



5 BEST

“CORE KILLER” EXERCISES

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5 BEST “CORE KILLER” EXERCISES

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WHAT IS THE CORE?

I've always been a fan of the TV show 'Jeopardy' even though it makes me question the education I received (or didn't receive) while growing up. I mean what's not to love about this show? It's fast pace, it's entertaining, but 9 times out of 10 I will answer the question incorrectly and that one question I do get correct ends up being something so basic that it's near comical and has zero practical application in my life.

Now if you were given this 'answer' from Jeopardy, how would you respond?

'A complex series of muscles including everything besides your arms and legs

and it is incorporated in almost every movement of the human body...'

WHAT ARE YOUR ABS?

WRONG

WHAT IS A 6-PACK?

WRONG

WHAT IS THE CORE?

DING DING DING



During the nearly two decades that I have been involved in strength and conditioning, the definition of “the core” and consequently, core training has evolved and has also been widely misconstrued.

With so many great minds in the fitness arena contributing daily there is a good deal of terrific data that currently exists about the “the core.” However, there has also been a great deal of smoke and mirrors put in play to simply lead one to believe they are doing something right.

Let’s take a quick look at some of the main functions of the core muscles:

1. Your core muscles stabilize a body segment so that another body segment can generate power. Even snipers in the military require strong core muscles in order to steady their arms.

2. Imagine your car without shocks; your core muscles are needed for shock absorption. ... Can you say, “This is important to help avoid or minimize injury?”

3. Your core muscles maintain functional postures. You don’t have to care about this unless you want to be in the 20% of Americans who DON’T complain of back problems (yes 80% claim to have back problems).

4. Your core muscles are required for dynamic motion such as lateral flexion, rotation, and bending. Simply put, you want to be able to move in various directions for things such as sports, chores, daily activities, etc.

5. Your core muscles contain and protect your internal organs. Consider these muscles as your bulletproof jacket keeping you alive in battle.

THE 6-PACK SYNDROME

When you see a person with a defined 6-pack, the last thing you probably think is that you are looking at someone who is unhealthy. After all, you must look like you are healthy to actually be healthy, right?

Not always.

It is actually very possible to be unhealthy and have well defined abdominal muscles at the same time. And, even if you don't have your 6-pack yet but are working towards one, the quest for obtaining your 6-pack can lead to behaviors that are detrimental to your long-term health.

Do you remember the Presidential Physical Fitness Test (PPFT) in grade school? If my memory serves me correctly, one of the tests consisted of a bent knee sit-up test (with a partner holding your feet) for maximum repetitions in 60 seconds, etc.



WITH LITTLE GUIDANCE ABOUT THE QUALITY OF THE MOVEMENT, THE GOAL WAS TO DO AS MANY REPETITIONS AS POSSIBLE WITH NO REGARD FOR HOW EACH ONE WAS PERFORMED.

What I didn't comprehend at the time was that each one of the activities in the PPFT tested the core.

Fast-forward to today and the evolution of the fitness industry and quickly everyone claimed that sit-ups were bad (but nobody ever explained why). Sit-ups were then substituted by crunches as core training supposedly evolved to a safer, more effective way to strengthen your core!



A close friend of mine told me about one of his friends who was a high level collegiate athlete and would literally do hundreds of crunches per day. Everyone noticed his “6- pack” and assumed he had a strong core but that was so far from the truth. This highly conditioned individual had such severe back pain that he had to give up his sport and put a long pause on his training in order to become ‘healthy’.

So what gives? How could someone who looks like Hercules and sprints like a cheetah have a “core” that appears as though it is made of steel but have back pain?

YOU MAY ALSO BE WONDERING HOW SO MANY PEOPLE CAN GET CORE TRAINING WRONG.

Remember that if these mainstream exercises, like the sit-up, were effective then you would think that studies and training outcomes would confirm that core training has a positive effect on movement economy, spinal mobility, daily activities or a reduction in injury rate and so on but the evidence doesn’t support this, even doctors would agree.

