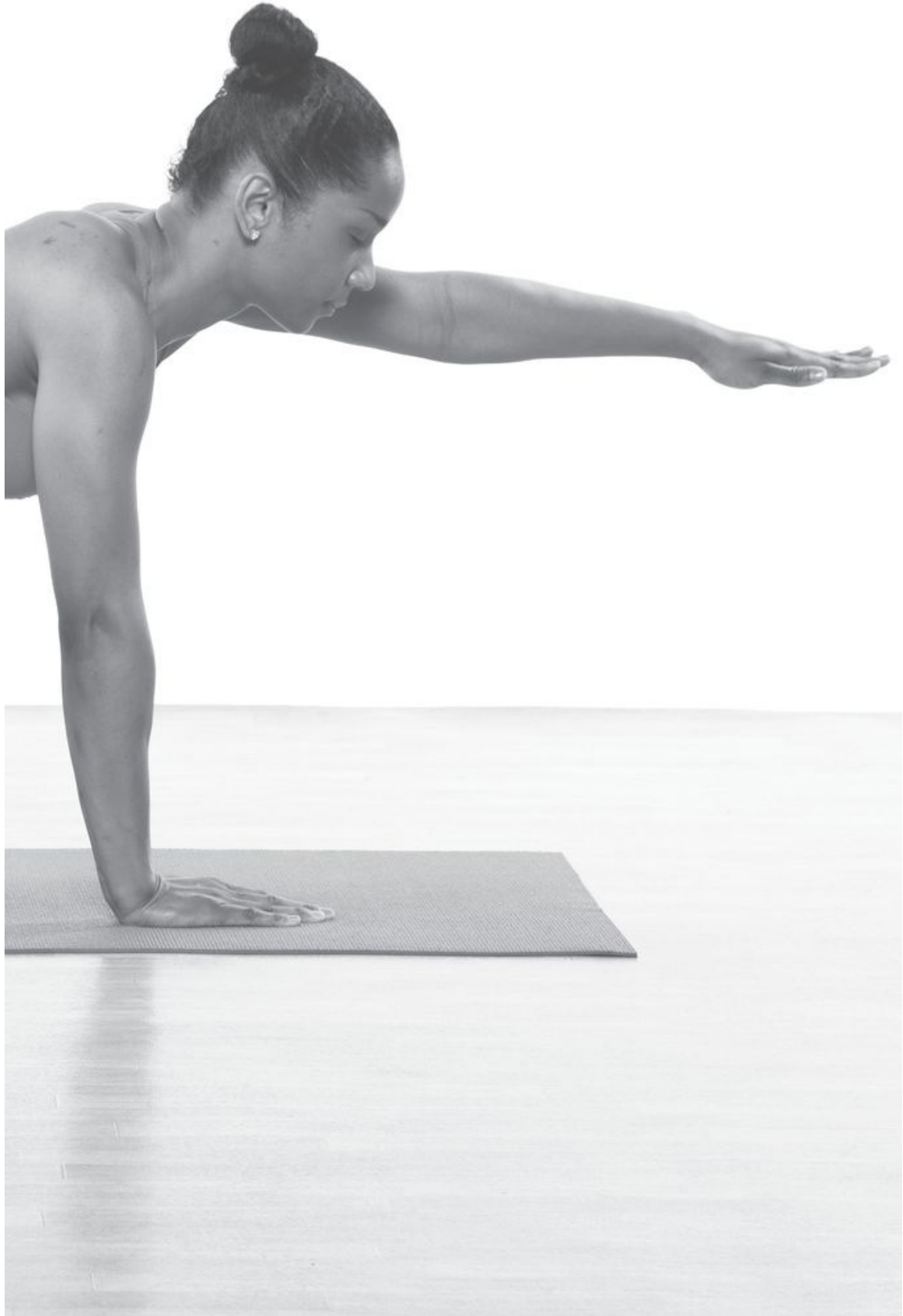
OK, that's it for now! Time to take a breather and relax. Read the chart to see if you should start with the Prep level program or jump right into Level I or Level II.

	Prep Level	Level I	Level II
Timed Plank	0--59	1:00-2:59	3:00 +
Leg Lifts	0-19	20-39	40+
Sit-Ups	0-39	40-79	80+

So, where do you stack up? If your results fall into more than one category, then start at the lower level; you'll have plenty of opportunity to progress to the next level as you work your way through the program.

The Prep level can be found on page 139.





PART II:

THE PROGRAM

7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups Program

By this point we've covered everything from setting your goals to why and how you should be strengthening your core, and we've even dispelled some myths about sit-ups. Now it's time to dive into the programs and get to work!

The Level I program is a 4-week progressive training program featuring 20-plus core-strengthening and toning exercises to prepare you mentally and physically for the 7-week program in Level II. For some athletes, Level I may be adequate to attain their fitness goals and maintain their physique; a month-long duration is perfect for developing and sticking to a routine, and the program is designed to target abs, hips and lower back in each set to maximize your total core fitness. Athletes who are looking for more of a challenge will be introduced to a dozen additional exercises in Level II that target the hips, lower back, and abdominal muscles in new ways and from different angles. Level II is semiprogressive; while for the most part we're working upward in terms of repetitions, the program varies from workout to workout to allow for strength gains, muscle growth, and recovery. Each exercise has been carefully selected and placed into each set specifically to strengthen and tone your entire core.

At no point during the programs will you be performing 100, 200, or 300 sit-ups—that's neither efficient nor wise. Performing an extreme amount of any exercise should be done sparingly, and is reserved for the tests after each level. While your goals may vary, there is no “magic number” of sit-ups required to advance from one level to the next; the sit-up tests are a benchmark for you to work toward by following the programs and strengthening your core. Completing 100 sit-ups in the Prep-level test or 200 after completing Level I is reasonable, but not the focus. Each level is about total-core strengthening; the sit-up tests are a method of assessing your gains from one level to the next.

A WORD ABOUT INTENSITY

The higher the level of intensity you put into the workout, the more you'll reap the benefits. Moving from exercise to exercise quickly, finishing every

rep with proper form and executing each workout from start to finish is the most efficient way to strengthen and tone your core and develop the body you want. The exercises are challenging, but if you sleepwalk through the movements and slog from one exercise to the next, you're only cheating yourself. Make the commitment to yourself and follow through. Stay focused on keeping the intensity high throughout your workouts and you'll absolutely see the results. Don't forget to hydrate and breathe properly, too!

Reading the Workout Charts

The programs are broken down into Level I and Level II. Each level has three workouts a week for a duration of 4 and 7 weeks, respectively. The workout for each day is contained in the box below that day. Each day's workout is broken down by sets consisting of the number of reps and the exercise type, followed by the amount of rest that you should take before starting the next set. For example, in the chart below for Week 1, Day 1, Set 1, you would perform 24 sit-ups followed by 20 reps of leg lifts, 20 hip raises, and then 22 supermans, moving quickly between exercises. When all 4 exercises are complete, rest for 30 seconds before moving on to the next set.

Note: Rest and recovery are vital to the success of the programs and should be included as prescribed on the schedules. Remember also to warm up before your workout and stretch afterward! See pages 126–38 for ideas.

Level 1

Week 1	Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon <i>set 1</i>	24 Sit-Ups	20 Leg Lifts	20 Hip Raises	22 Supermans
<i>set 2</i>	1:15 Plank	16 Bird Dogs	22 Reverse Crunches	20 Mountain Climbers
<i>set 3</i>	18 Stability Ball Extensions	:40 Side Plank each side	26 Marching Twists	24 Crunches

Use the exercise logs starting on page 146 to track your progress with the program. Since the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups program is designed to be performed multiple times, I recommend that you make some copies of the log before you start filling it in. You'll thank me later!

Level I

Ready to get started on Level I? This level features 25 different exercises and is suitable for most individuals who are athletic and familiar with working out. This program is the real “meat and potatoes” of the program, and is four weeks in duration. During Level I, you’ll strengthen and tone your total core while learning and perfecting the form of tried-and-true exercises that you can perform anywhere.

Note: Rest and recovery are vital to the success of the programs and should be included as prescribed on the schedules. Remember also to warm up before your workout and stretch afterward! See pages 126–38 for ideas.

Level I

Week 1	Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon <i>set 1</i>	24 Sit-Ups	20 Leg Lifts	20 Hip Raises	22 Supermans
<i>set 2</i>	1:15 Plank	16 Bird Dogs	22 Reverse Crunches	20 Mountain Climbers
<i>set 3</i>	18 Stability Ball Extensions	:40 Side Plank each side	26 Marching Twists	24 Crunches
Tue	Rest			
Wed <i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	25 Reverse Crunches	22 Mountain Climbers	18 Bird Dogs
<i>set 2</i>	18 Cobras	1:15 Plank	24 Mason Twists	22 In & Outs
<i>set 3</i>	24 Band Twists	22 Bicycle Crunches	24 Leg Lifts	:40 Side Plank each side
Thu	Rest			
Fri <i>set 1</i>	30 Sit-Ups	22 Bicycle Crunches	20 Supermans	20 Leg Lifts
<i>set 2</i>	25 Crunches	26 Band Twists	20 Cobras	24 Mountain Climbers
<i>set 3</i>	24 In & Outs	25 Reverse Crunches	22 Hip Raises	:45 Side Plank each side
Sat	Rest			
Sun	Rest			

Week 2

Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)

Mon	<i>set 1</i>	36 Crunches	24 Leg Lifts	25 Supermans	20 Reverse Crunches
	<i>set 2</i>	2x :20 Rolling Plank*	25 Hip Raises	25 In & Outs	--
	<i>set 3</i>	25 Bicycle Crunches	25 Mountain Climbers	25 Mason Twists	25 Windshield Wipers
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	20 Bird Dogs	20 Cobras	30 Crunches
	<i>set 2</i>	1:15 Plank	25 Supermans	30 Band Twists	--
	<i>set 3</i>	28 Mason Twists	20 Bicycle Crunches	22 In & Outs	25 Mountain Climbers
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	22 Stability Ball Crunches	22 Stability Ball Extensions	14 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	25 Supermans	26 Leg Lifts	25 Reverse Crunches	--
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Band Twists	24 Bird Dogs	24 Cobras	24 Mason Twists
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 3

Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)

Mon	<i>set 1</i>	2x :20 Rolling Plank*	25 Crunches	25 Leg Lifts	20 In & Outs
	<i>set 2</i>	25 Band Twists	10 Inchworms	22 Bird Dogs	24 Mason Twists
	<i>set 3</i>	25 Bicycle Crunches	30 Mountain Climbers	24 Cobras	25 Hip Raises
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	1:20 Plank	30 Sit-Ups	22 Supermans	22 Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Crunches	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Marching Twists	15 Hanging Leg Raises	:45 Side Plank each side	10 Inchworms
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	30 Crunches	25 Hip Raises	25 Leg Lifts
	<i>set 2</i>	2x :35 Rolling Plank*	22 Supermans	20 Cobras	20 Windshield Wipers
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Sit-Ups	24 In & Outs	10 Leg Climbers	24 Band Twists
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 4

Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)

Mon	<i>set 1</i>	1:20 Plank	30 Sit-Ups	24 Supermans	22 Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	16 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Crunches	20 Stability Ball Extensions	16 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Marching Twists	15 Hanging Leg Raises	:45 Side Plank each side	10 Inchworms
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	2x :30 Rolling Plank*	25 Crunches	25 Leg Lifts	25 In & Outs
	<i>set 2</i>	25 Band Twists	12 Inchworms	22 Bird Dogs	24 Mason Twists
	<i>set 3</i>	25 Bicycle Crunches	30 Mountain Climbers	24 Cobras	25 Hip Raises
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	20 Bird Dogs	20 Cobras	30 Crunches
	<i>set 2</i>	1:15 Plank	25 Supermans	25 Reverse Crunches	30 Band Twists
	<i>set 3</i>	28 Mason Twists	20 Bicycle Crunches	22 In & Outs	25 Mountain Climbers
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Level I Test

Congratulations on completing the Level I program! In the last 7 weeks, you've progressed through over a dozen different movements and variations to develop total core strength and should be ready to take a 2-minute sit-up test.

Grab your exercise gear, warm up, stretch, and hydrate. Set your timer for 2 minutes. Your goal is 80 sit-ups in that time; if you were in the military, that'd be enough to put you near the top of the class! Get ready, set, go!

2:00 Sit-Up Test _____ Date: ____/____/_____

So, how'd you do? Did you hit your mark? Are you satisfied with your results? If you are, then move on to Level II on page 53. If you still feel you need more work to strengthen your core or you just feel like repeating Level I, then go right ahead! The programs in this book were designed for you to work at your own pace. Don't worry, Level II and over a dozen new exercises and variations will be waiting for you whenever you're ready.

Level II

Welcome to Level II—are you excited to kick it up a notch? Level I is a great base to start from; the exercises are identifiable, repeatable and build a high level of core strength.

So, who needs a Level II anyway? Well, you do. It's important to change the specificity of your workouts every 3–4 weeks as your muscles begin to adapt. To keep challenging your body, follow the SAID principle: Specific Adaptation to Imposed Demands. This means that to keep strengthening your total core, you can't let your body get too accustomed to any one exercise or workout. Level II introduces different exercises or more advanced variations of movements from Level I to continue to strengthen and tone your core, and even provides extreme exercises that are sure to challenge your entire body.

Note: Rest and recovery are vital to the success of the programs and should be included as prescribed on the schedules. Remember also to warm up before your workout and stretch afterward! See pages 126–38 for ideas.

Level II

Week 1		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	:30 Side Plank each side	25 Band Twists	12 Inchworms	22 Bird Dogs
	<i>set 2</i>	24 Mason Twists	22 Hip Raises	22 In & Outs	25 Mountain Climbers
	<i>set 3</i>	20 Bicycle Crunches	1:20 Plank	16 Hanging Leg Raises	20 Cobras
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	2x :30 Rolling Plank*	25 Crunches	25 Supermans	25 In & Outs
	<i>set 2</i>	28 Mason Twists	20 Bicycle Crunches	22 Sit-Ups	25 Mountain Climbers
	<i>set 3</i>	16 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Crunches	20 Stability Ball Extensions	16 Stability Ball Hip Raises
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	18 Leg Climbers	36 Sit-Ups	22 Bird Dogs	12 Inchworms
	<i>set 2</i>	24 Bicycle Crunches	30 Crunches	20 Mountain Climbers	20 Cobras
	<i>set 3</i>	1:00 Stability Ball Plank	20 In & Outs	20 Hip Raises	24 Supermans
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 2		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	2x :35 Rolling Plank*	33 Crunches	22 Leg Lifts	25 In & Outs
	<i>set 2</i>	25 Band Twists	12 Inchworms	24 Mason Twists	--
	<i>set 3</i>	25 Bicycle Crunches	30 Mountain Climbers	24 Cobras	25 Hip Raises
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	1:20 Plank	30 Sit-Ups	22 Supermans	20 Bird Dogs
	<i>set 2</i>	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Crunches	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises	25 In & Outs
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Marching Twists	15 Hanging Leg Raises	:45 Side Plank each side	10 Inchworms
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	30 Crunches	25 Hip Raises	25 Leg Lifts
	<i>set 2</i>	2x :45 Rolling Plank*	22 Supermans	20 Windshield Wipers	--
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Sit-Ups	24 In & Outs	20 Leg Climbers	24 Band Twists
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 3

Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)

Mon	<i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	20 Bird Dogs	20 Cobras	30 Crunches
	<i>set 2</i>	1:15 Plank	25 Supermans	25 Reverse Crunches	30 Band Twists
	<i>set 3</i>	28 Mason Twists	20 Bicycle Crunches	22 In & Outs	25 Mountain Climbers
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	:45 Side Plank each side	25 Band Twists	12 Inchworms	22 Bird Dogs
	<i>set 2</i>	24 Mason Twists	27 Hip Raises	22 In & Outs	25 Mountain Climbers
	<i>set 3</i>	20 Bicycle Crunches	1:20 Plank	16 Hanging Leg Raises	20 Cobras
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	1:20 Plank	30 Sit-Ups	22 Supermans	22 Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Crunches	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Marching Twists	15 Hanging Leg Raises	:45 Side Plank each side	10 Inchworms
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

Week 4

Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)

