



11 key yoga postures to
empower
your core

Hand-picked core-building yoga postures
from **Suzy Rose**



Introduction

This guide was uniquely developed as a result of requests from my students for a go-to quick guide for core-building postures. We've worked to create something that will take you to a whole new level of physical and mental strength and inner power.

If you don't know me, I've been teaching yoga for over 18 years now, having completed a 2 year intense 500 hour training programme at the renowned Ruth White School of Yoga.

The style of yoga that I was taught is Iyengar, a form of Hatha yoga with an emphasis on detail, precision and alignment in the static postures. My yoga teacher, Ruth White, trained with Iyengar himself and I feel privileged to have had such a thorough and excellent training master myself.

I hope that you find true value in the connection these postures provide. If you ever need help, please do drop me an email at suzy@suzyrose.com

Suzy x

What is Core Strength in Yoga

Most people like to develop their core strength, and apart from looking toned and fit, having core strength also makes you feel good about yourself. Most of us think of core strength as being just the muscles associated with the abdomen. However core strength extends through to the upper and lower back, thighs, hips and pelvis – it makes up pretty much all of your torso.

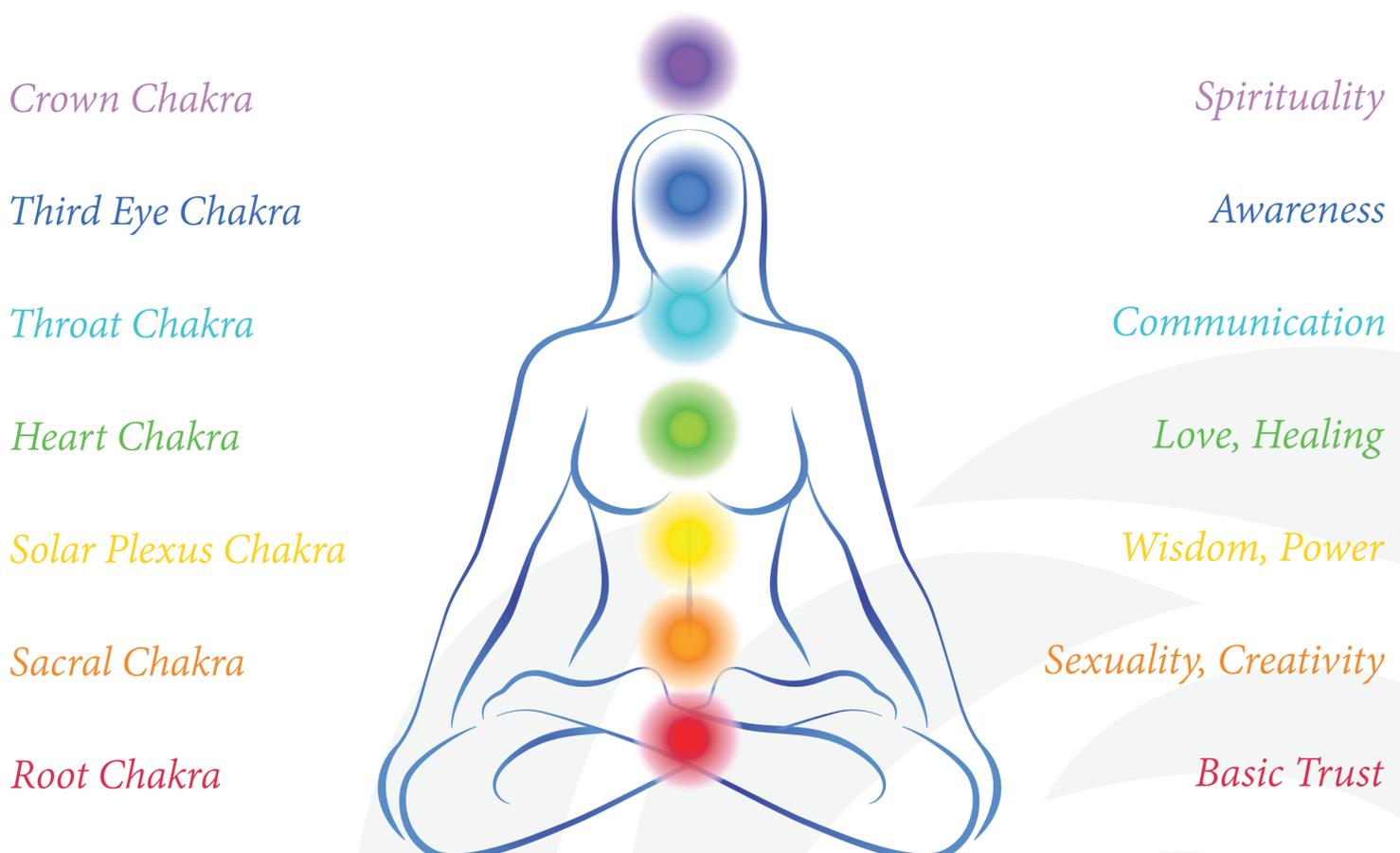
In yoga, working on core strength has an extra benefit. It is developing your 3rd energy centre or chakra. There are 7 main chakras in your body and this is the 3rd one, the solar plexus chakra.