Clearly something is inherently wrong with the current core training approach.

THE STRUCTURAL IMPORTANCE OF HAVING A STRONG CORE

With perhaps the exception of aesthetic purposes, the most popular reason for training the core is “protection” or injury prevention—primarily for the back, secondarily for the hips.

We often hear many fitness professionals and even medical doctors say the phrase, “The best way to protect your back is to strengthen your core.” While this may be true, it is not quite as simple as this statement suggests and here’s why:

If core training is important for injury prevention, especially for the back, then it needs to be explained how core training helps and, conversely, why a “weak core” might lead to injuries. But first let’s look at what makes up a “weak core?”

“Weakness” can be defined as a lack of strength, but a lack of strength isn’t always associated with weak muscles.

NATURALLY, WEAK MUSCLES CAN BE A FACTOR, BUT THERE ARE MANY INDIVIDUALS WITH NO SHORTAGE OF STRONG MUSCLES (INCLUDING THOSE WITH THAT “RIPPED” 6-PACK) WHO STILL FALL PREY TO BACK INJURIES SO WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN? WHAT ELSE CAN “WEAK” MEAN?

In its simplest explanation, the stabilization unit of the core is responsible for two things—*posture* and *timing*—which are not mutually

exclusive. When the stabilizers are not doing their job, poor posture results. When our timing is off, poor posture results during activity or movement.

And here lies the dangerous form of “weakness.” Individual muscles may be “strong” but can be simultaneously weak during functional activities like walking, stepping, bending, and so on. At the very least, poor timing affects efficiency and performance, but it also carries the risk of injury. In other words, the core must work in the right place, at the right time, to provide the stability needed to perform and protect.

Now let’s talk about posture for a little bit. Hopefully you should know by now that the core is largely responsible for posture (or lack thereof) and can be observed in two basic ways: statically (standing, sitting and/or balanced on a single leg) and dynamically (through movement). While static posture can be thought of as having a “neutral spine,” or “standing tall,” dynamic posture isn’t that black and white.

Dynamic posture requires control through stabilization, deceleration and/or reactivity. In some instances (typically under maximal loads), this might require a rigid and forceful “standing tall.” But in other instances, maintaining a rigid and neutral posture will inhibit performance (as in swinging a baseball bat or tying one’s shoe).

Now before we move onto something a little less confusing you need to know that dynamic posture is not exercise-specific—it is *movement*-specific, which means the core needs to act differently depending on the activity performed, a fact that is deeply rooted in one of the chief fundamental principles of my education in exercise science—*specificity*.

SPECIFICITY IS THE PRINCIPLE OF TRAINING THAT STATES WHAT YOU DO IN THE GYM SHOULD BE RELEVANT AND APPROPRIATE TO YOUR DESIRED OUTCOME. TRAINING MUST GO FROM GENERAL (AT THE BEGINNING) TO SPECIFIC (AS THE PROGRAM PROGRESSES).

When looking at core training through the lens of specificity we might see some carryover, but we should not assume floor-based exercises would have an automatic transfer to activities performed on our feet.

Floor-based exercises can be good and may actually be the best place to start, but without integration with other activities, functional core strength may not be fully realized and in this lies the problem with conventional core training.

YOUR CORE AND YOUR PERFORMANCE

Here are a few novel ideas to see how important your core really is if you haven't been convinced just yet:

- » Swing a baseball bat without twisting your spine
- » Run down your road without staying upright
- » Climb a set of stairs without lifting your legs
- » Lift something heavy overhead without stabilizing your legs
- » Swim a lap without keeping your legs up

Do I need to give more examples on how the core is used?

And the crazy thing is the core is used in nearly everything you do with the exception of sleep but that can be debated because the core's relationship to breathing and digestion.

I've been a Strength Coach now for nearly 15 years and have worked with many world-class athletes. If you were to ask any serious athlete what the most important thing they should be training

they would immediately say their "core". Now not all of them might know what their core really is but they know the importance of core training through the information they were fed by their coach and trainers.