Mon	<i>set 1</i>	1:00 Stability Ball Plank	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	20 Leg Climbers	24 Mason Twists	22 Hip Raises	22 In & Outs
	<i>set 3</i>	25 Mountain Climbers	:30 Overhead Weighted Walk	20 Bird Dogs	22 Supermans
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	30 Marching Twists	40 Sit-Ups	30 Band Twists	24 In & Outs
	<i>set 2</i>	25 Mountain Climbers	22 Cobras	12 Inchworms	14 Hanging Leg Raises
	<i>set 3</i>	1:20 Plank	20 Hip Raises	22 Mason Twists	30 Crunches
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	3x :20 Rolling Plank*	40 Crunches	20 Cobras	24 Bicycle Crunches
	<i>set 2</i>	22 Leg Climbers	30 Mason Twists	18 Stability Ball Hip Raises	20 Stability Ball Extensions
	<i>set 3</i>	18 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	12 Hanging Leg Raises	22 Supermans	24 Windshield Wipers
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 5		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	:45 Side Plank each side	28 Band Twists	30 Marching Twists	20 Bird Dogs
	<i>set 2</i>	25 Mountain Climbers	:30 Overhead Weighted Walk	20 Bird Dogs	22 Supermans
	<i>set 3</i>	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Crunches	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	6 Stability Ball Circles	12 Hanging Leg Raises	22 Supermans	38 Sit-Ups
	<i>set 2</i>	1:00 Stability Ball Plank	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 3</i>	25 Mountain Climbers	22 Cobras	12 Inchworms	20 Bicycle Crunches
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	30 Bicycle Crunches	6 Stability Ball Circles	30 Band Twists	12 Inchworms
	<i>set 2</i>	38 Sit-Ups	3x :20 Rolling Plank*	24 Bird Dogs	24 In & Outs
	<i>set 3</i>	20 Cobras	36 Marching Twists	:40 Overhead Weighted Walk	10 Hanging Leg Raises
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 6		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	:40 Medicine Ball Plank	20 Bird Dogs	28 Band Twists	24 Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	1:00 Stability Ball Plank	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 3</i>	42 Sit-Ups	24 Supermans	10 Inchworms	22 Windshield Wipers
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	25 Mountain Climbers	:30 Overhead Weighted Walk	20 Bird Dogs	22 Supermans
	<i>set 2</i>	3x :20 Rolling Plank*	38 Sit-Ups	24 Cobras	30 Mason Twists
	<i>set 3</i>	6 Stability Ball Circles	12 Hanging Leg Raises	36 Marching Twists	22 Hip Raises
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	1:00 Stability Ball Plank	20 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Extensions	20 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	22 Hip Raises	24 Leg Lifts	24 Bicycle Crunches	30 Reverse Crunches
	<i>set 3</i>	3x :20 Rolling Plank*	20 Mason Twists	28 Band Twists	24 Hip Raises
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Week 7

Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)

Mon	<i>set 1</i>	3x :30 Rolling Plank*	18 Inchworms	22 Hip Raises	20 Cobras	22 Mason Twists
	<i>set 2</i>	50 Sit-Ups	28 Windshield Wipers	24 Band Twists	30 Leg Lifts	1:00 Overhead Weighted Walk
	<i>set 3</i>	10 Stability Ball Circles	14 Hanging Leg Raises	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
Tue		Rest				
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	1:20 Stability Ball Plank	12 Hanging Leg Raises	36 Marching Twists	22 Hip Raises	28 Band Twists
	<i>set 2</i>	:45 Side Plank each side	25 Mountain Climbers	1:00 Overhead Weighted Walk	20 Bird Dogs	22 Supermans
	<i>set 3</i>	30 Bicycle Crunches	30 Reverse Crunches	30 Windshield Wipers	55 Sit-Ups	20 Cobras
Thu		Rest				
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	10 Stability Ball Circles	14 Hanging Leg Raises	15 Stability Ball Reverse Rollers	20 Stability Ball Extensions	15 Stability Ball Hip Raises
	<i>set 2</i>	65 Crunches	30 Mason Twists	20 Inchworms	30 Leg Lifts	28 Bicycle Crunches
	<i>set 3</i>	32 Reverse Crunches	24 Bird Dogs	1:00 Medicine Ball Plank	24 Supermans	50 Sit-Ups
Sat		Rest				
Sun		Rest				

* Do the given amount of time in each position (plank, left side, right side); repeat for the number of times specified.

Level II Test

Wow, you've completed a very demanding Level II program—give yourself a round of applause! By now you should be an expert at over 30 different core-strengthening moves and have the confidence to knock out hundreds—that's right—hundreds of sit-ups.

Now, you may have noticed that this program has been careful not to recommend extreme repetitions of sit-ups, and it has been constructed to target and strengthen your total core while limiting the number of actual sit-ups. Well, now the time has come to see what you can do. There's no more 2-minute time limit, and for this test you'll be performing the maximum number of continuous sit-ups that you can.

Your goal may be 100, 200 or even an extreme 300 sit-ups, and they'll all be performed with proper form. One caveat: If you need to rest during the test you can raise your torso all the way up to 90° in relation to the floor and catch your breath. You may not rest in the down position with your back on the floor; this is consistent with military PFTs (but there's no drill sergeant screaming in your face!).

Make sure you have your gear ready and that you're warmed up, stretched, hydrated and breathing normally. Get ready to knock out some serious sit-ups!

Sit-Ups: _____ Date: ____/____/_____

Exercises

Previously, we introduced the muscles behind the movements. Here's where we put those muscles to work! Each of the 30-plus exercises in this book have been carefully chosen to work every muscle of your core from various angles and through different planes of motion to develop total core strength and flexibility.

Negative Sit-Up

A negative sit-up is pretty much exactly as it sounds—the exercise is focused on the downward extension movement of the sit-up. You won't find this move in the programs, but it's a great way to build core strength for those who can't yet perform a sit-up.

1 Lying flat on your back, bend your knees by bringing your heels toward your butt and place your feet flat on the floor.





2–3 Place your hands on the floor by your sides and use them to push you into the “up” position with your back at a 90° angle to the floor. You’ll notice that even with your arms helping out, core activation is still required to get your

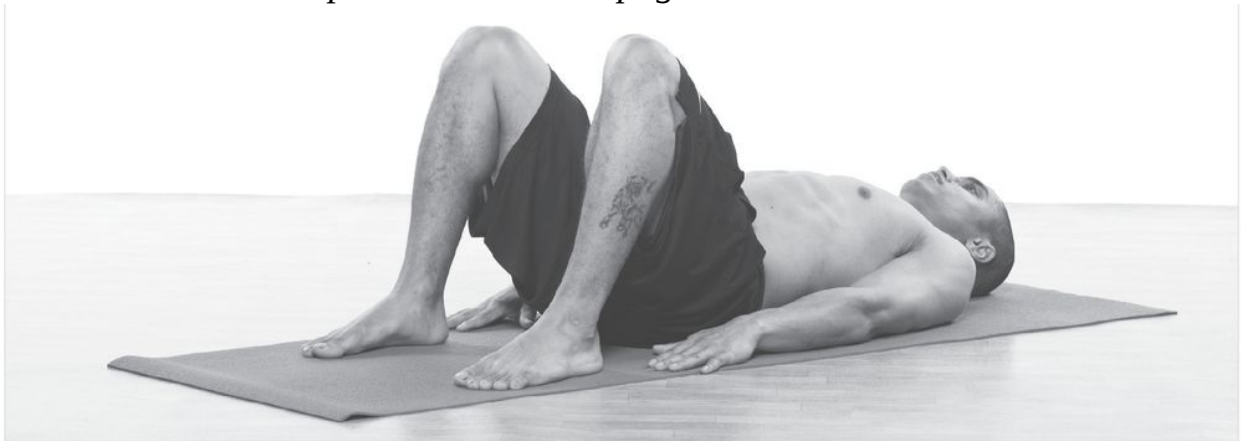
upper body into the up position.

To return to starting position, place your hands on the floor just outside your hips and slowly “curl” your body back down to the floor by allowing your upper back to bend slightly forward. When your shoulder blades and head have touched the floor, prepare to use your hands to raise you to the up position again.

That’s 1 rep.

Assisted Sit-Up

This is halfway between a Negative Sit-Up (page 64) and a full Sit-Up (page 14). It's performed by using your elbows to help you raise to the "up" position. When you find that you can complete 20, 30 or even more repetitions of assisted sit-ups, just start using your elbows less and less. Once your abs are strong enough to hold the paused position at a 45° angle without any help from your elbows, you can move your hands out from under your body and even progress to the more advanced hand positions listed on page 14.



1 Lying flat on your back, bend your knees by bringing your heels toward your butt and place your feet flat on the floor. Place both hands under your lower back or under the sides of your butt, whichever is most comfortable.



2 Leaving your elbows on the floor, contract your abdominal muscles and raise your head and upper back off the floor with the assistance of your elbows to provide stability and a little extra push. Stop the upward motion when your back is at about a 45° angle to the floor. Pause and then slowly curl back down to starting position slowly and carefully until your upper back and head touch the floor.

That's 1 rep.

Stability Ball Extension

Strengthening the lower back muscles is an extremely important part of core development that is all too often overlooked. In the quest to build six-pack abs, most people focus on the abdominal muscles and fail to properly work the lower back muscles, which often leads to lower back pain...which leads them to forgo back exercises altogether. The stability ball extension is one of the simplest ways to build lower back strength and flexibility.

1 Kneeling on the floor, place a stability ball in front of you and lean your upper body forward so your torso rounds over the top of the ball. Roll forward about 2 inches while keeping the ball in contact with your thighs; your hips should now be at about a 100–110° angle.



2 Once you're positioned on the ball and stable, extend your arms back toward

your hips with your palms facing downward. Contract the muscles of your lower back to raise your chest and sternum off the ball and straighten your back. Pause for 1–3 seconds and slowly return to starting position, trying not to bounce off the ball for each motion. That’s 1 rep.



TIP: The ball should be in contact with your thighs throughout the entire movement, and you shouldn’t feel like you’re sticking your butt out. If so, roll forward and lean on the ball a little bit more.



ADVANCED VARIATION: Make the move more challenging by extending your hands straight out in front of you with your arms along your head so that your biceps are next to your ears. Don't interlock your hands behind your head; this leads to arching your upper back and putting additional pressure on your neck.

Stability Ball Crunch

The imbalanced platform of the stability ball (shouldn't it be called an instability ball?) helps to activate more of the tiny supporting muscles throughout your core, legs and upper body while it also provides a comfortable base for crunches. The size and shape of the ball also allow you to adjust the difficulty of the crunch and range of motion depending on where you position the ball under your back.



1 Sit on the edge of a stability ball, then lean back and allow the ball to roll forward until it's positioned under your lower back; you'll need to adjust your feet accordingly. Choose your hand position; the farther you place your hands away from your hips, the harder the movement. Start with your arms extended straight with your hands by your hips. If that's too easy, you can cross your arms across your chest or even extend your arms straight over your head. Don't interlock your fingers behind your head; that causes strain on the upper back and neck.



2 Contract your abdominal muscles and lift your shoulder blades off the ball; this is the “up” position. Pause for 1–3 seconds, then slowly return back to starting position.

That’s 1 rep.

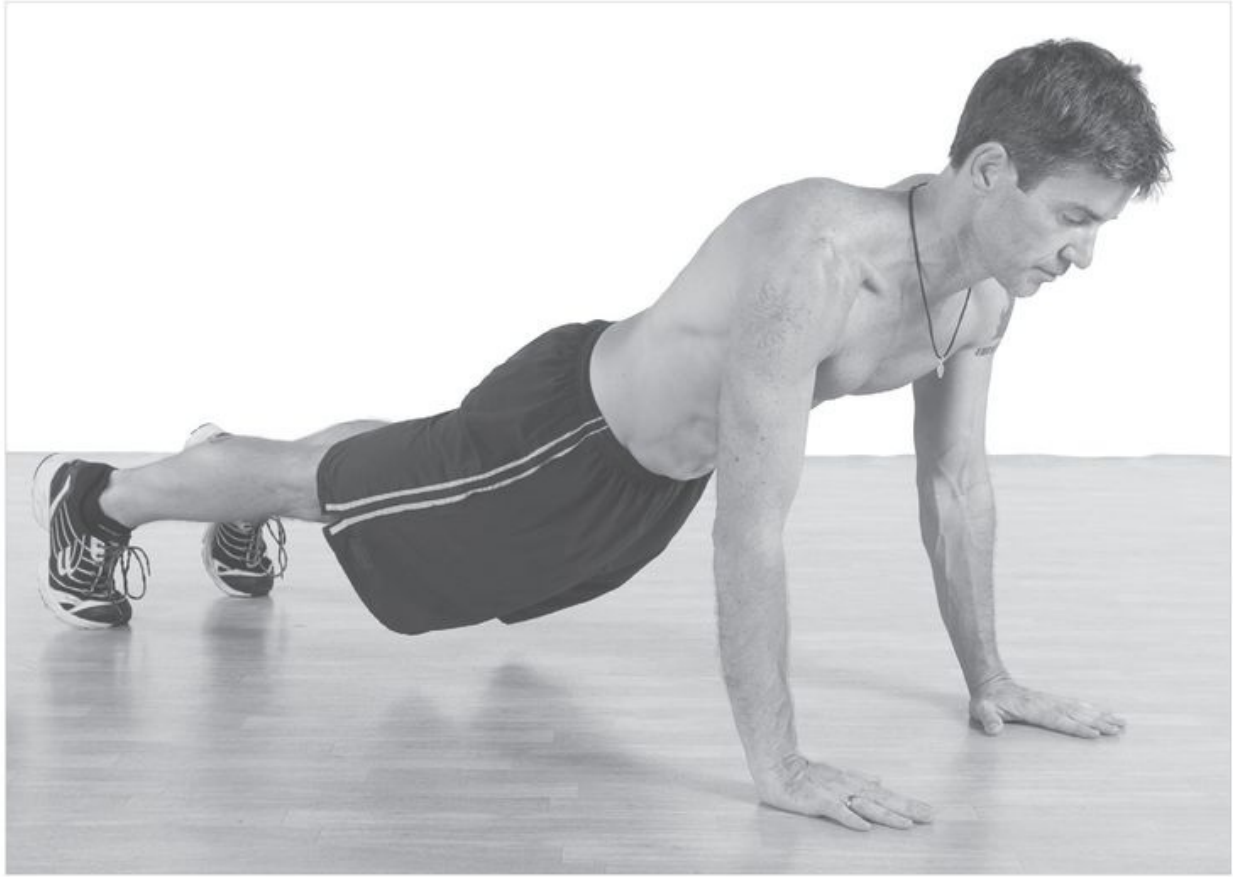
TIP: Don’t bounce on the ball at the bottom of the movement; it just makes the exercise easier to complete and you’re not working your rectus abdominis as well as you should. It may take a few reps before you find the right position on the ball, but once you do, you should not be moving every rep. Keep your feet planted and keep the ball as still as possible throughout the movement.

Plank

Planks are commonly referred to as the safest and best method for developing a strong core since they're a static exercise that builds strength and endurance in the abs, back and tons of various stabilizer muscles from your neck to your toes.

1 Place your hands on the ground approximately shoulder-width apart, making sure your fingers point straight ahead and your arms are straight but your elbows not locked. Your hands should be flat on the ground for support. Step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet. Engage your core to keep your spine from sagging; don't sink into your shoulders. Look at a timer—you're on the clock.

Remember to breathe and maintain the position for as long as you can. Be sure not to let your butt sag. Once you can no longer keep your back flat, lower your knees to the floor and rest.



FOREARM VARIATION: Place your elbows on the floor beneath your shoulders with your arms bent 90°, your hands palm-down on the floor and your entire forearms in contact with the floor. Because your body is closer to parallel with the floor, you're working your core even harder to maintain a straight line from head to toe.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PLANK

While the plank is a “simple” static exercise, there are a lot of muscles being used to hold your body in proper position:

Abdominal Muscles: Brace your rectus abdominis as if you were about to get punched in the stomach. By engaging your core, you’ll keep your spine from sagging. Breathe in and out slowly with your lips pursed as if you’re breathing through a straw (but make sure that straw is big enough to get plenty of air into your lungs!).

Glutes and Pelvis: Squeeze your gluteus maximus and minimus together. This will help to keep your butt from sticking up and lock your hips in place on the proper plane.

Shoulders: Keep your upper back flat and broad; don’t let your spine “sink” between your shoulder blades.

Legs: Keep your legs fully extended and straight, with your weight resting on the balls of your feet.

Arms: When doing planks on your hands, keep your arms as straight as possible without locking your elbows and your weight evenly distributed on both palms pressing into the floor. When doing planks on your elbows (my preferred method), your elbows should be under your shoulders and forearms and hands flat on the floor.

Neck and Spine: Since you’re using muscle groups throughout your entire body in order to keep your back straight, don’t let your head mess up your posture! Your neck should be neutral and aligned with your spine; this means you’re not raising your head or cupping your chin to your chest. Your eyes should be looking at the floor in the space between your forearms.

Hip Raise

This exercise is a slow and controlled motion that works the entire core—back, hips and abs—and provides a great way to work those muscles without any impact.



1 Lie on your back with your knees bent to about 90° and feet flat on the floor. Extend your hands toward your hips and place your arms and palms flat on the floor at your sides.



2 Engage your abdominal muscles to keep your core tight, and exhale while you press your feet into the floor and raise your hips and lower back up, forming a straight line from your sternum to your knees. Do not push your hips too high or arch your back. Hold this position for 15–30 seconds, and then inhale and slowly return to starting position.