The importance of strengthening the 3rd Energy Centre, or the Power Chakra

A chakra is a centre of energy and the literal Sanskrit meaning is “wheel” – a vortex of spinning energy associated with various physiological and neurological systems in the body.

Each chakra has its own vibrational frequency, and the idea is to keep each one spinning at a good, regular speed to keep the whole body, mind and emotional centre in balance and functioning optimally. When this happens we feel on top of the world! When they are stuck, we feel dull and lacking energy.

The 7 Chakras in the Body



Core strength helps to keep the 3rd energy centre balanced and spinning well. It is called 'Manipura' and is yellow, the colour of bright sunshine. It is located between the navel and solar plexus, and is the core of our personality and identity. The gift of this chakra is sensing your personal power, being confident, responsible, and reliable. It is the centre of your self-esteem, your willpower, self-discipline, as well as warmth in your personality.

The energy of this chakra allows you to transform inertia into action and movement. It allows you to meet challenges and move forward in your life, it is the chakra of resilience and it frees you from negative energies and purifies and strengthens your vitality. The main challenge for the 3rd chakra is to use your personal power in a balanced manner.

How to complete the postures

Here are 11 of the most powerful core strength postures you can do in yoga to build up your core abdominal muscles and feel strong in your whole body. Doing each of these poses regularly will definitely strengthen your core muscles and make you feel stronger and more energetic over time.

Do each of the postures safely and at your own pace, holding the postures for around 30–40 seconds to begin with and then increasing this to however long it feels right for you. Try to do each pose 3 times, with a short pause in between each.

1. The Boat

Paripurna Navasana



This pose requires you to balance on the tripod of your sitting bones and tail-bone.

