

CORE STRENGTH

Core strengthening isn't just for grown-ups; children can also benefit from toning techniques--but it has to be fun. A strong core ensures that your trunk/torso stays stable while your limbs are moving.

Here are some exercises kids can do in therapy or at home to work core muscles and achieve better posture, stability and endurance, without getting bored.

Bridging

Lay on back with knees bent and feet flat on floor. Push through heels and lift buttocks off surface. Hold position and focus on keeping pelvis and shoulders level. Engage lumbar stabilizers and gluteal muscles.

- Add a little: Lift and lower pelvis with control.
- Add a little more: Hold one leg out straight but still keep hips lifted and pelvis level. Repeat on other side. Try lifting and lowering with one leg.
- Add a small ball: Place a ball between the knees and hold it there while performing the same exercises. This will engage the adductors and stabilizers more. Or place the small ball under the pelvis while trying to hold it steady.
- Add a larger ball: Place feet on ball and attempt to lift hips and bridge. This can be tried with knees bent or straight.
- **Make it fun: Zoom cars under the bridge see how many can pass under. Place a musical or squeak toy under the pelvis that will sound as the child lifts and lowers.**



Prone Extension/Superman

Lay on stomach with arms overhead. Lift arms and legs so upper chest and upper thighs lift off surface, engaging spinal extensors. Arms and legs should be straight.

- Add a little: Change arm position so elbows are flexed to engage rhomboids and middle trapezius more.
- Add a little more: Bring hands down by hips with palms up and lift torso and legs.
- Add a small ball: Lift arms and legs while holding a ball.
- Add a larger ball: Perform arm or leg lifting when torso is on a larger therapy ball in prone.
- **Make it fun: Reach up for items that can be hidden under the body. Play catch from this position. Perform this on a swing or supported by a parent in the air.**



Quadruped Alternating Arms and Legs

On hands and knees, hold spine stable and straight. Alternate lifting and straightening the opposite arm and leg while holding spine and pelvis stable.

- Add a little: Crunch engaging abdominals by pulling in elbow to opposite knee under the body.
- Add a little more: Hold arm and leg out to the sides or lift arm and leg on the same side.
- Add a small ball: Place the small ball on the low back and do not let it roll off while performing this exercise.
- Add a larger ball: Perform exercise while arms are weight bearing on a ball (possibly weight bearing on forearms).
- **Make it fun: Add movement and crawl around with a small stuffed animal on the low back, pointing to other animals in the "forest" while not letting the animal drop off a stable spine.**



Plank

Assume a push-up position (body and legs straight, supported on extended arms and balls of feet). Hold a straight neutral spine in this position.

- Add a little: Lift one foot off the ground and maintain stable position
- Add a little more: Move to a side plank, supported on arm and side of foot on same side with hips and trunk in one line. Lift free arm. Moving between plank and side plank on each side is a very challenging exercise.
- Add a larger ball: Perform plank with forearms on the ball or with calves on the ball and arms extended.
- **Make it fun: Have a timed contest to see who can stay up in the position longest. Set up play kitchen toys on back pretending child is a table.**



Sit-Ups

Lay supine with knees bent and feet on floor. Lift head and shoulders off surface. Breathe out as you lift and in as you lower.

- Add a little: Add a hold at the top and then possibly lift a little higher.
- Add a little more: Add rotation to engage the obliques by reaching arm or elbow for opposite knee.
- Add a small ball: Lift and lower holding a small ball (a weighted medicine ball would add to the challenge). Or hold the small ball between the knees to better engage the adductors.
- Add a larger ball: Perform sit-ups while sitting/lying on a large ball.
- **Make it fun: Play catch with the ball as the child lifts and lowers. Have the child grab a puzzle piece with each lift to then complete a puzzle.**



Lunges

Stand with feet in stride, supported on a flat foot in the front and on the ball of the toes in the back. Flex the front knee, keeping back leg straight and engaged to lower into a lunge. Push to return to upright. Be cautious to keep front knee directly over ankle and not coming forward in front of the foot.

- Add a little: Rotate shoulders to the side as lowering into the lunge, but keep pelvis facing forward. This will engage the obliques more.
- Add a little more: Hold at three different points in the movement going down and coming up.
- Add a small or larger ball: Lower to pick up and put down a small ball. Play catch while lifting and lowering
- **Make it fun: Make the lunges walking lunges and have a race performing walking lunges.**



Wood Chops

Seated with both hands together, lift arms up over one shoulder and, with control, lower arms across body to opposite hip. Repeat movement to both sides.

- Add a little: Perform exercise in varied positions, such as standing, tall kneel and half kneel.
- Add a little more: Perform exercise with the resistance of holding elastic tubing secured to a table leg.
- Add a small ball: Hold the small ball (weighted, if possible) and perform movement. Or play catch with someone behind them.
- Add a larger ball: Perform exercise while seated on the larger ball.
- **Make it fun: Use a plastic bat or wrapping paper roll to swing or simulate sword movements to knock down toys, have a play sword fight or swipe at balloons.**



Dead Bugs

Lay on back with arms and legs off surface. Hold arms at hips and knees flexed. Lift right arm over head and straighten left leg, then switch with left arm over head and right leg straight. Move through these alternating arm and leg movements with control and abdominals engaged.

- Add a little: Lift head and shoulders slightly while performing exercise.
- Add a little more: Make body more like an X with legs straight and arms straight overhead and reach up with arm for opposite toes. Slowly control the lowering.
- Add a small ball: With the small ball in hands, lift knees and hold ball between feet or knees. Lower legs and repeat by passing ball back up to hands.
- Add a larger ball: Perform exercise while lying on a ball and feet on the floor, alternating which foot is lifted.
- **Make it fun: Swat or pop bubbles while performing this exercise. Play balloon volleyball while in this position.**

The Dead Bug



Other Ideas

Often, a home exercise program for children can get boring and will not be followed through. It can be more beneficial to suggest functional fun activities that kids do everyday to engage the core muscles.

- Build an obstacle course out of chairs and cushions at home, and have the child crawl or climb over it.
- Climb up a slide instead of using the steps, then turn around and slide down.
- Hold relay races in wheelbarrow, crab walking and bear positions.
- Crawl backwards up and down the stairs with supervision for safety
- Standing on an uneven surface (i.e. bed or pillows) while playing catch or hitting a balloon back and forth. This can also be done in a half-kneel or high-kneeling



This video has a few examples of exercises

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGswFly7kJc&index=1&list=PL3D2D82CD60BEFC4E>