That's 1 rep.

ADVANCED VARIATION : To work your core and stabilizers even more, when your hips reach the top of the motion and your body is flat from sternum to knees, raise one foot off the floor and extend it in front of you in the same line with your torso. Alternate legs with each repetition.



Stability Ball Hip Raise



1 Lying on your back, bend your knees and raise your legs high enough to roll a stability ball under your heels. Rest both heels directly on top of the ball 3–6 inches apart. Both knees should be bent at 90° and the entire weight of your legs should be resting on the ball. Extend your hands toward your hips and place your arms and palms flat on the floor at your sides.



2 Engage your abdominal muscles to keep your core tight, and exhale while you press your heels into the ball and roll it away from your body. Raise your hips and lower back, forming a straight line from your sternum to your feet while keeping the tops of your shoulder blades flat on the floor. Do not push your hips too high or arch your back. Hold this position for 15–30 seconds, then inhale and slowly roll the ball back toward your butt with your heels and lower yourself back to starting position.

That's 1 rep.

Bird Dog

The bird dog is an excellent exercise for developing abdominal and hip strength and flexibility, and also for working your lower back by stabilizing your spine throughout the movement.

1 Get on your hands and knees with your legs bent 90°, knees under your hips, toes on the floor and your hands on the floor directly below your shoulders. Keep your head and spine neutral; do not let your head lift or sag. Contract your abdominal muscles to prevent your back from sagging; keep your back flat from shoulders to butt for the entire exercise.





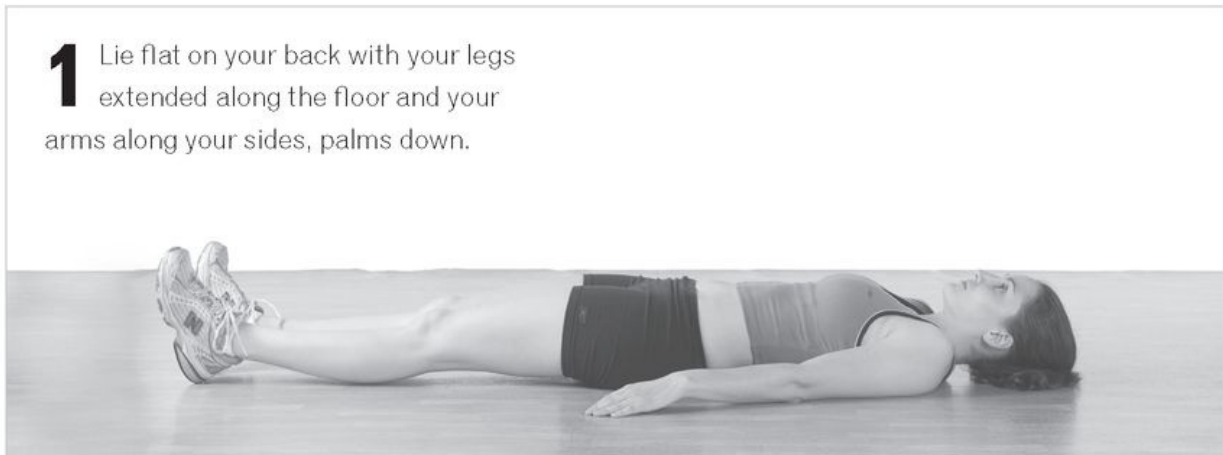
2 In one slow and controlled motion, simultaneously raise your left leg and right arm until they're on the same flat plane as your back. Your leg should be parallel to the ground, not raised above your hip; your arm should extend directly out from your shoulder and your biceps should be level with your ear. Hold this position for 3–5 seconds and then slowly lower your arm and leg back to starting position.

That's 1 rep. Repeat on the other side.

Reverse Crunch

How do you get all the core-strengthening benefits of a crunch with very limited stress on the lower back? Reverse crunches are the answer! Keep your back straight and lower legs on a level plane throughout this slow and controlled movement.

1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended along the floor and your arms along your sides, palms down.



2 Contracting your lower abdominal muscles, lift your feet 4–6 inches off the floor, bend your knees and bring them in toward your chest. Be careful not to put excessive pressure on your lower back by bringing your hips off the floor. Pause when your glutes rise slightly off the mat.



3 Extend your legs and lower them until your feet are 4–6 inches off the floor.



Leg Lift

These are commonly called scissors or flutter kicks, and are a great way to isolate your abs!

1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended along the floor and your arms along your sides, palms down. Contract your lower abdominal muscles and lift your feet 6 inches off the floor. Hold for 3 seconds.



2 While keeping your left foot in place, lift your right foot 6 inches higher (it should now be 12 inches off the floor). Hold for 3 seconds.



3 Simultaneously lower your right leg back to 6 inches off the floor while raising your left foot 6 inches higher. Hold for 3 seconds.

This counts as 2 reps.



Side Plank

The side plank is a great isolation exercise for tightening your internal and external abdominal obliques (aka your love handles) as well as the transverse abdominis. For some people with lower back problems that prevent them from twisting with a full range of motion, side plank may be a beneficial exercise, but it's not perfect for all. The instability of the side plank will work a host of supporting muscles all over your body, including your hips, glutes, chest and back. On average, side planks are held for about half as long as standard planks.



1 Lie on your side and stack your feet, hips and shoulders atop each other. Prop yourself up on your elbow, keeping it directly under your shoulder; your forearm should be completely on the ground, perpendicular to your body.



2 Engaging your core to keep your spine erect, lift your hips off the floor until you form a straight line from head to feet. Let your top arm rest along your side. Hold the position for a predetermined amount of time or for as long as possible.

Slowly return to starting position. Repeat on other side.

MODIFICATION: People with weak knees may find that this position puts a great deal of strain on their knees when they keep both legs straight. To alleviate some of the stress, I've used a foam roller, medicine ball or similar to provide some knee joint stability. Place the object on the outside of the thigh that is closest to the ground and keep your legs straight. You may need to experiment with the positioning to get comfortable.

Rolling Plank

The rolling plank is a superset of planks combining the flat plank and both side planks to work your entire core and even target a host of stabilizers (from deep abdominals to spinal erectors) as you move from position to position in a slow and controlled manner.

1 Place your elbows on the floor beneath your shoulders, your entire forearms flat on the floor, and your arms bent 90°. Your hands should be flat on the ground for support. Step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet. Engage your core to keep your spine from sagging and squeeze your glutes to keep your butt from sticking up. Keep your upper back flat and broad; don't sink into your shoulders. Hold this position for the targeted amount of time.



2 Slowly shift your weight to your left elbow and rotate your entire body so it's perpendicular to the floor and your weight is resting on your left elbow and the outside edge of your left foot. Keeping your left elbow on the ground, rotate your left forearm so it's perpendicular to your body for added support. Place your right hand on your hip and stack your right foot on top of your left forearm.

Throughout the rotation keep your spine straight and don't let your hips sag toward the floor. Hold this side plank for the targeted amount of time, and then roll back to starting plank position.

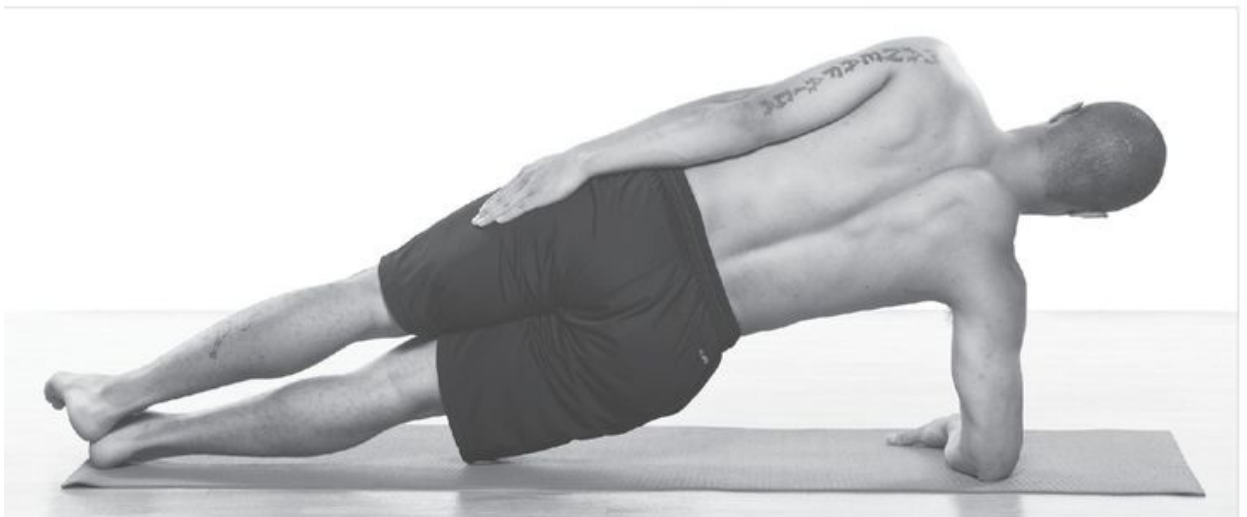
Hold the plank position for the targeted amount of time.



3 Roll onto your right elbow and perform a side plank on your right side for the targeted amount of time.

Roll back to starting position and lower your body to the floor.

That's 1 rep.



Stability Ball Reverse Roller



1 Starting on your hands and knees, place the tops of both feet on top of a stability ball. Place your weight in your hands and lift your knees off the mat, balancing your weight on your hands and the stability ball. Walk your hands out until your body forms a straight line from head to feet, engaging your core and glutes to keep your back flat. Your hands should be on the floor just a little bit wider than your shoulders and your neck should be in a neutral position with your head neither raised nor chin pressed to chest.



2 Keeping your back flat and spine straight, exhale and slowly bring your knees in toward your chest and your heels toward your butt. Do not raise your hips or arch your back. Stop when you can't bring your knees any closer toward your chest, and hold that position for 10 seconds.

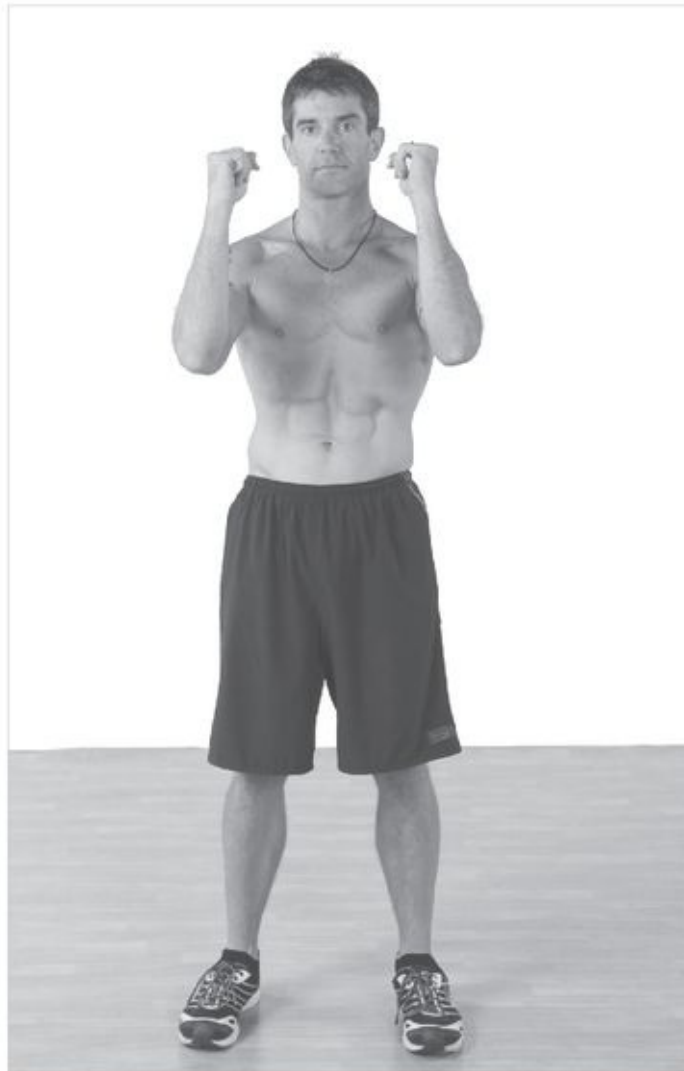


3 In a slow and controlled motion, inhale and extend your legs backward, returning your body to starting position. Be careful not to bounce on the stability ball. This should be a very slow and controlled movement with your abs and glutes engaged the entire time.

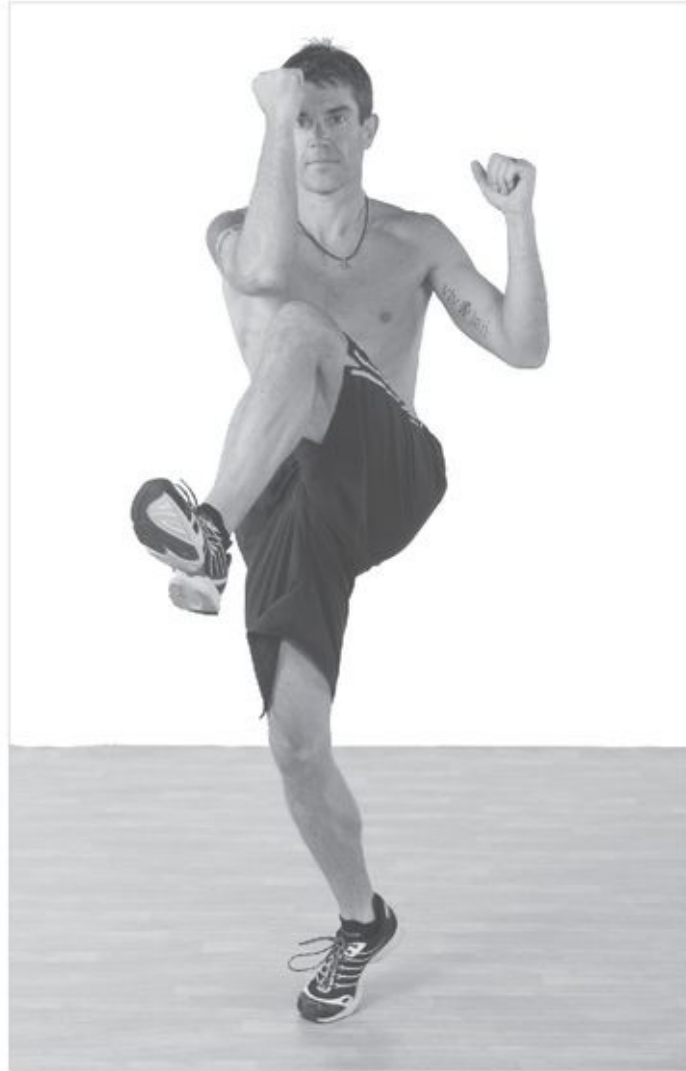
That's 1 rep.

Marching Twist

Finally, a chance for to get off the floor! The marching twist works your obliques, hips and abs and is a high-intensity move to get your heart rate up.



1 Stand tall with your feet shoulder-width apart. Bring your arms in front of you and bend your elbows 90°.



2 Twist your torso to the right and raise your left knee to your right elbow.



3 Repeat with your right knee and left elbow. A little hop with the bottom foot helps you keep your momentum going from leg to leg.

Windshield Wiper

Many core-strengthening moves are part stretch and part exercise—this is another one of those. Windshield wipers are a torso twist and spine rotation to stretch and strengthen your lower back, glutes and hips. I personally use this exercise to warm up my lower back muscles and align my lumbar spine; don't be surprised if you feel a slight pop as your vertebrae align when performing this move. If you have any spinal or lower back issues, be extremely careful when performing this exercise slowly.



1 Lying flat on your back with your arms extended along your sides, palms down, bend your knees 90° and raise your legs so that your lower legs are parallel to the floor. For more stability, take your arms out to the sides to form a “T.”