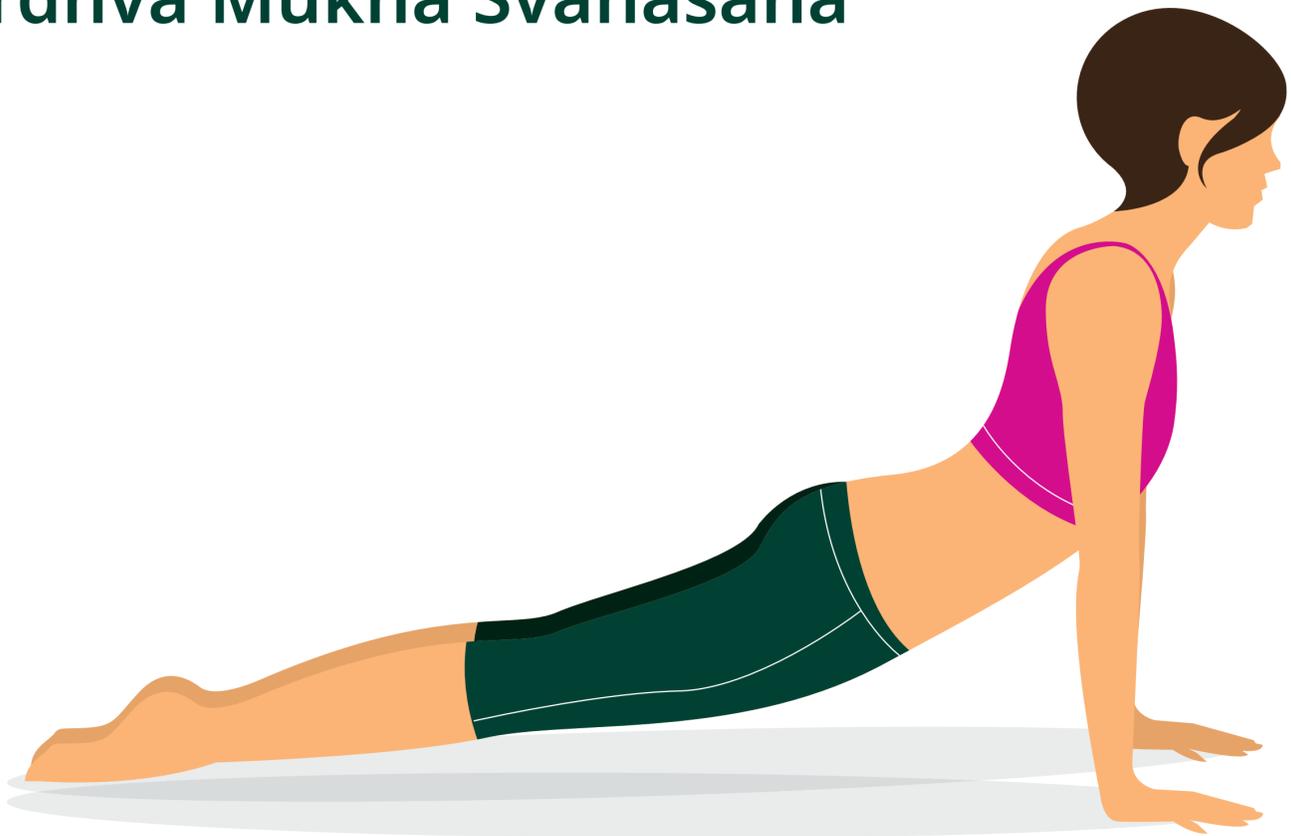
Once here, lift your legs up first with knees bent and then gradually straighten them out to a point where you feel you are working your abdominal muscles without putting a strain on your back.

The shape of the body is a 'V' shape with the head and the toes ideally at the same level. Raise your arms and straighten them out in front of you in line with your shoulders, keeping your shoulders relaxed. You can hold on to the back of the thighs when you first start until all the muscles are strong enough to let go. Don't worry if the legs shake when you first do it, the muscles are just learning what they need to do.

This full boat pose is the number one abdominal strengthener. However, you will also notice it works on the thighs and the lower back. This pose strengthens the deep hip flexors that attach the inner thigh bones to the front of the spine and they also work on the intestines which keeps them functionally well and healthy.

2. The Upward Dog

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana



Lie on your front and place your hands by the side of your chest, in line with the centre of your breastbone. Breathe in and push into the hands and lift the head up, sliding the chest forward as you do so.

The challenge is to get the chest fully extended upwards whilst keeping the shoulders back and lifting the collar bones up.

The next level is advanced and if you have strong arms and wrists push harder into the floor with the hands and lift the knees up from the floor. The arms are strong and the buttocks strong. If the neck feels ok then look up towards the ceiling, otherwise straight ahead.

This pose improves posture, strengthens the spine, arms, wrists, chest and shoulder muscles and stretches the core muscles whilst working them. The buttocks get firmer and it stimulates the stomach, liver, spleen and upper abdominal organs. It helps relieve sciatica and can be therapeutic for asthma. It also alleviates fatigue.