Core training is essential to athletic performance. Core training differs from many traditional weight-training routines by working the muscles of the trunk in unison. The same is true for the upper and lower body. All athletic movements incorporate the core in some way. Very few muscle groups are isolated. Instead the whole body works as a unit and core strength training endeavors to replicate this.

What are the benefits of core training to the athlete?

- » Greater efficiency of movement
- » Improved body control, stability and balance
- » Increased power output from both the core musculature and



peripheral muscles such as the shoulders, arms and legs

- » Reduced risk of injury
- » Improved breathing and circulation

But for the most of us who have had to hang up the cleats a long time ago, don't think for a second that your core is fine the way it is. Just because you might not be an athlete anymore you can still perform in other arenas and you should never settle on where you are right now.

Think about all the other areas of your daily life that you might be the least bit active. i.e. the workplace, playing in the backyard with your kids, annual fishing trip with your buds or maybe even

messing around in the bedroom with your spouse...

And on that note, did you know that having a good strong core would be beneficial when interacting with the opposite sex?

When you are consciously looking after your health and your body, you cannot help but feel sexy. Imagine training regularly for six months, eating well, losing weight and feeling more defined and ripped than ever before. You'd surely want to turn the lights ON and get down to it with your spouse, right?!

THERE ARE MANY REASONS FOR THIS 'PLAYFUL' URGE AND A GREATER SENSE OF IMPROVED SELF-CONFIDENCE, BUT STOP AND THINK ABOUT WHAT MUSCLES YOU ACTUALLY USE MOST IN THE BEDROOM. THE ANSWER IS PRETTY CLEAR, THE MUSCLES THAT ARE RIGHT AROUND YOUR MIDSECTION: THE ABS, THE LOWER BACK, GLUTES AND PELVIC MUSCLES.

And we know that core training by definition is the training of those very muscles and if you train these muscles to move correctly.... Well let's just say you will definitely keep your spouse begging for more.



5 BEST CORE KILLER EXERCISES

Okay, so here is what you've been waiting for, the **5 Best Core Killer Exercises** that I know for a fact will radically transform your core into something you never thought was possible. And the best part is that these 5 exercises are total body, which means you get more bang for your buck and if you're anything like me you want to work as efficiently as possible and get the most out of your time spent in the gym.

Now before you just go knocking these exercises out there are a few things you need to know. These particular movements aren't necessarily for beginners however don't let that dissuade you from trying, just scale everything back and modify each move accordingly to your current level of fitness.

In order to truly 'kill your core' your body will need to be accustomed to lifting heavier weights, moving through a greater range of motion and have the stability to keep movement patterns flowing properly. But with each exercise I've included an alternative and you'll find that listed at the bottom of each exercise description.

One last thing, this list isn't created from 1 being the best and 5 being the 5th best. Each exercise is unique in it's own way and produces different results. But the order that these exercises are in is intentional and based on motor unit recruitment, difficulty of exercise, and amount of strength needed. Make sure you keep the same order of these 5 when incorporating them into your program.

So without further ado, here they are:

#1 ZERCHER SQUAT

“Zercher” refers to the placement of the bar. You hold it in the crook of your elbows, cradling it on your torso. With the barbell in that position, you can either squat down with it (Zercher squat), walk with it (Zercher carry), bend over like a Romanian deadlift (Zercher good morning), or hold it for time (Zercher hold).

The Zercher squat can work your core harder than regular squats and deadlifts. So if your weakness in the squat is your core and you tend to feel it more in your back than your glutes or legs, the Zercher squat will be the perfect movement for you.



ALTERNATE TO ZERCHER SQUAT: GOBLET SQUAT

Stand by holding a light kettlebell by the horns under your chin close to your chest but not touching. This will be your starting position. Squat down keeping your chest and head up and your back straight. At the bottom position, pause and then stand back up into starting position.



#2 SUITCASE CARRY

Performing the suitcase carry is a crazy way to bring on that burn you feel after you carry heavy things – luggage (hence the name), groceries, bags of topsoil, cases of beer -- for a long distance.

