

Off-Balance Core Exercises

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Looking for a toned stomach or a better tennis game? These are two good reasons to turn your workout into a balancing act. A controlled wobble activates deep core muscles to help tighten the midsection and prepare athletes for that quick turn or lunge. Fabio Comana, MA, MS, of the American Council on Exercise, shares a few, fun core moves for better fitness.



Engage Your Abs

Before each move in our workout, first engage your abdominals by tightening them -- without holding your breath -- as if preparing to take a punch. You'll activate the core muscles surrounding your spine and tone your entire abdominal area. Engaged abs also help prevent injury when lifting. If you have a medical condition, be sure to check with your doctor before this or any new fitness program.



One-Legged Balance

Start with this beginning move, keeping a stable chair or a wall within arms' reach. With feet together, pick up one foot -- knee facing forward or to the side. Hold the position with eyes open, then closed. Switch feet and repeat for four reps on each foot. If any move feels wrong or unsafe to you, stop and check with a trainer. Depending on your health and physical condition, some exercises may not be recommended.

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Leg Swings

Stand on your right leg and raise the left leg 3-6 inches off the floor. With arms at your sides, swing your left leg forward and backward, touching the floor for balance, while keeping your torso erect. Now, repeat the moves, but don't allow your foot to touch the ground. And finally, swing your left foot to the left side, holding your right arm out. Switch legs and repeat.



One-Legged Clock With Arms

Balance on one leg, torso straight, head up, and hands on the hips. Visualize a clock and point your arm straight overhead to 12, then to the side (3), and then circle low and around to 9 o'clock without losing your balance. Increase the challenge by having a partner call out the different times to you. Switch to the opposite arm and leg and repeat.



One-Legged Clock With Legs

Balance on one leg, torso straight, head up, and hands on your hips. Straighten the other leg to the front, and imagine yourself as the center of a clock. Point that foot to 12, 9, and then cross over to 3 o'clock while holding your balance. Increase the challenge by having a partner shout out the different times to you. Switch to the opposite leg and repeat.

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Clock On Unstable Surface

Once you master balance moves on solid ground, try them on an unstable surface such as a BOSU platform. Stand near a wall or other support, for safety. Start in the middle of the board on two feet at first. When you feel comfortable, carefully give the one-legged clocks a try. It's harder than it looks!



One-Legged Squat

Stand with your feet hip-width apart. Point your left foot out front, just barely touching the floor for balance and push your hips back and down into this challenging one-legged squat position. Your right knee is bent, chest upright, eyes forward, and your arms out front. Slowly push up to return to starting position. Switch feet.



Lunge With Reach

Stand with feet together, arms straight out to the side at shoulder height. Now, lift one foot up, pause momentarily, and lunge forward. Your hips should drop down until your front thigh is parallel to the floor. Maintain a flat back and hold your arms straight in front of you. Push off with your front leg to return to starting position. Repeat on the other side.

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Staggered-Stance Squat

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, head up, and chest high. Take a staggered position by bringing the toe of one foot, even with your other heel. Hold this stance as you sink into a squat, but don't let your heels pull up off the ground! This move requires a shift in balance and readies you for more dynamic moves.