3. Upward Extended Feet Pose Urdhva Prasarita Padasana



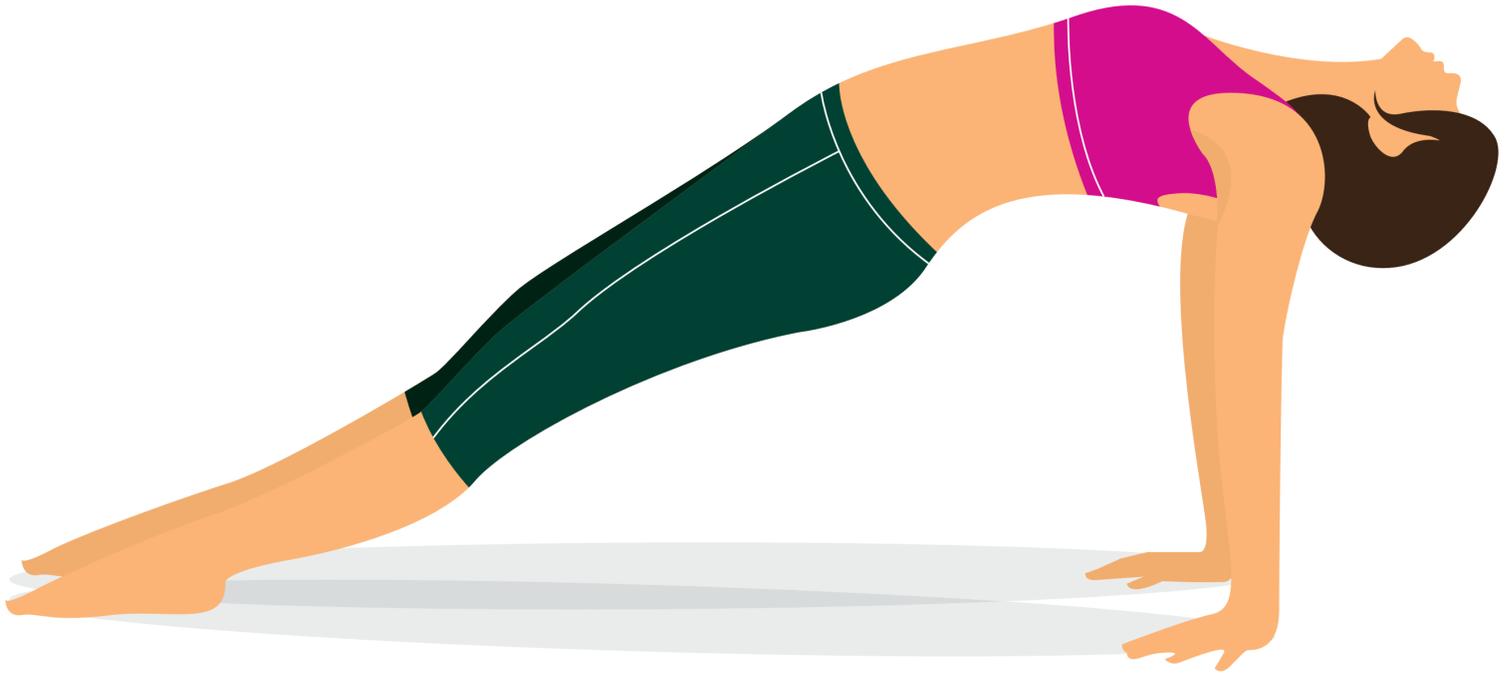
Lie on your back and lift both legs up over your hips, knees bent a little if necessary. Keep the legs from coming too far over your tummy. Interlock your fingers behind your head and lift your head off the floor.

Keep one leg up and gently lower the other down to the floor, as far as your back and abdominal muscles allow (you can bend your knees if you feel any part of the body is straining). Switch sides and do this a few times. As you get stronger, you will notice that you will be able to increase the number you do. Work with the out-breath as you lower the leg down, breathe in and stay here and then breathe out again when you switch over.

When you carry something heavy in one hand or turn around in a chair to look behind you, the obliques, two long muscles on either side of your torso, are working hard. This pose targets the oblique muscles, especially the trunk rotation involved in those activities. In a short time you will feel your abdominal muscles strengthen, in fact you will feel them whilst you're doing them! Just keep going!

4. The Upward Plank

Purvottanasana



Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you. Place your palms on the floor slightly behind your hips. Spread your fingers wide and press into your palms, lifting your hips so that your torso moves up towards the ceiling. Keep looking at the ceiling and point your toes down towards the floor. Make sure that you keep your arms and your legs straight.