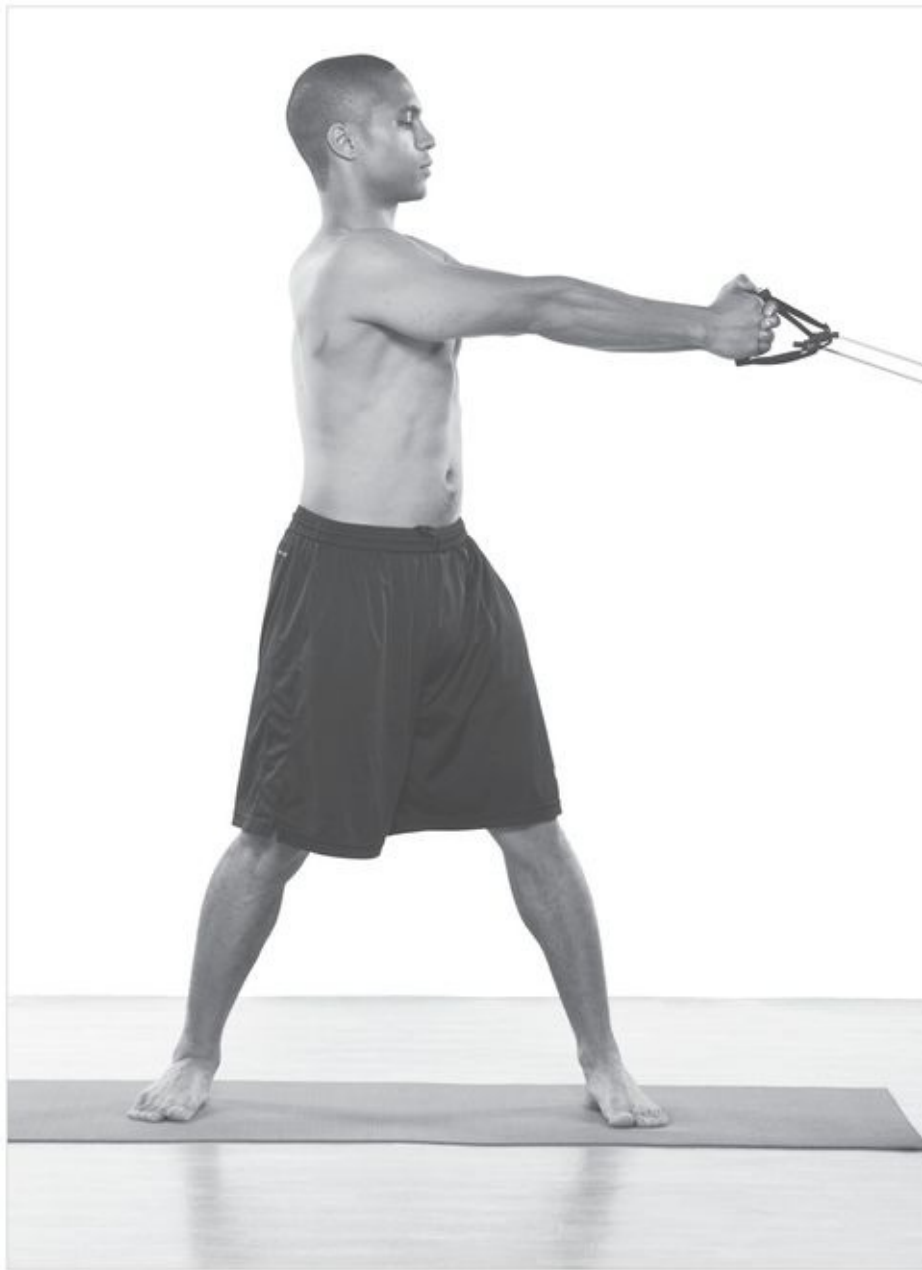


2 Exhale, and slowly rotate your hips and legs to drop your knees to one side. Hold that position for 1–3 seconds. Inhale and raise your legs back to starting position.

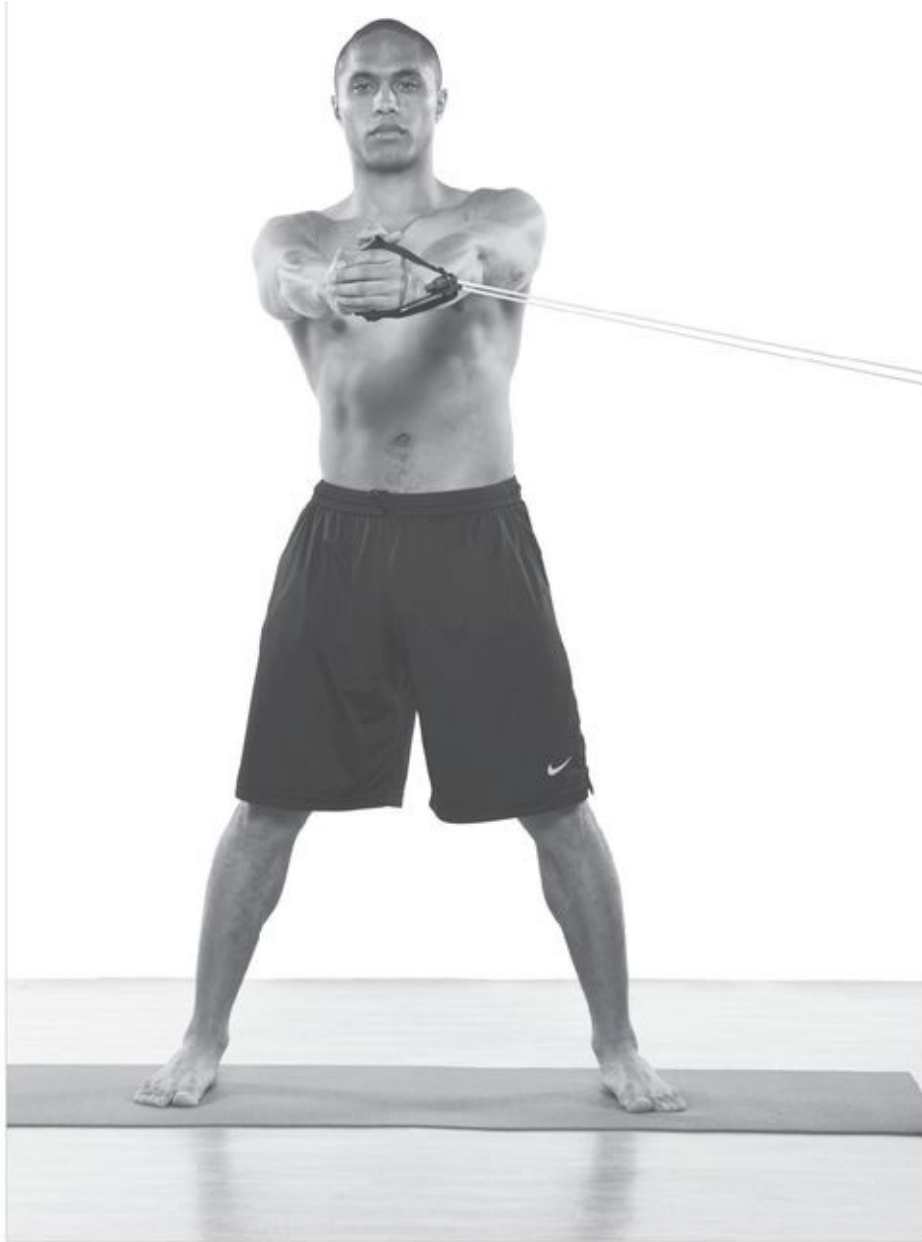
That's 1 rep; repeat on the other side.

Band Twist

Before assuming the starting position, affix an exercise band to a stable object between waist and chest high. Stand far enough away to the side that you can grasp the exercise band with your arms fully extended.



1 Standing sideways to the band, grasp the band with your arms extended directly in front of your chest and elbows straight but not locked. Your face and chest should be facing the band, rotated roughly 90° in relation to your hips. Your hips should remain in place throughout the entire movement and not rotate with your body.

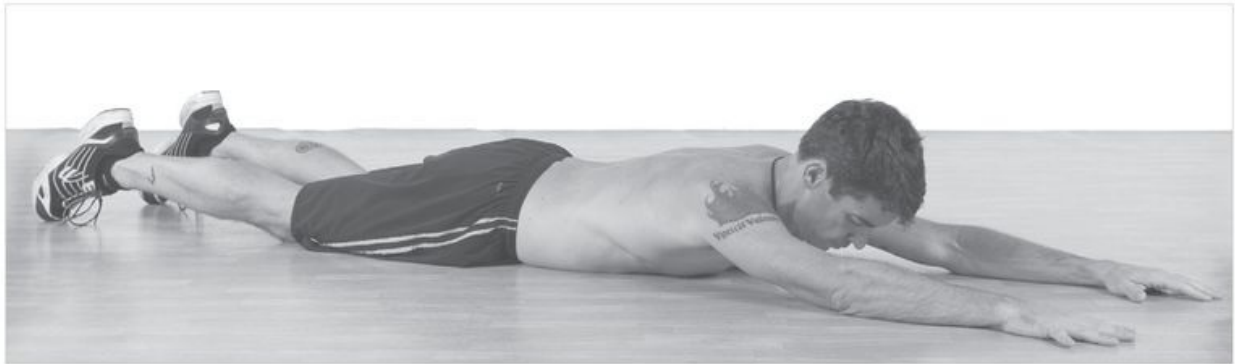


2 Exhale and contract your abdominals as if you were about to receive a punch in the gut, and use your obliques to rotate your torso until it's in line with your hips. Keep your arms straight and hold onto the exercise band for resistance; your hands should be directly in line with your sternum. Focus on stretching the band with your obliques, not your arms. Hold this position for 3–5 seconds; inhale and return to starting position.

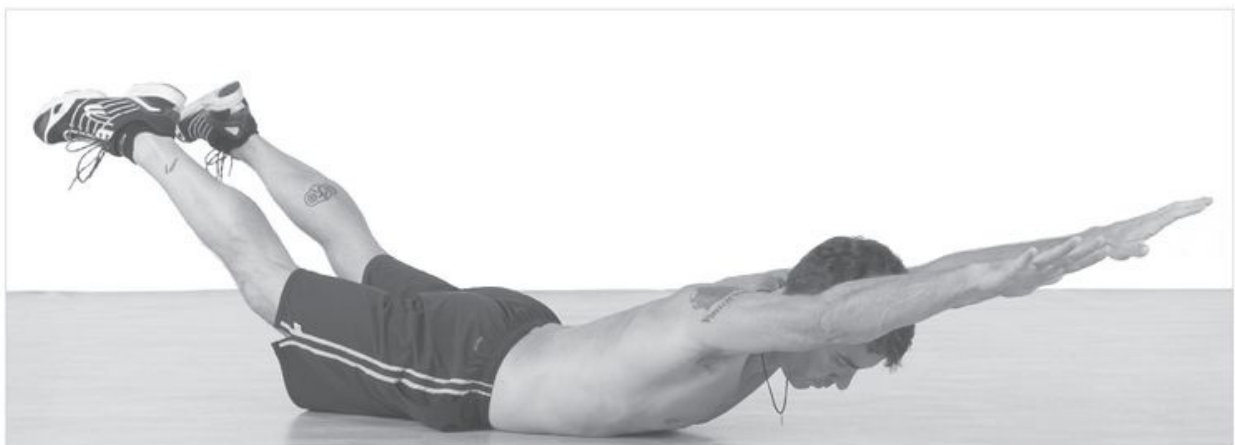
That's 1 rep. Be sure to keep your back straight; do not lean forward or backward or arch your spine during the movement. Remember to swap sides between sets.

Superman

Interestingly enough, this exercise is not performed “up, up and away” but actually on your stomach, flat on the ground. However, the Man of Steel would greatly appreciate the importance of this move as it strengthens your lower back and gives some due attention to your erector spinae—you know, those muscles that keep you vertical.



1 Lying face down on your stomach, extend your arms directly out in front of you and your legs behind you. Keep your knees straight as if you were flying.



2 In a slow and controlled manner, contract your erector spinae and reach your arms forward and legs backward toward opposite walls, and allow your arms and

feet to raise 3–5 inches off the floor. Your head should maintain a straight position with your spine; do not arch your back. This move is as much of a “stretch” as it is an exercise. Hold for 5 seconds.

Lower slowly back to starting position.

Mountain Climbers



1 Assume the top position of a push-up with your hands directly under your shoulders and toes on the ground. Keep your core engaged and your body in a straight line from head to feet.



2 Lift your right toe slightly off the ground, bring your right knee to your chest and place your right foot on the ground under your body.



3 With a very small hop from both toes, extend your right foot back to starting position and at the same time bring your left knee to your chest and place your left foot on the ground under your body.

Continue switching, making sure to keep your hips low.

V-Sit

This is one of those exercises that sounds exactly how it looks but, boy, is it tougher than it sounds. This is a slow, controlled movement: Never jerk your body from a prone dorsal position to a V—that’s a quick way to pull a muscle! In order to reap the benefits of this exercise and the host of supporting muscles it works (not to mention the coordination it helps build), really focus on your form and practice keeping your core engaged and mirroring the straightness of your upper body and legs. It also doesn’t hurt to have a soft cushion under your tailbone.

1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended straight along the floor and your arms extended overhead on the floor with your biceps by your ears.

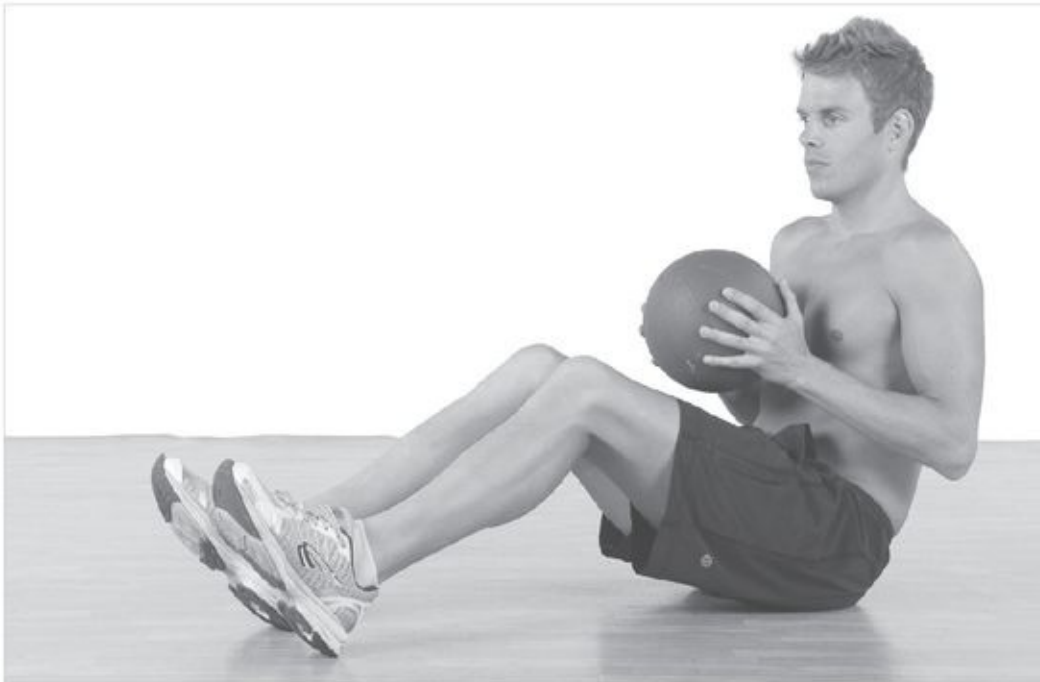


2 Contracting your abdominal muscles and keeping your legs straight, raise your legs and upper torso to form a “V.” Your straight arms can be held parallel to your legs or alongside your ears. Hold the position for at least 3 seconds. Slowly lower everything down without touching the ground with your heels or shoulders, then perform another rep.

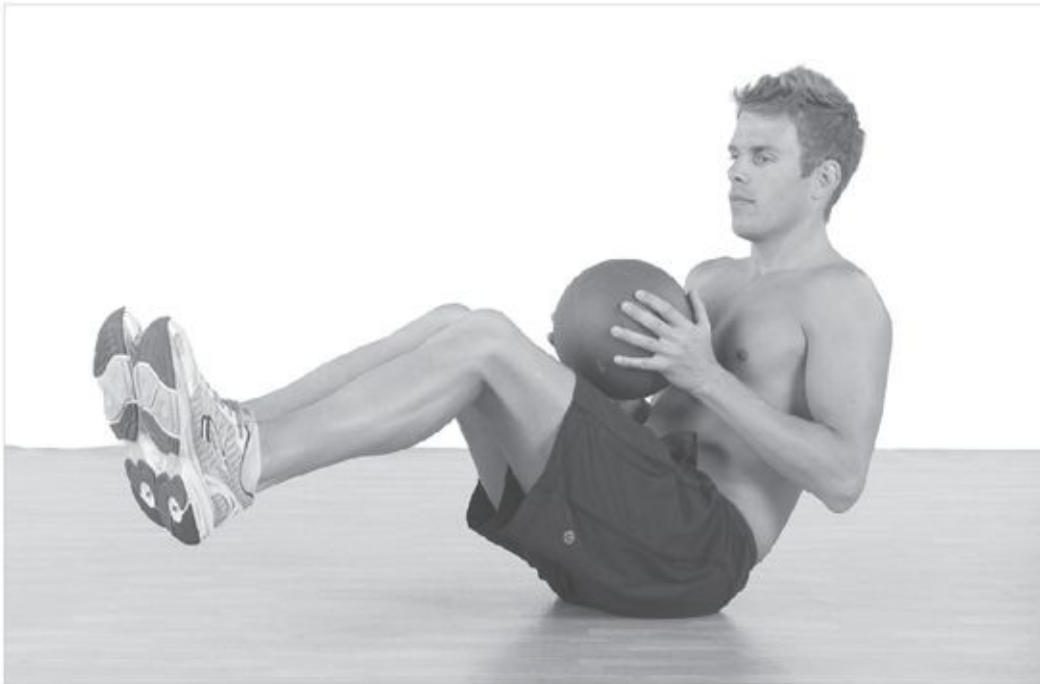


Mason Twist

This exercise works the oblique abdominal muscles, the erector spinae and even the hip flexors. Always be careful when using weights in a twisting motion as you can easily injure your lower back. Start with the lightest possible weight and work your way up as you become more comfortable with the move and refine your form.



