

# 6-MINUTE **CORE** STRENGTH

Simple Core Exercises  
to **Improve** Posture, **Build** Balance,  
and **Relieve** Back Pain



**DR. JONATHAN SU, DPT**

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## **6-Minute Core Strength**

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# Free Bonus Material

I want to make sure you get as much value as possible from this book, so I've put together a few additional free bonus materials to help you, including:

- Videos demonstrating each exercise and their variations to increase or decrease the difficulty level
- Workout plans neatly laid out and provided in PDF and Excel formats
- A monthly email newsletter with tips to help you succeed on your health and fitness journey

To get instant access to all of this free bonus material, go here now:

[www.sixminutefitness.com/corebonus](http://www.sixminutefitness.com/corebonus)

And if you have any questions or run into any difficulties, just shoot me an email at [jonathan@sixminutefitness.com](mailto:jonathan@sixminutefitness.com), and I'll do my best to help!

# Introduction

You've probably heard about the importance of having good core muscle strength. Indeed, a growing body of science shows that core strength is essential for people of all ages and fitness levels, and that the real-world benefits of having a strong, stable core are endless.<sup>1</sup>

Having a strong core can:

- improve your balance and posture, keeping you standing strong and tall well into old age
- relieve back or knee pain and protect your joints from excessive wear and tear
- prevent exercise- or work-related injuries and make it easier to do daily tasks
- improve sports performance

In short, your core is essential for just about everything you do because your core is the foundation that allows you to sit, stand, twist, bend, lift, walk, run, and jump.

Clearly, you need to improve your core strength. So what if I could show you how to develop core strength faster than you ever thought possible? What if I gave you a science-based, field-tested approach that takes only six minutes a day — and what if you could see real results in just 15 days?

This book will show you the simple science of building core strength quickly, safely, and effectively with little or no equipment. No matter your age, weight, fitness level, or financial constraints, after reading this book, you will feel empowered to transform your body and your life.

## Why I Can Help

I'm Dr. Jonathan Su, physical therapist, fitness expert, and author of the bestseller *6-Minute Fitness at 60+*.

Throughout my career, I've read thousands of pages of scientific literature and tried just about every type of treatment, technique, and exercise program you can imagine.

I've even coauthored the clinical textbook *Netter's Orthopaedic Clinical Examination*, which teaches healthcare professionals how to evaluate and treat physical dysfunction wherever it shows up in the body.

At this point, I can confidently say that while I don't know everything, I know what works and what doesn't.

## What You Will Learn

- The muscles that make up your core and why they require a different training approach than traditional strength training
- Why an overreliance on sit-ups, crunches, and other forward-bending exercises may do more harm than good
- The importance of “core awareness” and “core bracing” during core exercises and most everyday movements, with simple steps to mastering both
- Over 25 of the most effective exercises you can do at home using little or no equipment, including variations to match any fitness level
- Workouts to address specific goals, such as improving posture, improving balance, relieving pain, and more

Imagine waking up every morning and feeling excited because you know your body is finally working with you, not against you. Imagine feeling more capable and confident in your body and ready to do all the things you want to do in life. All of this is within your reach, and it's easier than you think.

## How to Use the Exercises and Workouts

I've designed the exercises and workouts in this book with a ton of flexibility and variation to fit the needs of just about anyone imaginable.

If you're new to core strengthening, getting back into exercising after a long break, or just feel like you need to brush up on foundational techniques of core strengthening, I suggest spending some time on part 2. This part of the book will help you understand and apply core awareness and core bracing, which are essential during core exercises and most everyday movements.

If you're experienced with core strengthening and you prefer the freedom of putting together your own workouts à la carte style, feel free to jump directly to part 3. This part of the book provides easy-to-follow instructions for over 25 exercises you can do at home using little or no equipment, with variations to match any fitness level.

If you prefer a more prescriptive approach to core strengthening, part 4 provides beginner, intermediate, and advanced level workouts that are a fantastic starting point for anyone wanting to jump into core strengthening without having to figure things out. These workouts can be completed in as little as six minutes. For those who want more exercise, 12-minute and 18-minute workouts are also available.

Part 4 also includes core workouts that address specific goals such as improving posture, relieving pain, building balance, and enhancing walking or running performance. If you don't find what you're looking for, you can always email me at [jonathan@sixminutefitness.com](mailto:jonathan@sixminutefitness.com) and I'll be happy to point you in the right direction.

## **My Promise to You**

I've worked with thousands of people of all ages and fitness levels using the same program you're about to learn in this book. If you follow this program exactly as I laid it out, I promise you'll see real results in your body and your life in as little as 15 days.

Don't wait! Turn to the next page right now and begin your journey to the life-changing transformation that awaits.

# Part 1:

## Understanding Core Strength

Part 1 will get you started on the right track by laying a strong foundation for understanding core strengthening. You will:

- understand why core strength is essential for just about anyone
- identify the important muscles that make up the core
- learn why core strengthening is different from regular strength training
- understand why performing too many sit-ups and crunches may do more harm than good

At the end of this part, we will discuss why short, six-minute core workouts are effective. I'm excited and humbled to be your guide on this journey!