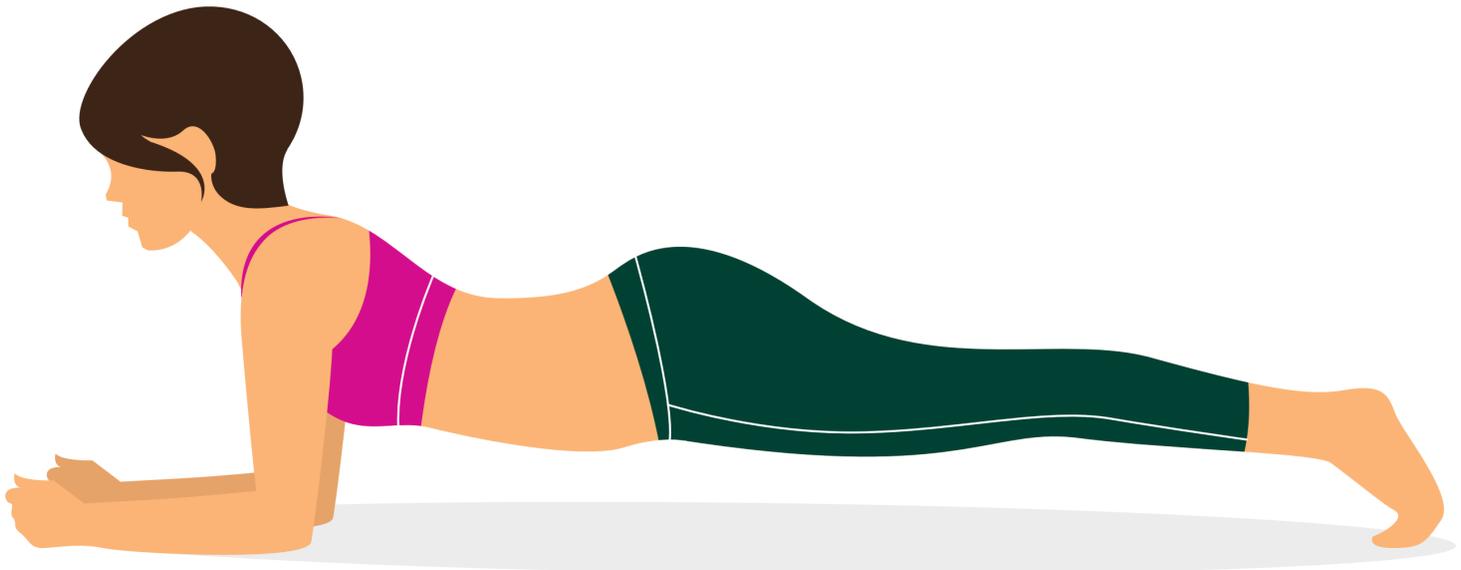
Hold your entire body strong so that you are making a straight line from your head to your heels, and squeeze your core. It should feel like you are trying to pull your belly button towards your spine.

You should aim to hold the pose for 20–30 seconds per repetition. If your hips drop or you feel like your stomach is starting to sag, lower yourself back to the floor immediately. You will not be getting any benefit out of holding the wrong position, and you could actually be leaving yourself open to risk of injury.

We draw on the strength of the core and leg muscles, as well as the support of the shoulder blades beneath the heart. It strengthens the triceps, wrists and back, whilst opening and stretching the chest, lungs and even the front of the ankles.