Standing with the weight accomplishes little, but walking forces your core to work to stabilize your body and leaves your entire mid-section and shoulders burning. Don't be afraid to go heavy. You're looking for a weight that will challenge your core but you need to maintain good form.

Grab a dumbbell, kettlebell, (most active men can start in the 40lb – 70lb range with a DB or KB) or to really test your strength grab a barbell (sometimes the 45lb bar is enough!) and hold it like a suitcase, keeping your shoulders square and upright.

Maintain that posture as you walk with the weight at your side. Have a set distance and walk down and back, or see how many loops you can do before your grip goes. You're allowed to be creative with this movement. Make sure to bend your knees when you put down the weight as you would in a deadlift.



ALTERNATE TO SUITCASE CARRY: FARMER'S CARRY

Another phenomenal strongman type of core training that's very similar to the suitcase carry except you will have a little more balance and control of the resistance because you will be holding two even weights, one in each hand, at once instead of one weight in one hand. Apply the same principles with the farmer's carry as you would with the suitcase carry when performing this exercise.



#3 ONE-ARM DUMBBELL Z PRESS

One of my favorite exercises that the average gym goer won't see every day is the One-Arm Dumbbell Z Press. It may be a mouthful to say, but it is an exercise with a ton of benefits and will carryover to other movements throughout life.

The biggest benefit of the Z press is its training effect on core stability. Sitting on the floor without any back support puts serious demand on your anterior core muscles. There's nothing to hold you upright and you can't draw stability from your legs the same way you would if you were standing.

By unilaterally training the Z Press sets you up for some serious anti-rotation and anti-lateral flexion stability as well. It's a great exercise for killing your core.

When performing this exercise it is **CRUCIAL** to maintain an upright posture. Don't slouch! Perform the movement like a standard overhead shoulder press in terms of the path that the resistance will naturally move. Press the weight over the spine keeping the heels and backs of the knees pressed to the floor.



MODIFICATION TO ONE-ARM DUMBBELL Z PRESS

Since this exercise is very unique and hard to replicate it deserves to be modified and not swapped out for a different exercise. Luckily there are things you can do to make this movement possible. First, widen your foot position – open the legs further apart – and make room for the hips.

If that doesn't work, the second modification would be to simply reduce the degree of hip flexion. In other words, create a greater angle at the hips. Place a low step or a small platform under your butt so you've got a slight elevation. Sitting on a bench defeats the purpose, as you want to be as close to the floor as possible. Even a couple of inches of lift can make a big difference.



#4 RENEGADE ROW

The Renegade Row is one of the hardest but most effective core exercises out there because this exercise requires a lot of stabilization. You're forced to keep your muscles rigid in order to maintain balance. In addition to targeting the core muscles, this movement also hits the middle back, as well as the chest, triceps and shoulders.

Make sure to follow these pointers when performing this exercise:

- » Transfer the weight between the arms.
- » Squeeze your butt.
- » Tighten the supporting side leg.
- » Don't twist the hips. Keep the body parallel to the ground!
- » Row the weight using your back, not your arms.



MODIFICATION TO RENEGADE ROW

Being in the high-plank position might be challenging enough so to modify this exercise just scrap the weights completely and go through the same motion without weight. Pretend as if you were to row a weight to your side. This will help you establish strength and confidence needed when adding resistance.



#5 WINDMILL

Last but definitely not least is the kettlebell windmill. This total body movement is an artistic expression of mobility, stability and strength that will give you exactly what you want in an exercise. Now this exercise does require a bit more flexibility so proceed with caution.

If you have any known back or shoulder issues, please start with the alternate movement first until you've gained the strength and mobility needed for this exercise. Again proceed with caution.

Begin by placing a kettlebell in front of your lead foot and clean and press it overhead with your opposite arm. Clean the kettlebell to your shoulder by extending through the legs and hips as you pull the kettlebell towards your shoulders. Rotate your wrist as you do so, so that the palm faces forward. Press it overhead by extending the elbow.