1 Sit on the floor with your knees comfortably bent, feet on the floor, arms bent 90° and hands holding a medicine ball or weight in front of your chest.



2 Lift your feet 4–6 inches off the floor and balance your bodyweight on your posterior. Keep your core tight to protect your back.



3 While maintaining the same hip position, twist your entire torso at the waist and touch the ball to the floor on the left side of your body.

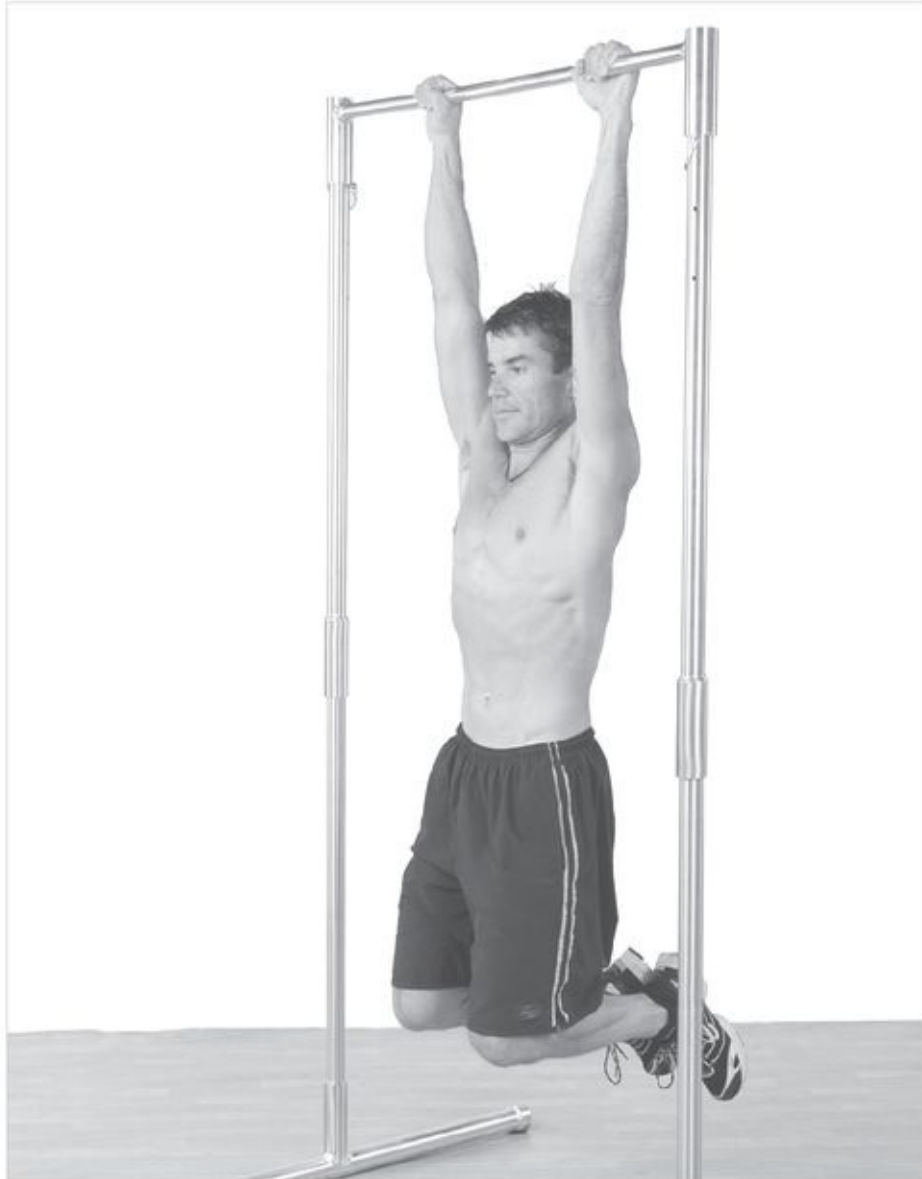


4 Rotate back to center, keeping your feet off the floor and maintaining your balance using the supporting core muscles. Then rotate to your right and touch the ball to the floor.

Return to center. That's 1 rep.

Hanging Leg Raise

Don't have a pull-up bar? For this move you can use a door, provided it's strong enough to support your bodyweight. Swing the door open and place your back against the door. Raise your arms over your head and reach your hands back to grab the top of the door. Grip the door firmly and raise your feet off the floor by contracting your abdominal muscles and slowly bring your knees up toward your chest. The door will help to keep your back straight and provide some additional stability during the movement.



1 Grab an overhead bar with your preferred grip (underhand, overhand or mixed) and hang from the bar with your arms fully extended but elbows not locked. For this exercise, count 3 seconds up, hold 1–3 seconds and then 3 seconds down.



2 Contracting your abdominal muscles, slowly bring your knees up toward your chest while keeping your torso as close to vertical as possible. Don't lean back during the movement or swing between reps.

Lower your legs in the same slow manner.

VARIATION: Kick your hanging leg raises up a notch by adding a pike on the way down. After you bring your legs to your chest and hold for 3 seconds, straighten your legs as you lower them and hold in a pike position (or "L" shape formed by your torso and legs) for an additional 3 seconds.



Leg Climber

This move could best be described as a one-legged V-sit (page 92), but incorporates some obliques by twisting to grab one leg and literally climb your hands up it. This slow, controlled movement takes some time to master and even longer to look good while doing it.

1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended straight along the floor and your arms extended overhead on the floor with your biceps by your ears.



2 Contract your abdominal muscles and raise both legs off the ground 8–12 inches. Keep both legs straight.





3 Keeping your left leg in place, raise your right leg and your upper torso very similar to the V-sit. Reach your left hand to grab the inside of your right leg (the higher the better), then grab the same leg closer to your foot with your right hand.



4 Work your hands up until you've successfully climbed hand-over-hand up to your right foot. End with both hands grasping your right foot, your torso and

right leg in a V and your left leg sticking out trying to maintain balance.

Release your right foot and slowly lower your upper body and right leg to the floor. That's 1 rep.

Inchworm

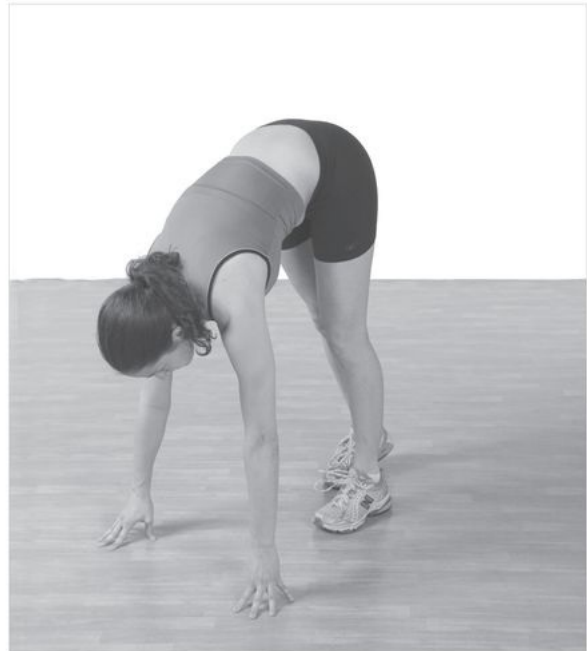
This is a great full-body exercise and a perfect test for hamstring and lower back flexibility. In this motion-based exercise, you'll advance forward approximately 4 feet per repetition, so plan your exercise positioning accordingly.



1 Stand with your feet about hip-width apart and fold over so that your hands touch the floor.



2–3 Keeping your hands firmly on the floor to balance your weight, walk your hands out in front of you one at a time until you're at the top of a push-up. Hold for 3 seconds.



4–5 Keeping your hands firmly on the floor to balance your weight, “walk” your feet toward your head by taking very small steps on your toes. Imagine that your lower legs are bound together and you can only bend your feet at each ankle. As you continue walking your feet toward your head, your butt will rise and your

body will form an inverse “V.” When you’ve stretched your hamstrings, glutes and calves as far as you can, hold that position for 3 seconds. That’s 1 rep.

Bicycle Crunch

Rated by the American Council on Exercise as the number-one way to target the rectus abdominis, this move gets your whole body in motion and really works the entire core.

1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended straight along the floor and your hands at both sides of your head, fingers touching your temples.



2 Raise your feet 6 inches off the floor while simultaneously contracting your rectus abdominis and lifting your upper back and shoulders off the floor. In one movement, bend your left knee and raise your left leg so that the thigh and shin are at 90°; rotate your torso using your oblique muscles so that your right elbow touches the inside of your left knee.



3 Rotate your torso back to center and lower your upper body toward the floor, stopping before your shoulders touch.



4 Extend your left knee and return your foot to 6 inches off the floor and bend your right leg to 90°. Contract your abs, rotate and touch your left elbow to the inside of your right knee. That's 2 reps.



In & Out

Aside from planks, this is my favorite core move due to its full range of motion and how well it works the entire rectus abdominis and erector spinae without putting excessive force on your upper spine and neck. Because your hands aren't placed behind your neck like an old-school sit-up, there's no tendency to jerk your head forward; you're cheating if your arms aren't level to the floor. This is a very slow and controlled motion and is best performed at a cadence of 3 seconds in, 3 seconds hold and 3 seconds out.



1 Lie flat on your back with your legs extended straight along the floor and your arms along your sides, palms down.



2 Lift your feet about 3 inches off the floor, bend your knees and bring your feet

toward your butt while simultaneously lifting your arms off the floor and activating your abs to roll your upper body upward.



3 Continue raising your head and shoulders off the floor and bringing your hands past the outside of your knees while bringing your knees and chest together. At the top of the move, pause for 1–3 seconds.

Slowly return to starting position. Be careful to “roll” your spine in a natural movement and let your shoulders and head lightly touch the floor.

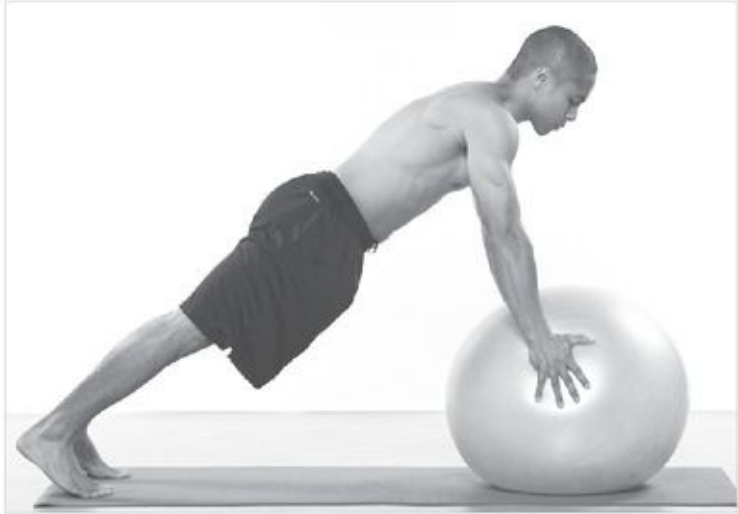
VARIATION: For more abs activation, maintain the same distance of your feet from the floor as you extend your legs back to straight and hold them there until you begin the next rep. It’s a lot harder, and you’ll recruit far more muscles from your upper legs, pelvic girdle and hips to extend your legs in and out without letting your heels touch. Remember to keep your hands level to the floor—you’re cheating if you raise them up!

Stability Ball Plank

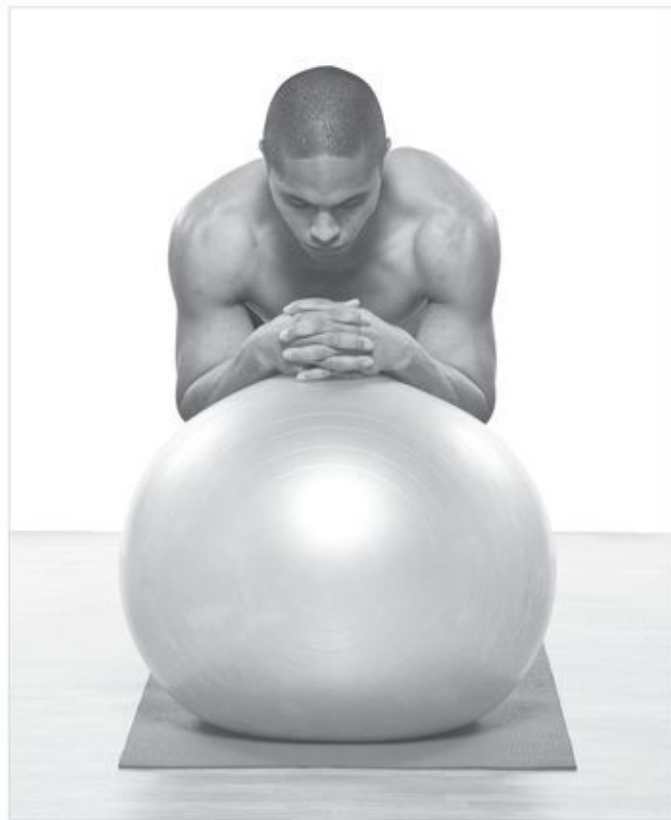
1 Place your forearms on top of a stability ball with your elbows beneath your shoulders and arms bent 90°. Clasp your hands together and step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet. Keeping your core tight and back straight, perform a plank for the targeted amount of time. Slowly lower to your knees when you've finished.



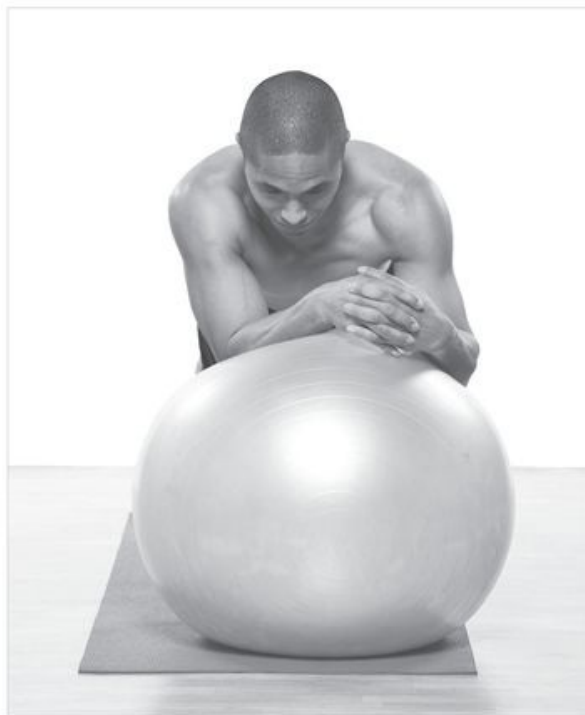
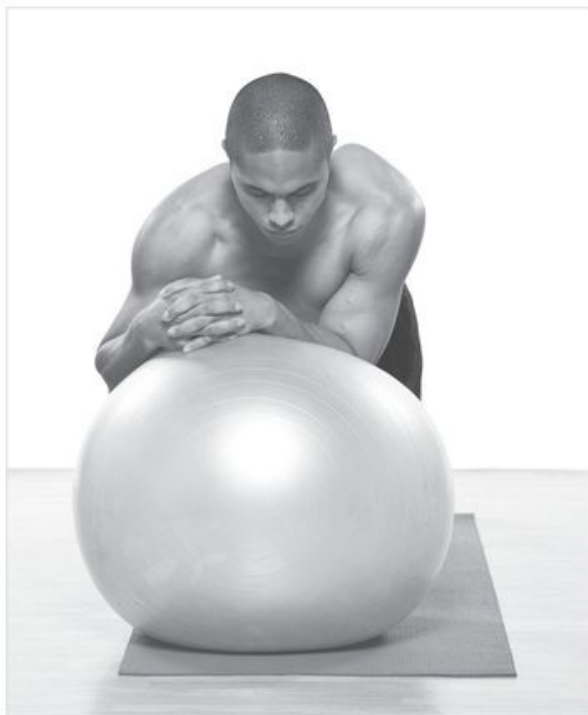
VARIATION: To work your arms, chest and upper back while you work your core, place your chest on the stability ball and step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet. Place both hands on the sides of the stability ball, contract your core and glutes to keep your back straight, and lift your chest off the ball. Hold the “up” position for the targeted amount of time, then lower your chest back to the ball and place your knees on the floor.