5. Elbow Plank

Phalakasana



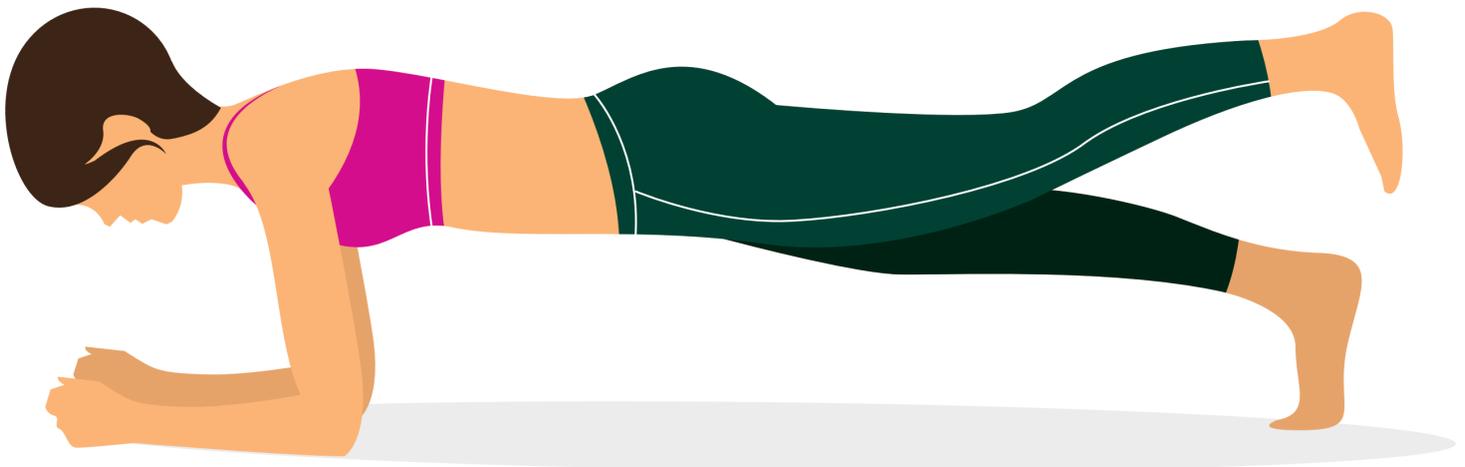
Begin on the front of your body with your elbows placed directly below the tips of your shoulders. Keep your forearms parallel to each other and firmly fixed on the floor to support you through the pose.

Take a deep breath in and as you tuck your toes in, lift your body up and off the floor in line with the shoulders. Look down and keep the head, neck and trunk of the body in line.

Keep the breath steady as you stay in the pose for 30–40 seconds

6. One Leg Plank

Phalakasana



After completing the full body plank 3 times, come into the position again, inhale and lift your right leg up parallel to the floor.

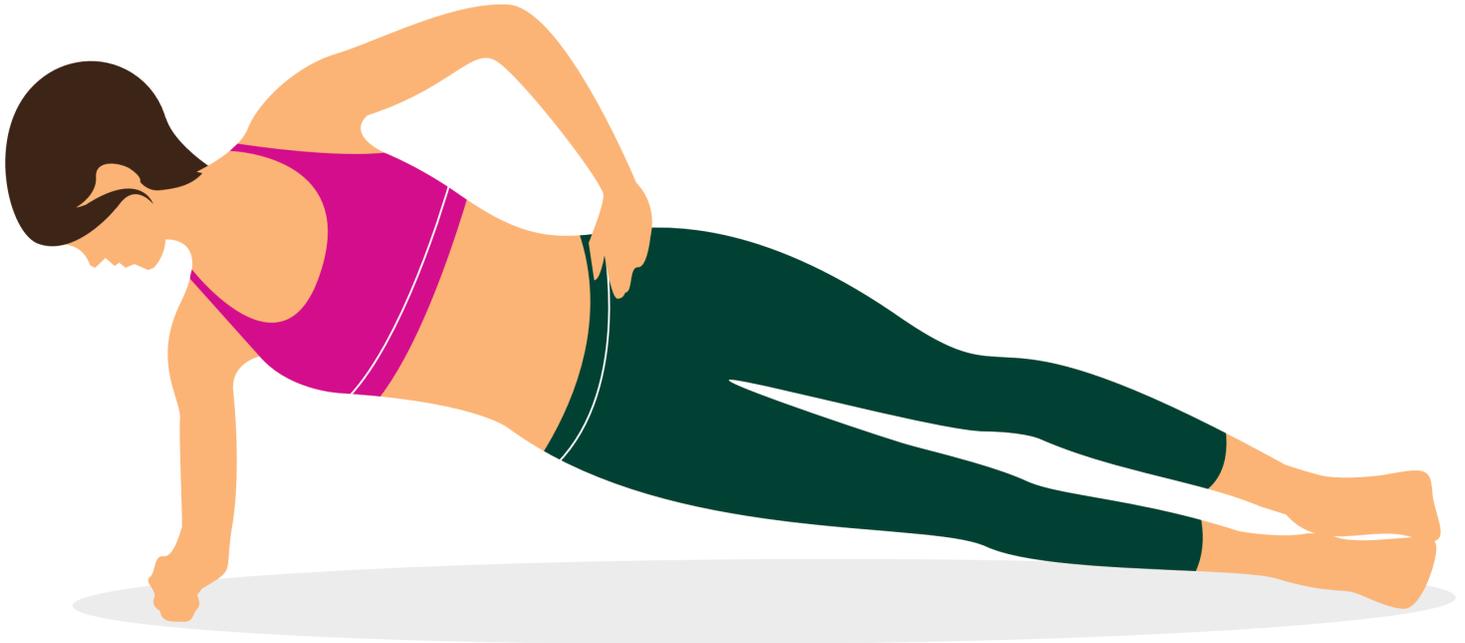
Push strongly through the raised heel and lengthen through the crown of your head, keeping the tail-bone pressed towards the pubis.