Keeping the kettlebell locked out at all times, push your butt out in the direction of the locked out kettlebell. Turn your feet out at a forty-five degree angle from the arm with the locked out kettlebell. Bending at the hip to one side, sticking your butt out, slowly lean until you can touch the floor with your free hand. Keep your eyes on the kettlebell that you hold over your head at all times.

Pause for a second after reaching the ground and reverse the motion back to the starting position.



ALTERNATE TO THE WINDMILL : ELBOW SIDE PLANK PRESS

Lying on your side on a mat and make sure your elbow is positioned underneath your shoulder to help support the joint. Move into a side plank (legs on top of each other), core engaged, top hand on the kettlebell (or dumbbell), hips in line with your body.

Grab onto the kettlebell (or dumbbell) and lift it up in a pulling manner towards the ceiling while keeping your body strong and stable. You are allowed to slightly rotate the hips when lifting the weight overhead. Once the weight is overhead, pause and then slowly bring your arm down to the starting position then repeat.

It's IMPORTANT to keep the core tightened throughout the movement, and always making sure to keep your head, shoulders, hips and knee in line.



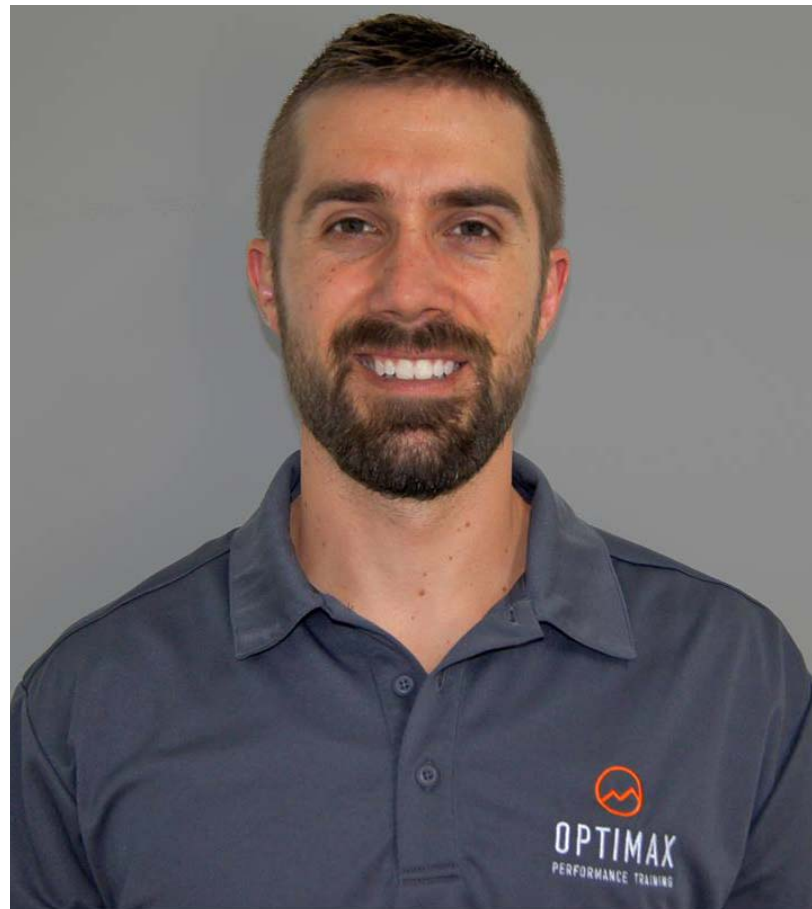
EXERCISE NOTES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Klepacki has over 15 years of experience and education in the fitness and athletic world. He holds a Master's Degree in Exercise Science and holds numerous highly recognized certifications that have set his expertise and training above most others. Brian has learned that in order for you to achieve your max performance, a multitude of training regimes must be implemented to stimulate all systems of the body.