Stability Ball Circles



1 Place your forearms on top of a stability ball with your elbows at shoulder height and arms bent 90°. Clasp your hands together and step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet.

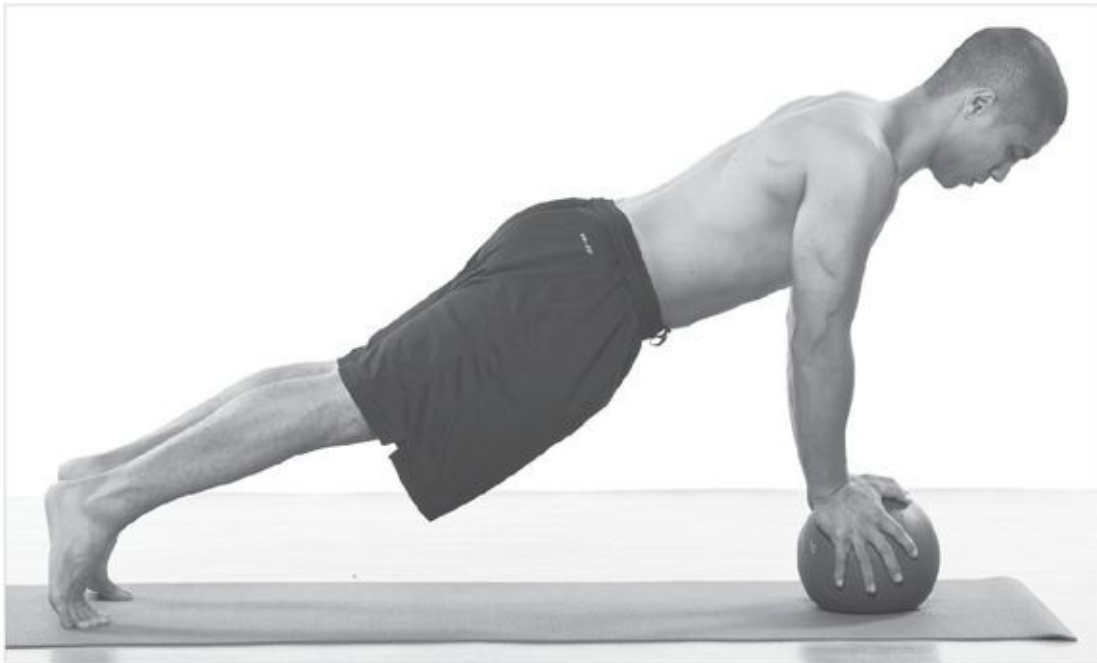


2–3 Engage your core and slowly move your elbows in small clockwise circular motions. Repeat for the desired number of circles and then repeat in counter-clockwise direction.

Slowly lower your body to your knees when you've completed all your reps.

Medicine Ball Plank

The old adage goes, “the bigger they are, the harder they’ll fall,” but when it comes to planks, the smaller the ball, the harder the core work! Here are two variations for using a medicine ball during a plank exercise.



1 Starting on your hands and knees, place a medicine ball directly beneath your sternum. Place both hands on opposite sides of the ball and grasp firmly, keeping your arms straight but elbows not locked. Step your feet back until your body forms a straight line from head to feet. Your feet should be about 6 inches apart with the weight in the balls of your feet. Contract your abdominal muscles and glutes to keep your spine straight from head to heel, and keep your neck in a neutral position with your eyes looking at the medicine ball. Keep your upper back flat; do not let your spine sink below your shoulder blades.

Hold this position for the targeted amount of time, then slowly place your knees on the mat and hands on the floor.

ONE-HAND VARIATION: Perform a basic medicine ball plank, but place your left hand on a medicine ball and your right hand on the floor. Your right arm will be fully extended and your left slightly bent to accommodate the height of the ball. Your shoulders and upper back should remain flat. Hold the position for the targeted amount of time, then roll the medicine ball to your right hand and repeat. After completing both hands, you've done 1 rep.

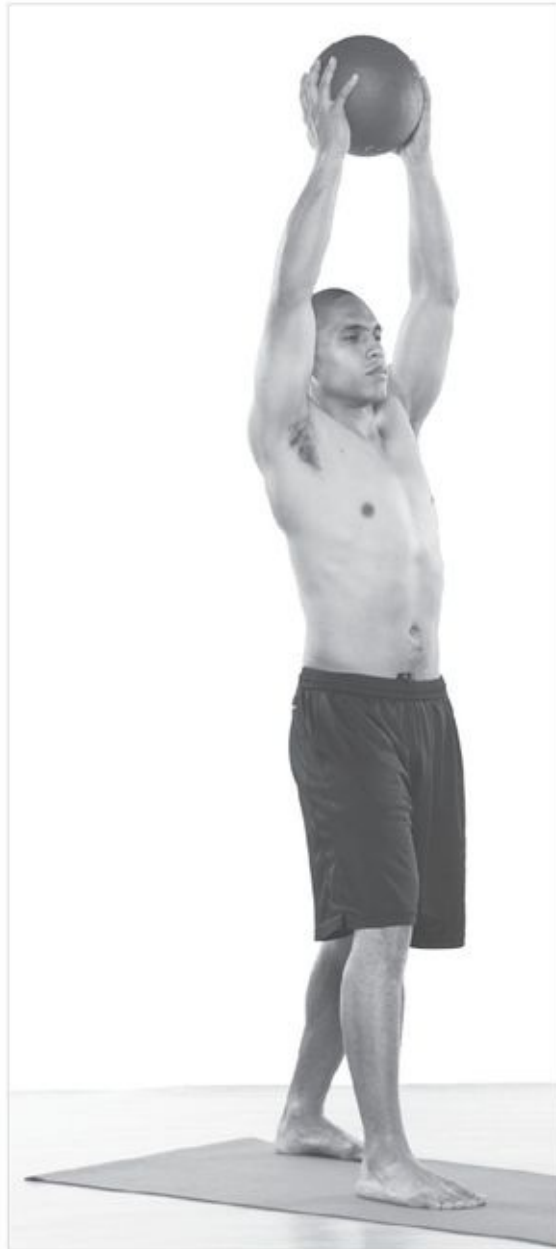


Overhead Weighted Walk

Yes, this is as easy as it sounds—you lift a weight over your head and walk slowly. But it's also a great way to activate and strengthen core and stabilizer muscles, as well as work your arms and legs. This exercise can be performed with dumbbells, a plate or a barbell, but let's start with a medicine ball.



1 Stand with your feet about hip-width apart and raise a medicine ball over your head. Extend your hands straight over your head with your elbows just slightly bent and not locked. Engage your core as if you were about to be hit in the stomach with a tennis ball; try not to arch your back.



2 Keeping your back tall and straight, walk for the targeted amount of time or steps. Then lower the ball to chest height, squat down, and place the ball on the floor between your feet.





PART III:

BEYOND 300 SIT-UPS

Maintaining Your Physique

Congratulations on your success with the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups program! Whether you've hit 100, 200 or even 300 sit-ups, you've surely increased your core strength and developed a more toned physique. So, what's next?

Over the last seven weeks, hopefully you've come to appreciate how demanding and rewarding a comprehensive core-strengthening program can be. After completing the program, you can easily choose any level, week or day and jump-start your new workout from there. Even better, now you can use the exercises in this book to develop your own routines to keep your core strong and flexible!

The Prep level, Level I and Level II are all fantastic routines for maintaining your physique. You've already mastered the movements, so restarting any of the routines is as easy as flipping back a few pages and starting over. While the Prep level is geared at building your strength and confidence to tackle the exercises in Level I and Level II, those levels were specifically created with a wide variety of moves to work your core from a variety of angles and to keep the workouts challenging. If you're up for the challenge, mix in some of the extreme core exercises starting on page 114 to really kick your workout into high gear.

The routines in this book are targeted at strengthening your core, so it's important to add some full-body movements and cardio exercises to keep fit and agile, and maintain a lean physique. Squats, lunges, pull-ups, medicine ball tosses, sprints and hill repeats are all great exercises to build into your three-days-a-week routine to get your body ripped. Come to think of it, I wrote *7 Weeks to Getting Ripped* and created the programs for just that purpose!

I sincerely hope you enjoyed participating in the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups program and have strengthened your core, improved your posture and mastered proper form for not only sit-ups, but the other 30-plus exercises as well.

Thank you for allowing me to develop this program and bring it to print. As a personal trainer I only get the opportunity to work with a select group of athletes at a time. Through these 7 Weeks to Fitness books I have the rare opportunity to reach tens of thousands of athletes of all ages and fitness levels. I appreciate and welcome your feedback, comments, suggestions and success stories on this and all of my programs at 7weekstofitness.com.

Bonus Extreme Core Exercises

Here are a few interesting exercises that didn't make it into the workouts. They're from my secret stash of fun and exciting moves that never fail to get some gawkers at a gym.

Full disclosure: I learned the hanging windshield wipers from a guy at a gym in Scottsdale, Arizona. I couldn't believe how cool and dangerous the move looked, and I had to try it for myself. Needless to say, it took a few tries before I could master it, and now it's one of my favorite extreme core moves—plus it makes other gym-goers scratch their heads when they see me doing it.

Remember, these are advanced moves and not for beginners or any athlete without a strong core or with any back pain or injury.

Suspended Exercises Using an Exercise Band

The less stability you have in an exercise, the more stabilizing muscles you'll have to activate. While stability balls are great for that purpose, suspended bands bring it to a whole other level of difficulty.

To set up for these very advanced movements, attach an exercise band to a fixed object at least 36 inches off the ground. When fully stretched, the band should be approximately 24 inches off the ground. A long exercise band looped around a pull-up bar or Smith machine works very well. Don't forget to make sure that the band and the apparatus can support your weight!

Suspended Crunch



1 Starting on your hands and knees, place the toes of both feet into the loop of the exercise band one at a time. Place your weight in your hands and lift your knees off the mat, balancing your weight on your hands and suspended feet. Walk your hands out until your body forms a straight line from head to feet, engaging your core and glutes to keep your back flat. Your hands should be on the floor just a little bit wider than your shoulders, and your neck should be in a neutral position with your head neither raised nor chin pressed to chest.

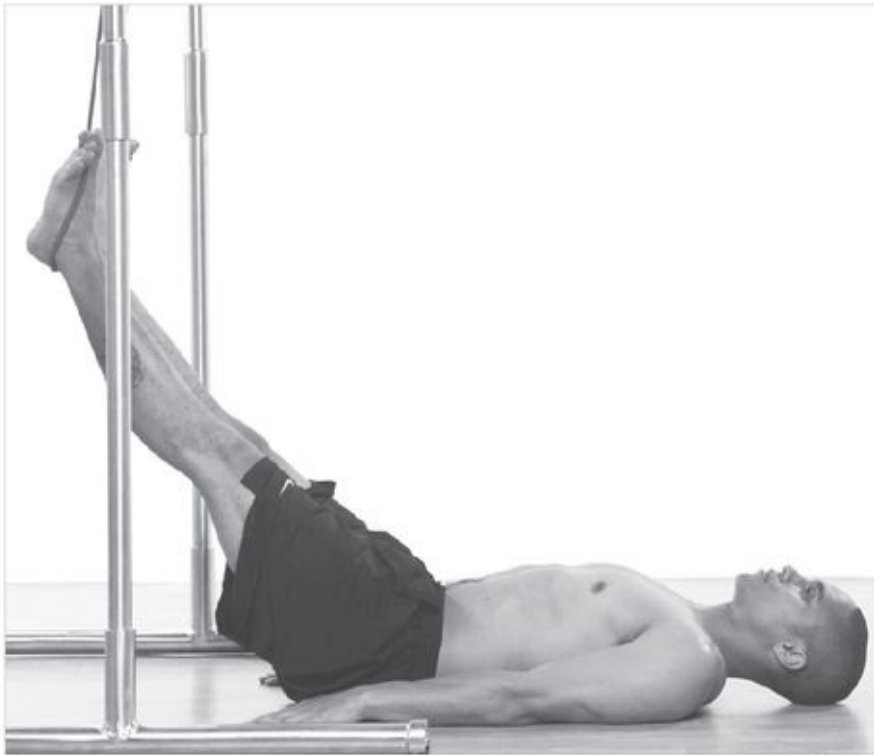


2 Keeping your back flat and spine straight, exhale and slowly bring your knees in toward your chest and your heels toward your butt. Do not raise your hips or arch your back. Stop when you can't bring your knees any closer toward your chest, and hold that position for 10 seconds. Be careful not to swing or bounce on the exercise band. This should be a very slow and controlled movement with your abs and glutes engaged the entire time.

In a slow and controlled motion, inhale and extend your legs, returning your body to starting position. That's 1 rep.

Suspended Hip Bridge

1 Lie on your back and place your feet in the loop of the band. Keep your arms extended along your sides, palms down.





2 Raise your butt off the floor, and then raise your hips and lower back, forming a straight line from your sternum to your feet with the tops of your shoulder blades flat on the floor. Do not push your hips too high or arch your back. Engage your core and squeeze your glutes to keep your back and hips rigid and flat.

In a slow and controlled motion, lower down to starting position. That's 1 rep.

Be careful not to swing or bounce on the exercise band; this should be a very slow and controlled movement with your abs and glutes engaged the entire time.

Obsta-Core Course

This “exercise” is complicated and works a lot of different supporting muscles. Quite simply, the idea is to perform a plank while walking your hands in a half-circle. Oh yeah, and there are a whole bunch of obstacles placed in your way that you’ll need to place your hands on and then stabilize your body against. Make sure each of the objects is stable and able to support you before you place your weight on it. Since you’re designing your own course, make it fun and interesting—but safe! I’ve used kettlebells, medicine balls, BOSU balls, stability balls, foam rollers and just about anything that’s laying around the house.

1–2 Starting at one end of your obsta-core course, assume a plank position on your hands; your feet will remain in the center of the half-circle. Walk your hands in a half-circle. When you encounter an object, place one hand on it with your other hand on the ground, and hold a plank for 15 seconds. Then walk your other hand over and onto the object and place your first hand on the floor. Hold a plank for another 15 seconds, Continue until all obstacles are completed.

Make sure your core is engaged and your back is flat; review the proper plank form on page 72.



Hanging Windshield Wiper

This exercise requires strength, coordination and a little bit of guts. Make sure you have a very firm grip, that the pull-up bar is strong and that there's plenty of room above the bar. If you're not ready for this extreme move, work on basic Windshield Wipers (page 87) to perfect the form and strengthen your core.

1 Grasp a pull-up bar using an underhand grip (palms facing you) with your hands shoulder-width apart. Raise your legs off the floor and lean back while pulling your hips up to the bar. Position yourself so your back is parallel to the ground, and raise your feet above the bar in a pike position with your toes pointing toward the sky. That's right, your body will be in a 90° L-shape with the bar at your waist (and that's just the starting position).



2 Using your obliques, along with a million other tiny stabilizer muscles, twist your hips and legs in unison to the right until they're close to parallel with the pull-up bar. Hold for 3–5 seconds and then slowly return to starting position. That's 1 rep; repeat on the left side.

Because this is a complicated move, it may take several times to execute properly, so be careful to have an extremely firm grip on the bar and do not attempt if you're already fatigued. Please.







APPENDIX

Warm-Ups & Stretches

As we discussed in the Before You Begin section on page 27, since you'll be pushing, pressing and twisting your body during the workouts, it's very important to warm up before you stretch. Stretching prior to warming up can cause more damage than good to muscles, ligaments and joints. When your muscles are cold, they're far less pliable and you don't receive any benefit from stretching prior to warming up. Below are some dynamic warm-ups that'll get your heart rate up, loosen tight muscles and prepare you for your workout.

After your workout, stretching will help you reduce soreness from the workout, increase range of motion and flexibility within a joint or muscle, and prepare your body for any future workouts. Stretching immediately postexercise while your muscles are still warm allows your muscles to return to their full range of motion (which gives you more flexibility gains) and reduces the chance of injury or fatigue in the hours or days after an intense workout.