Hold for 10–30 seconds, exhale the foot to the floor, then repeat with the left leg for the same length of time.

We draw on the strength of the core and leg muscles, as well as the support of the shoulder blades beneath the heart. It strengthens the triceps, wrists and back, whilst opening and stretching the chest, lungs and even the front of the ankles.

7. Side Plank

Vasisthasana



Lie on the right side of your body, resting on your right elbow with your left leg stacked on top of the right.

Your left hand is placed on top of your left hip. Breathe in deeply and lift your hips up off the floor.

Continue to breathe in and out deeply in the position for 15–30 seconds.

If you want to work a little harder, you can lift the top left leg up and hold the position for a few seconds.

Repeat to the other side.

Vasistha literally means “most excellent, best, richest”. It is one of the easiest ways to work the two layers of muscle along the sides of your core, known as your obliques. These muscles help you rotate and bend your trunk, and they also play a role in helping to protect your spine.

8. Balancing Cat-Cow Pose

Utthita Cakravākāsana



Come onto your knees as if you are going into the Cat Pose and move the shoulders and hips slightly away from your hands.

On your next in-breath, extend your left foot towards the back and lift your left leg up straight out behind you keeping it in line with your spine. This pose stretches the extended leg away from the centre of the body, strengthening the hips and pelvis, improves flexibility of the back, and engages the core muscles deeply.

The whole pose is centred around the core muscles to maintain the perfect balance.

9. Camel Pose

Ustrasana



The Camel Pose is the big detox pose!

And of course it powers up the core muscles during the stretch and back-bend.

Kneel on your mat and check it's well cushioned. Keep your knees hip distance apart. Gently press your shins and the tops of your feet into floor. Place your hands on you hips, thumbs pointing towards your sacrum.

Draw your elbows back towards each other and then stretch the chest up towards the ceiling, and if your neck feels comfortable take your head back looking upwards. If you can reach back to touch your heels or feet, without leaning back with your hips, then do so for an even bigger stretch.

It opens the lymph glands in the neck, groin and under the armpits. It also stimulates the nervous system, thyroid and improves circulation and digestion. It's said to decrease fat on the thighs and improve the complexion.

10. Locust Pose

Salabhasana



Lie on your belly with your arms along the sides of your body, palms facing up, forehead resting on the floor.

Turn your big toes toward each other to inwardly rotate your thighs, and firm your buttocks so your coccyx presses toward your pubis.

Take a deep breath and lift your head, arms, chest and legs slowly up off the floor – feel like you are balancing on a ball under your belly. Remain in this pose until you feel you need to come back down. Once down, place your hands under your head, turn your to the side and let go of all your muscles in the body. Repeat this 2 more times at your own pace.

This pose is the stamina builder pose. It lifts the breath and keeps you riding on it. You feel your heart rate and breathing go up and it feels energising to stay in the pose for a while. It strengthens the buttock muscles, firms up the core muscles and really gets the upper back muscles in full extension and working.

11. Bow Pose

Dhanurasana



Lie on the front of your body and with your forehead still on the ground reach back with your hands and grab hold of your ankles as you lift your knees off the floor.

Breathe in and lift your head and chest at the same time as your thighs off the floor.

Look straight ahead and you may find that your body very gently rocks back and forth over your belly keeping your weight balanced.

This circular back-bend makes you feel connected and powerful in every way. Whilst expanding and pulling the chest backwards to open up the front of the body it also lifts the spine from the coccyx all the way up to the top of the neck, creating a pull in one direction away to the feet and in the other towards the chest and shoulders.

The whole body is working!



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