As a competitive triathlete and a Strength & Conditioning Specialist, Brian knows how crucial it is to sort through fact and fiction when it comes to athletic training and human performance. His philosophy is simple, PURPOSE OVER PREFERENCE. He is not about those big box cookie cutter programs and he doesn't prescribe a random workout that has no purpose. His logic is specific. His training has a purpose.

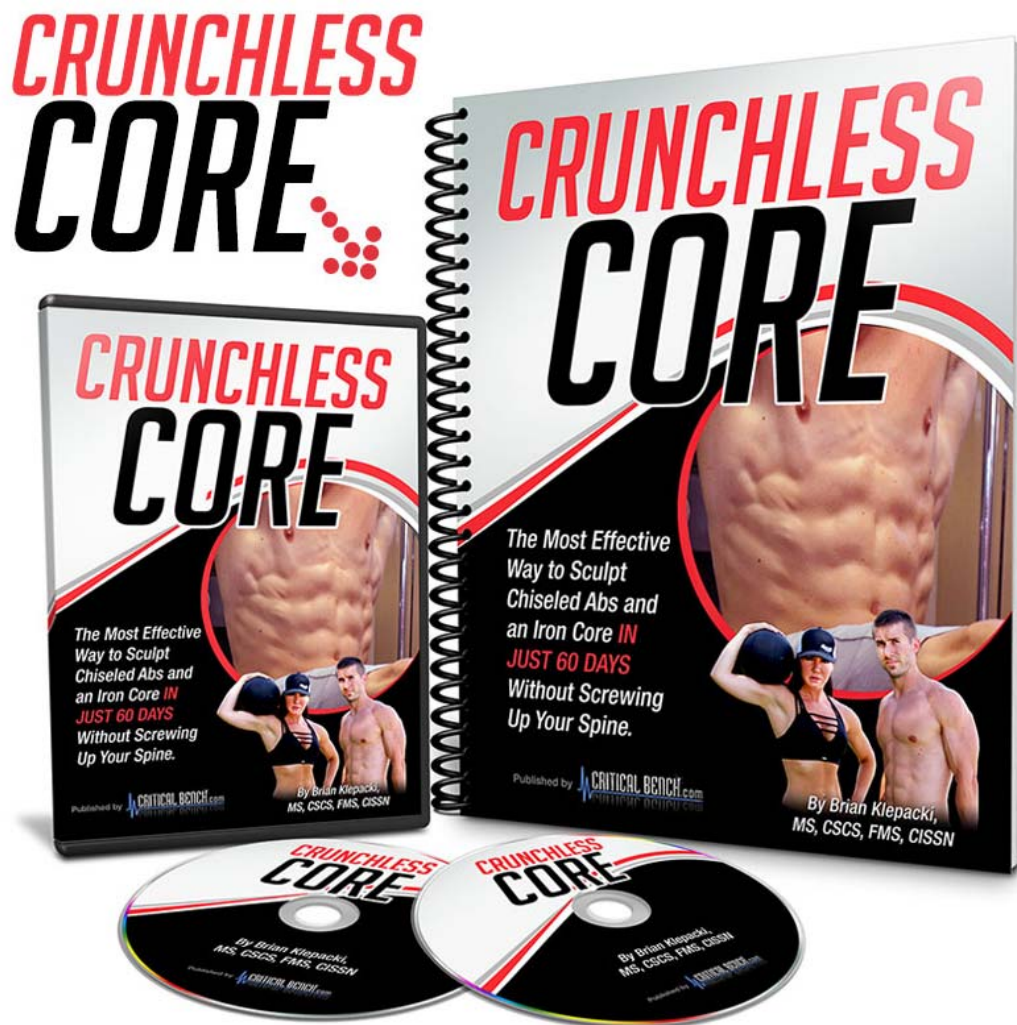
Brian currently resides in St. Petersburg, FL with his wife and their two boys. He is the Owner of Optimax



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THE **SAFEST**, MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO **SCULPT CHISELED ABS** AND DEVELOP AN IRON CORE IN JUST **60 DAYS** WITHOUT SCREWING UP YOUR SPINE.



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