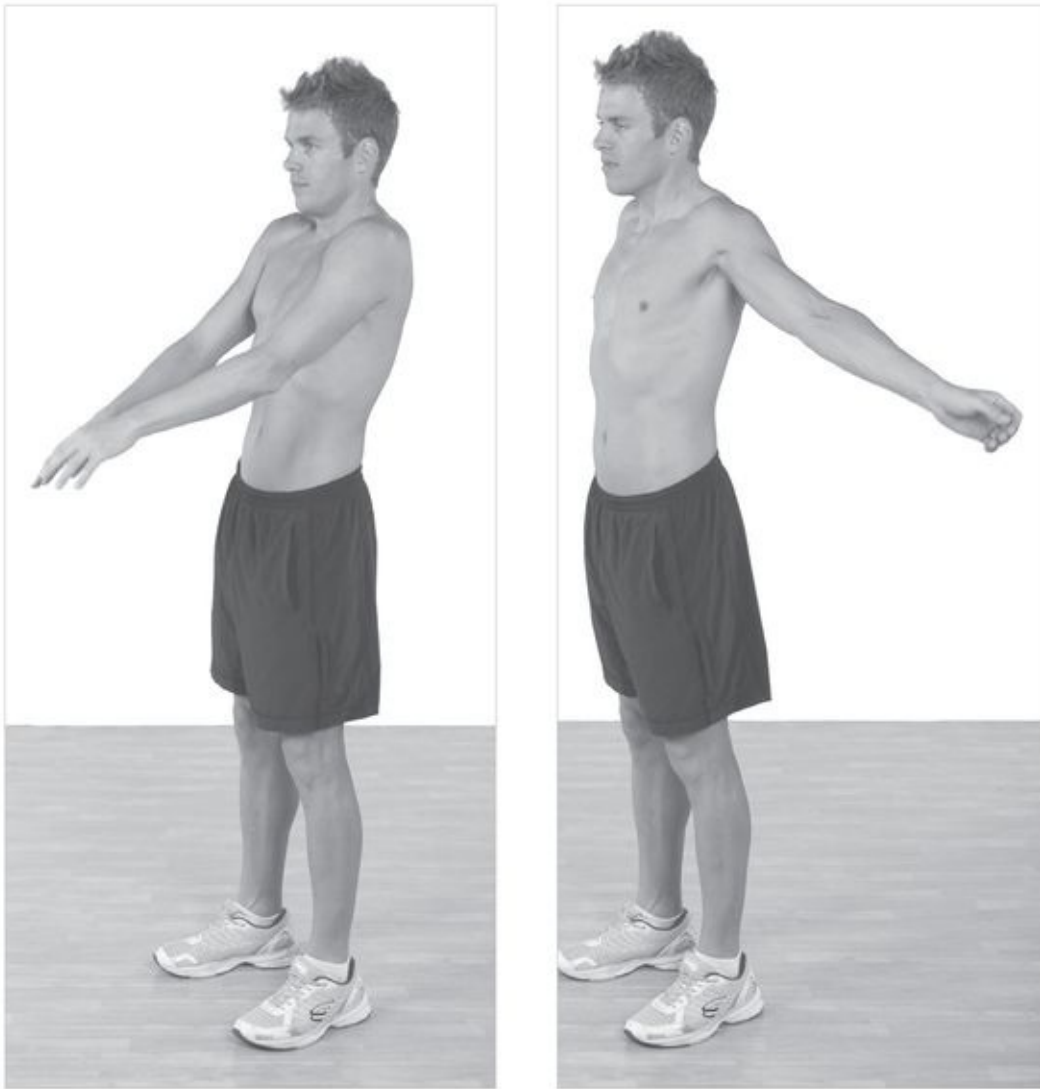
It's important to remember that even when you're warm and loose, you should never "bounce" during stretching. Keep your movements slow and controlled. The stretches in this section should be performed in order to optimize your recovery. Remember to exhale as you perform every deep stretch and rest 30 seconds in between each stretch.

Warm-Ups

Arm Circle



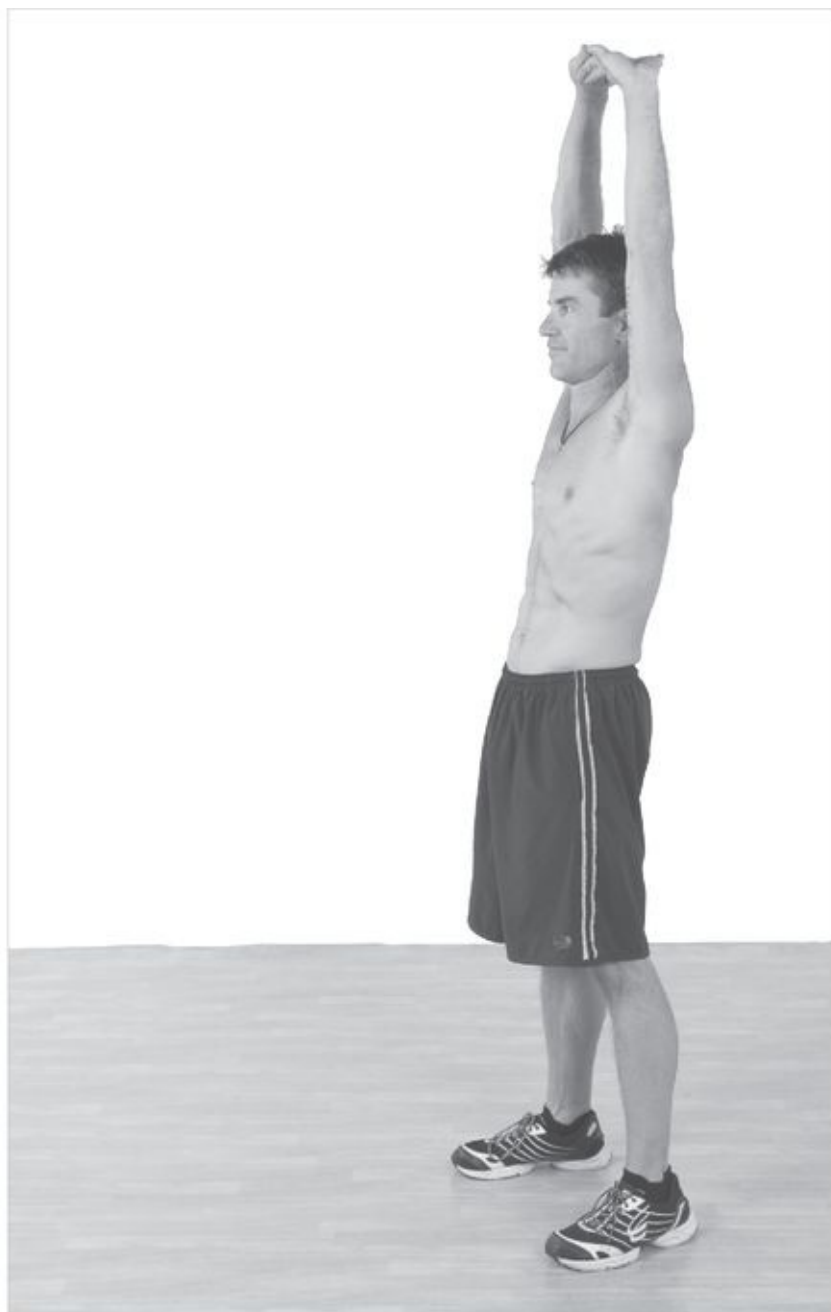
1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart.



2–3 Move both arms in a complete circle forward 5 times and then backward 5 times.

Lumber Jack

1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and extend your hands overhead with elbows locked, fingers interlocked, and palms up.



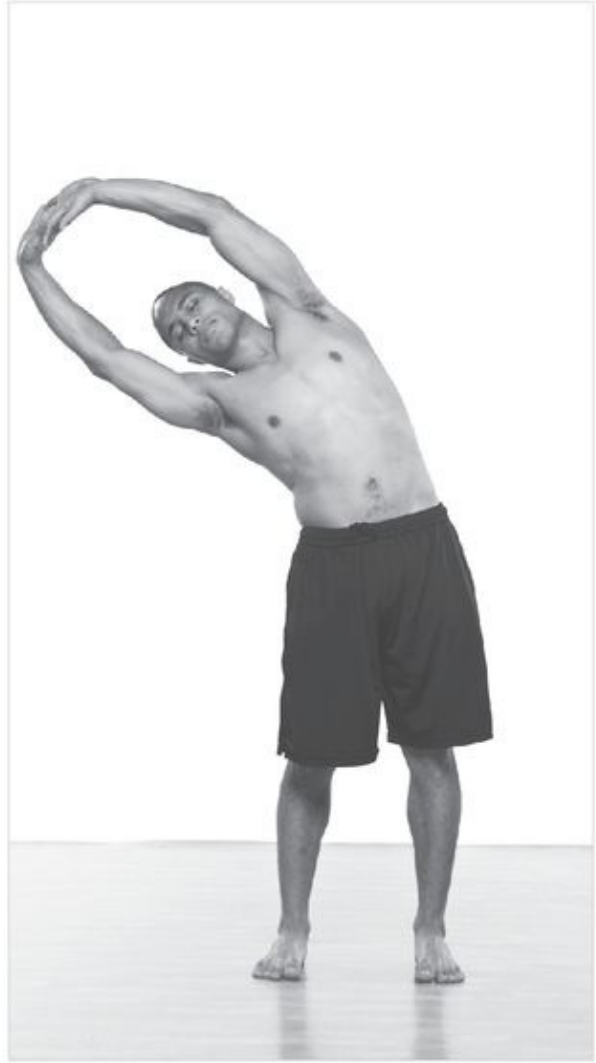
2 Bend forward at the waist and try to put your hands on the ground (like you're chopping wood). Raise up and repeat.



Side Bend

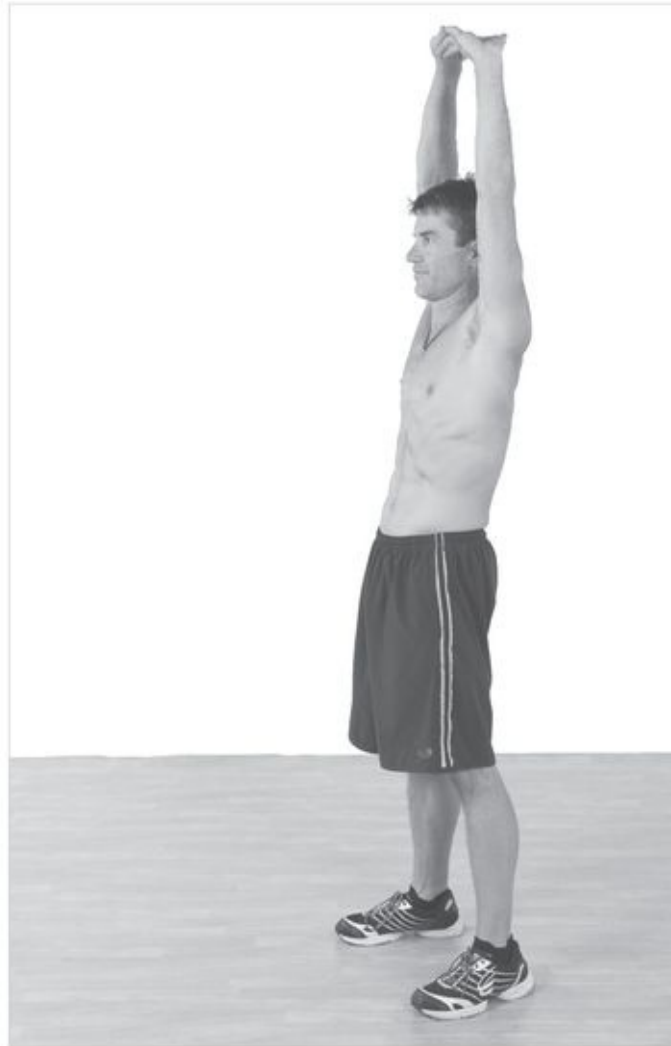


1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and extend your hands overhead with elbows locked, fingers interlocked and palms up.

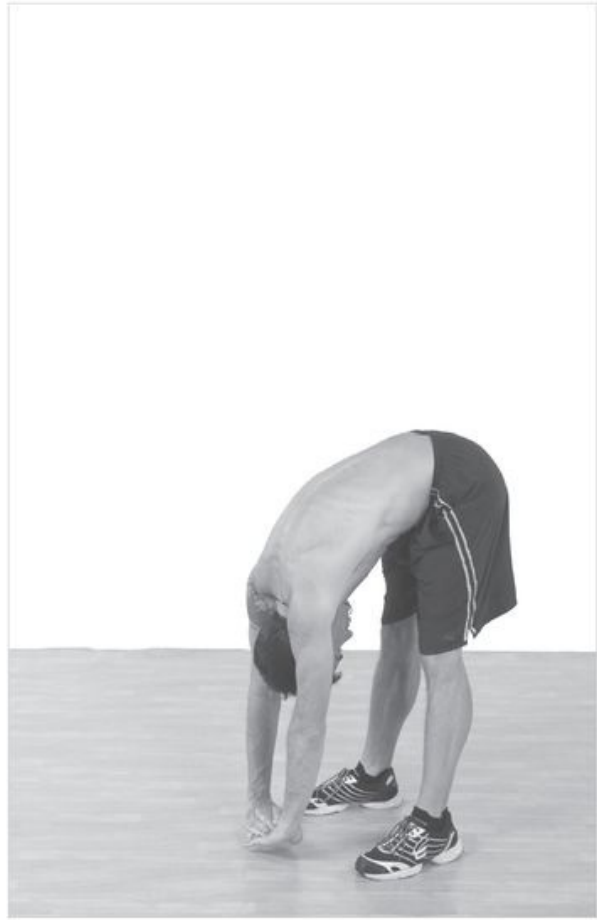
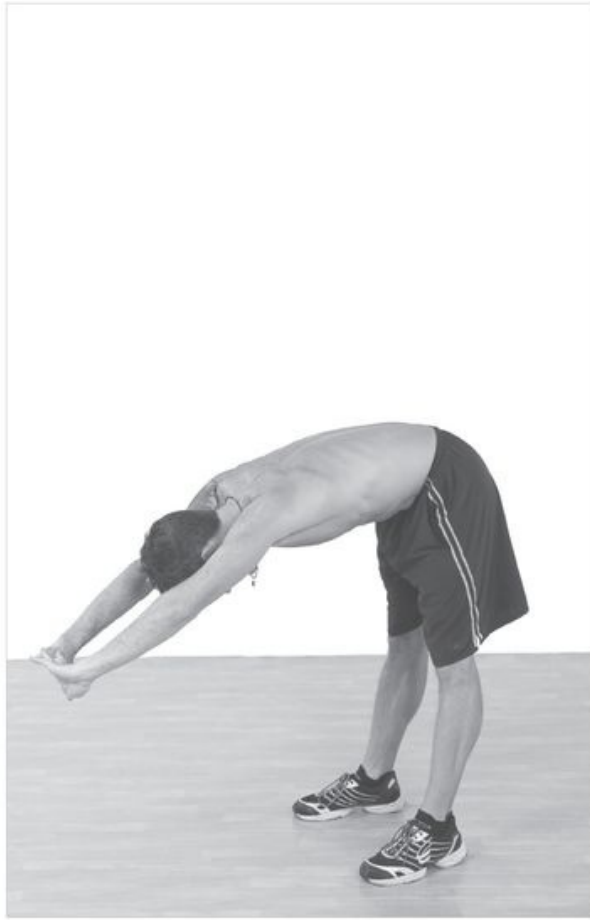


2-3 Bend side to side.

Around the World



1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and extend your hands overhead with elbows locked, fingers interlocked, and palms up. Keep your arms straight the entire time.



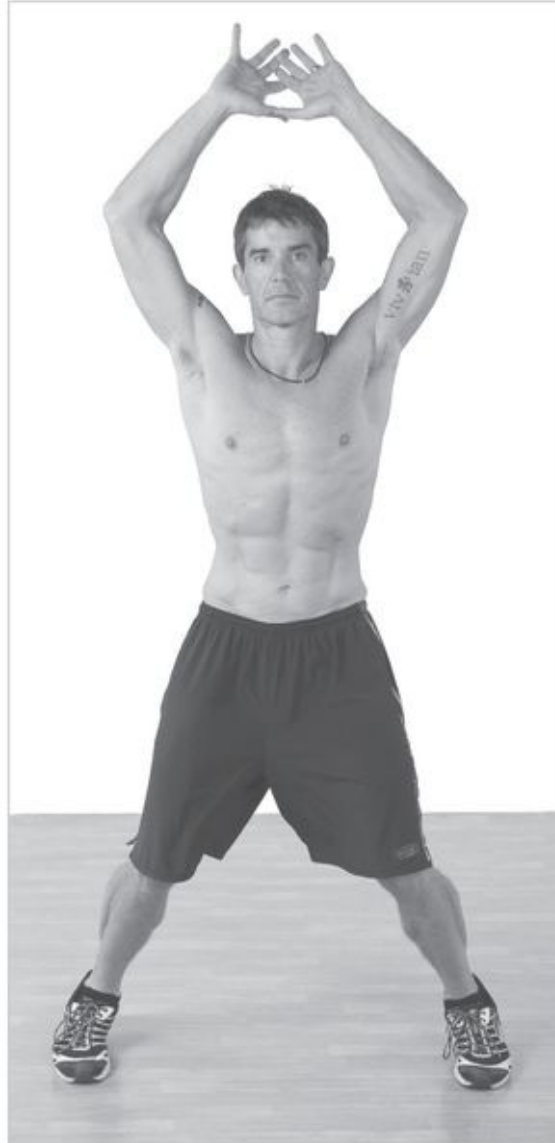
2–3 Bending at the hips, bring your hands down toward your right leg, and in a continuous circular motion bring your hands toward your toes, then toward your left leg and then return your hands overhead and bend backward.

Repeat three times, then change directions.

Jumping Jacks



1 Stand tall with your feet together and arms extended along your sides, palms facing forward.



2 Jump 6–12 inches off the ground and simultaneously spread your feet apart an additional 20–30 inches while extending your hands directly overhead.

Jump 6–12 inches off the ground and return your hands and feet to starting position. Do 10 reps.

Stretches

Forearm & Wrist

Begin the stretch gently and allow your forearms to relax before stretching them to their full range of motion.

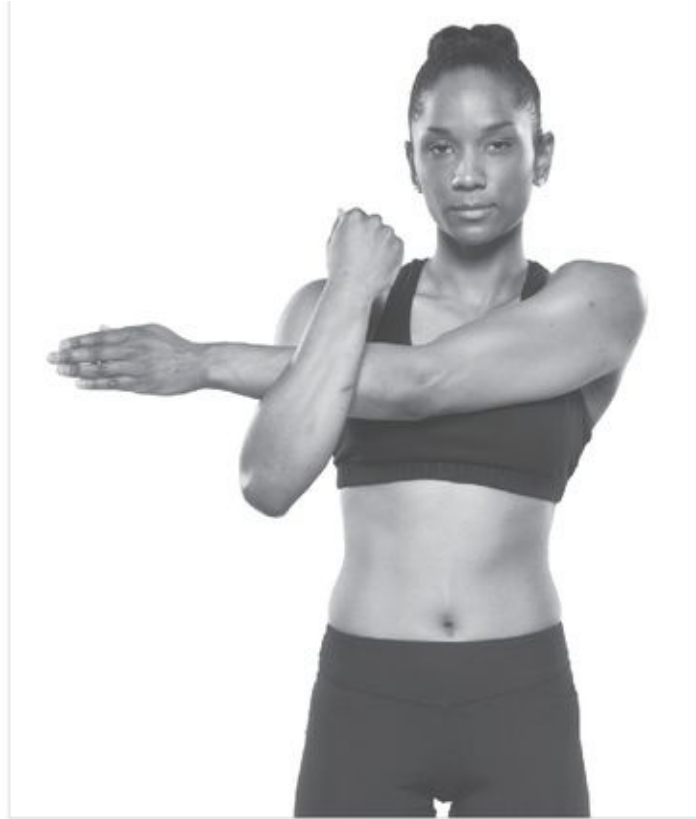


1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and extend both arms straight out in front of you. Keep your back straight. Turn your right wrist to the sky and grasp your right fingers from below with your left hand. Slowly pull your fingers back toward your torso with your left hand; hold for 10 seconds.



2 Swap arms and repeat.

Shoulders



1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and bring your left arm across your chest. Support your left elbow with the crook of your right arm by raising your right arm to 90°. Gently pull your left arm to your chest while maintaining proper posture (straight back, wide shoulders). Don't round or hunch your shoulders. Hold your arm to your chest for 10 seconds.



2 Release and switch arms.

After you've done both sides, shake your hands out for 5–10 seconds.

Shoulders & Upper Back



1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and extend both arms straight out in front of you. Interlace your fingers and turn your palms to face away from your body. Keep your back straight.



2 Reach your palms away from your body. Exhale as you push your palms straight out from your body by pushing through your shoulders and upper back. Allow your neck to bend naturally as you round your upper back. Continue to reach your hands and stretch for 10 seconds.

Rest for 30 seconds then repeat. After you've done the second set, shake your arms out for 10 seconds to your sides to return blood to the fingers and forearm muscles.

Chest



1 Clasp your hands together behind your lower back with palms facing each other. Keeping an erect posture and your arms as straight as possible, gently pull your arms away from your back, straight out behind you. Keep your shoulders down. Hold for 10 seconds.

Rest for 30 seconds and repeat.

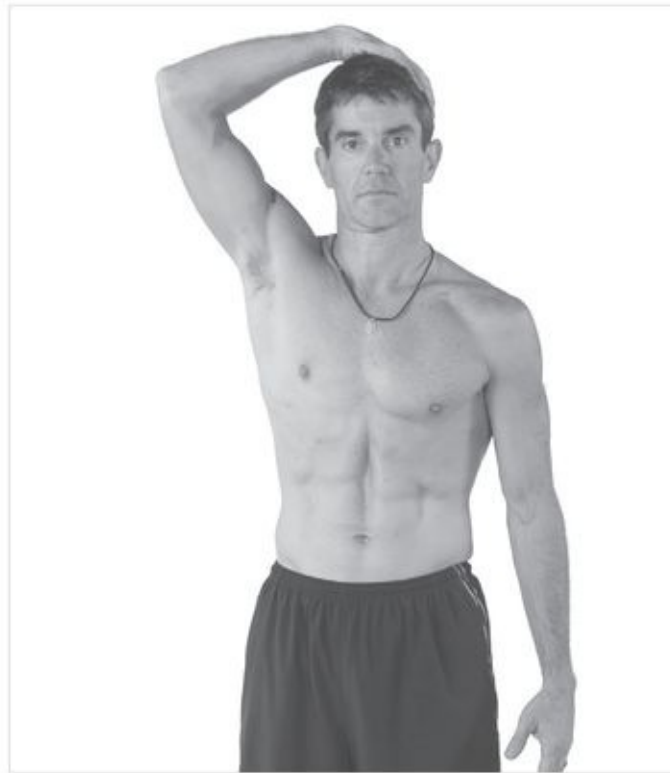
Arms



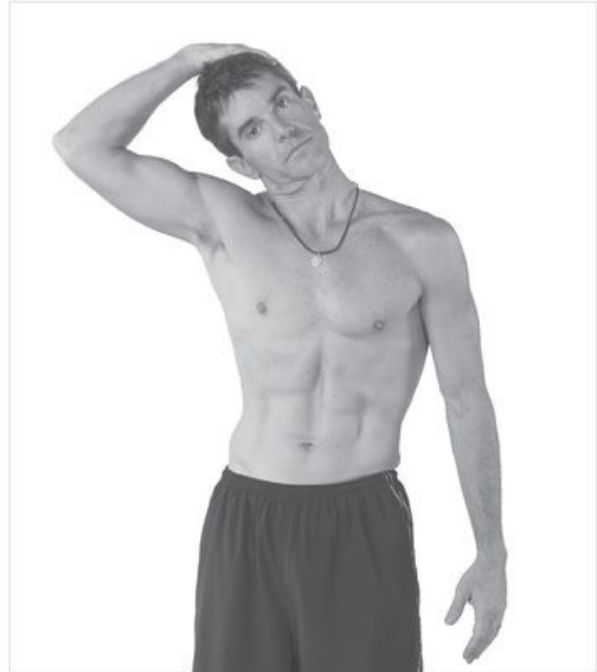
1 Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Maintaining a straight back, grab your elbows with the opposite hand. Slowly raise your arms until they're slightly behind your head. Keeping your right hand on your left elbow, drop your left hand to the top of your right shoulder blade. Gently push your left elbow down with your right hand, and hold for 10 seconds.

Rest for 10 seconds and then repeat with opposite arms.

Neck



1 Standing like a soldier (with your back straight, shoulders square and chest raised), slowly lower your left ear to your left shoulder. To increase the stretch, you may use your left hand to gently pull your head toward your shoulder. Hold for 5–10 seconds.



2–3 Slowly roll your chin to your chest and then lower your right ear to right shoulder. Again, you may use your hand to enhance the stretch. Hold for 5–10 seconds.

Return your head to normal position and then tilt back slightly and look straight up. Hold for 5–10 seconds.

Cobra

This stretches and strengthens your abs and back and is a great way to cool down between sets of multiple repetitions.

1 Lying on your stomach, place your hands directly under your shoulders with your fingers facing forward. Straighten your legs and point your toes.



2 Exhale and engage your core while lifting your chest off the floor and pushing your hips gently into the floor. Your arms help guide you through the movement, and your elbows should remain slightly bent at the top of the extension; your hips should remain in contact with the mat. Hold the “up” position for 15–30 seconds, then gently roll your upper body back to the floor. Rest for 10 seconds.



Child's Pose



THE POSITION: From a kneeling position, sit your butt back on your calves, then lean forward and place your lower torso on your thighs. Extend your arms directly out in front of you, parallel to each other, and lower your chest toward the floor. Reach your arms as far forward as you can, and rest your forearms and hands flat on the floor. Hold for 30 seconds. Release and then rest for 10 seconds.

Prep-Level Program

Welcome to the Prep level! This program builds progressively over three weeks and packs a lot of training and learning into that short span of time. It's imperative that you use this program to not only build your strength and stamina, but also to master all of the movements so you can perform them repeatedly with good form. A great deal of people will repeat the Prep program until they're ready to make the leap into Level I.

Prep Program Tips

Take this workout at your own pace if you're new to working out or coming back after some time away. Don't overdo it! You'll most likely be sore for 1–2 days after your first few workouts, and if you overdo it, you'll miss subsequent workouts. This happens to nearly everyone when they start a workout regimen—don't let it happen to you.

You can repeat the Prep program as many times as you'd like to build your strength and increase the intensity on the other exercises. Here's a little secret: The Prep program will get you stronger, leaner and toned, too! The exercises contained in the Prep program are carefully chosen to build your confidence as well as your body, and by sticking to the program you'll see results!

Nothing is more motivating than having a “before” picture, whether you post it on your fridge or keep it on your cell phone. It's really important to see where you began so that during the program and after completing it, you can see your improvements.

You'll always miss some workouts, no matter how hard you try and prepare—life gets in the way. Don't be discouraged if you miss a day—just slide your routine back a day for the rest of the week and start again on Monday. If you missed a week, just restart the following Monday. Don't give up. The goal isn't “7 weeks”; it's all about you getting in the best shape of your life. Even if it takes six months of stops and starts, the end result is totally worth the effort!

Note: Rest and recovery are vital to the success of the programs and should be included as prescribed on the schedules. Remember also to warm up before your workout and stretch afterward! See pages 126–38 for ideas.

Prep Level

Week 1		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	8 Assisted Sit-Ups	5 Hip Raises	5 Cobras	--
	<i>set 2</i>	:30 Plank	10 Leg Lifts	10 Reverse Crunches	--
	<i>set 3</i>	8 Assisted Sit-Ups	5 Hip Raises	8 Crunches	--
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	12 Marching Twists	10 Bird Dogs	10 Reverse Crunches	--
	<i>set 2</i>	:30 Plank	5 Hip Raises	5 Cobras	--
	<i>set 3</i>	10 Assisted Sit-Ups	10 Reverse Crunches	10 Leg Lifts	--
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	:30 Plank	12 Crunches	8 Hip Raises	--
	<i>set 2</i>	8 Cobras	12 Leg Lifts	10 Bird Dogs	--
	<i>set 3</i>	12 Assisted Sit-Ups	12 Reverse Crunches	10 Hip Raises	--
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

Week 2		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	14 Marching Twists	12 Reverse Crunches	14 Leg Lifts	--
	<i>set 2</i>	:40 Plank	10 Bird Dogs	12 Hip Raises	--
	<i>set 3</i>	12 Assisted Sit-Ups	8 Cobras	--	--
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	:40 Plank	14 Leg Lifts	8 Cobras	--
	<i>set 2</i>	10 Windshield Wipers	12 Assisted Sit-Ups	8 Supermans	--
	<i>set 3</i>	:30 Side Plank each side	14 Crunches	--	--
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	16 Assisted Sit-Ups	10 Stability Ball Extensions	10 Bird Dogs	--
	<i>set 2</i>	10 Stability Ball Crunches	12 Supermans	16 Crunches	--
	<i>set 3</i>	12 Mountain Climbers	12 Hip Raises	--	--
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

Week 3		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	14 Windshield Wipers	16 Leg Lifts	10 Bicycle Crunches	--
	<i>set 2</i>	18 Crunches	10 Cobras	12 Bird Dogs	--
	<i>set 3</i>	1:00 Plank	14 Reverse Crunches	12 Stability Ball Crunches	--
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	6 Sit-Ups	14 Hip Raises	14 Leg Lifts	--
	<i>set 2</i>	12 Bicycle Crunches	12 Supermans	10 Cobras	--
	<i>set 3</i>	6 Sit-Ups	12 Stability Ball Crunches	12 Hip Raises	--
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	1:00 Plank	18 Marching Twists	12 Stability Ball Extensions	--
	<i>set 2</i>	:30 Side Plank each side	10 In & Outs	14 Hip Raises	--
	<i>set 3</i>	12 Bicycle Crunches	12 Bird Dogs	8 Sit-Ups	--
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

Week 4		Rest 30 seconds after every set (longer if required)			
Mon	<i>set 1</i>	1:00 Plank	14 Hip Raises	16 Leg Lifts	--
	<i>set 2</i>	16 Windshield Wipers	12 Bird Dogs	10 Sit-Ups	--
	<i>set 3</i>	16 Reverse Crunches	12 Cobras	12 Stability Ball Extensions	--
Tue		Rest			
Wed	<i>set 1</i>	10 Band Twists	16 Supermans	10 Mason Twists	--
	<i>set 2</i>	1:00 Plank	12 Sit-Ups	14 Hip Raises	--
	<i>set 3</i>	14 Stability Ball Crunches	12 Stability Ball Extensions	12 Bicycle Crunches	--
Thu		Rest			
Fri	<i>set 1</i>	16 Sit-Ups	16 Hip Raises	14 Mason Twists	--
	<i>set 2</i>	1:05 Plank	22 Crunches	12 Supermans	--
	<i>set 3</i>	18 Windshield Wipers	16 Mountain Climbers	12 In & Outs	--
Sat		Rest			
Sun		Rest			

Prep-Level Program Test

Are you ready for a quick test of your progress after tackling the Prep program? Great, well drop and give me 40, soldier! Seriously, let's take the test and see if you can do 40 or more sit-ups!

Round up your timer, towel, water and exercise mat, and let's see how many sit-ups or crunches you can do in 2 minutes. If you've completed all the exercises in the Prep level, then this should be a snap!

2:00 Timed Sit-Ups: _____ Date: ____/____/_____

Congratulations on completing the Prep program! So, how do you feel? By now you should be stronger, more confident and familiar with each of the basic core-strengthening movements and ready to move on to the challenges in Level I and Level II. Not ready yet? Then, by all means, feel free to repeat the Prep program until you feel like you're up to the more advanced exercises in Level I. Take this program at your own pace; developing better posture and stronger abs, back and hips has so many long-term benefits and is far more important than hitting a certain number of reps in a pre-determined amount of time.

When you're ready, the Level I program begins on page 47.

7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups Logs

Level 1 Sit-Ups Log

WEEK	DAY	SET 1		SET 2		SET 3		SET 4		SET 5		TOTAL
		Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	
1	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
2	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
3	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
4	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
GRAND TOTAL												

Use this chart to record your progress. You may choose to make several copies instead of writing straight in the book. For a digital version of this log, check out the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups iPhone app at 7weekstofitness.com.

Level 2 Sit-Ups Log

WEEK	DAY	SET 1		SET 2		SET 3		SET 4		SET 5		TOTAL
		Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	
1	M											
	W											
	F											
	WEEKLY TOTAL											
2	M											
	W											
	F											
	WEEKLY TOTAL											
3	M											
	W											
	F											
	WEEKLY TOTAL											
4	M											
	W											
	F											
	WEEKLY TOTAL											
GRAND TOTAL												

Use this chart to record your progress. You may choose to make several copies instead of writing straight in the book. For a digital version of this log, check out the 7 Weeks to 300 Sit-Ups iPhone app at 7weekstofitness.com.

Level 2 Sit-Ups Log

WEEK	DAY	SET 1		SET 2		SET 3		SET 4		SET 5		TOTAL
		Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	
5	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
6	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
7	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
GRAND TOTAL												

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Prep Level Sit-Ups Log

WEEK	DAY	SET 1		SET 2		SET 3		SET 4		SET 5		TOTAL
		Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	Goal	Actual	
1	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
2	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
3	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
4	M											
	W											
	F											
WEEKLY TOTAL												
GRAND TOTAL												

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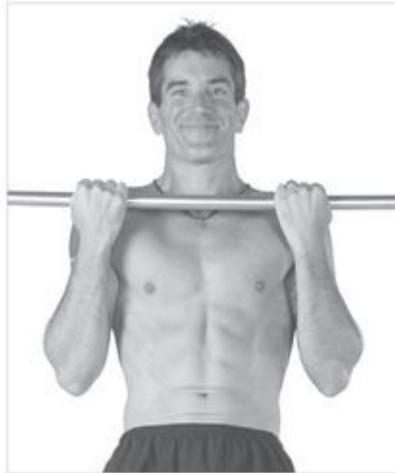
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