# 1. Core Strength 101

I'm sure you have heard the phrase "strengthen your core," but what is the "core" and why do you need to strengthen it? Most people think of the core as simply the rectus abdominis muscles, otherwise known as the "six-pack" muscles on the front of the abdomen. But your core is much more than that.

The core is the center of your body, and it's made up of layers of muscles that surround the front, the sides, and the back of your torso. In addition to the torso, the core also includes muscles of your pelvis, hips, and shoulders.<sup>2</sup>

So why then do you need to strengthen these muscles specifically? Since the early 1980s, studies show that good core muscle strength is essential for just about every movement we do and activity we perform.<sup>3</sup> This is true for people of all ages and fitness levels in daily life and sports activities.



# What Is Core Strength?

Core strength is the amount of force your core muscles can resist.

Because our society is prone to sitting most of the time, which results in potentially damaging levels of compression on our spine, we need a strong core to protect our spine from excessive forces that are present when we're sitting, standing, running, jumping, lifting, and performing just about any activity imaginable.<sup>4</sup>

When you stiffen or engage the core muscles, your torso becomes a rigid yet flexible cylinder, like a natural back brace or weightlifting belt, that offloads harmful compressive forces from your spine.

The natural brace created by your core muscles also protects your spine from potentially dangerous levels of bending and shearing stress from seemingly simple movements, such as pushing, pulling, bending, and lifting. Without the stability created by your core, the discs, ligaments, and bones of your spine can get injured and be in pain in the presence of these forces.

Additionally, the core is the kinetic link between your arms and your legs that allows effective whole-body movements.<sup>5</sup> Kinetic energy is the energy of motion, and your core is the link that transfers this energy from your arms to your legs and vice versa, allowing you to move in the world with greater power, efficiency, and ease.

For example, it would be difficult to sit up from a lying position without tightening your core muscles. Try to sit up without the use of your arms by bending your knees toward your chest and then kicking your legs forward without tightening your core. Notice how challenging, or even impossible, this task is.

Try doing this a second time while tightening your core and notice how you pop up into a sitting position with more ease. Engaging or tightening your core muscles makes this movement much easier because kinetic energy generated by your legs moves through your torso and effortlessly lifts your upper body like a teeter-totter.

In addition to linking your arms and legs, the core is also important for optimal performance during physical activities because all movements originate from your center and radiate outward. Golf swings, tennis serves, soccer kicks, and just about any motion that uses your arms or legs begins from your core and radiates outward to generate maximum force.

# Why Core Strength Is Important

Because your core underpins everything you do, the real-world benefits of having a strong and stable core are numerous:

- **Helps you maintain good posture:** Most people with poor posture stand with their head forward, shoulders rounded, and torso slouched because of a weak core. By strengthening the core muscles around your torso and on the back of your body, you can then stand tall with your body in good alignment. The benefits of good posture are numerous, including reduced neck tension, improved confidence, and better breathing from having open airways.
- **Relieves pain:** Weak core muscles increase your risk of back pain and injuries. Core strength reduces acute and chronic back pain by improving support for your spine. Core strength can also relieve knee pain by keeping your legs in alignment when you're walking, running, or climbing stairs.
- **Improves balance and prevents falls:** The muscles in your core are key for helping you maintain your balance and lessening your risk of falling. A strong core helps stabilize your body so you can stay upright and reduce swaying that may throw you off balance.
- **Prevents injuries:** Your core gives you better control of your muscles, making it less likely that you'll overtax them. So activities such as carrying groceries, walking, running, and climbing stairs are easier to perform and you're less likely to suffer from injuries with a strong core. A strong core also promotes good body alignment during movement which can reduce wear and tear on your joints.
- **Boosts athletic performance:** A strong core is critical to sports performance because it enables you to maximize your power output and perform complex athletic movements with greater precision and control. For example, core exercises can keep a runner's legs from tiring quickly and allow a rower to pull harder and faster while paddling. The power of a tennis player's serve and a golfer's swing is from their cores more so than their arms.

As you can see, you need to have a good strong core. The good news is that

building core strength is much easier than most people realize. In fact, that is the goal of this book: to show you exactly how you can reap all the benefits of having a strong core in as little as six minutes a day.

## 2. A Closer Look at the Core Muscles

It is important to get a general understanding of where the muscles are located and what they do. If the thought of anatomy or biomechanics feels intimidating, rest assured — you don't need to get buried in the details. I've included only the most important core muscles, and I describe them as succinctly as possible.

Some of you may still feel intimidated or overwhelmed by this information. Just take a deep breath and know that you don't have to memorize the name of these muscles, their location on the body, or exactly what they do. Just knowing that the core involves more muscles than most people realize will help you make sense of the exercises later.

Try approaching this chapter with curiosity, and I promise that this will make core strengthening a more skillful and enjoyable endeavor.

## **Movers and Stabilizers**

The muscles of the body can be divided into movers and stabilizers. Most core muscles can work as both.

Movers, the big muscles on the surface of the body responsible for large movements, are the muscles that most people focus on when they go to the gym. They are the ones that let you do push-ups, pull-ups, and squats.

Stabilizers, on the other hand, typically involve much less movement and are the muscles that support your body. These muscles are usually much smaller and deeper inside your body than movers, yet they are essential for preventing pain, decreasing injury risk, and optimizing performance.

The core muscles are the main stabilizers of the body.

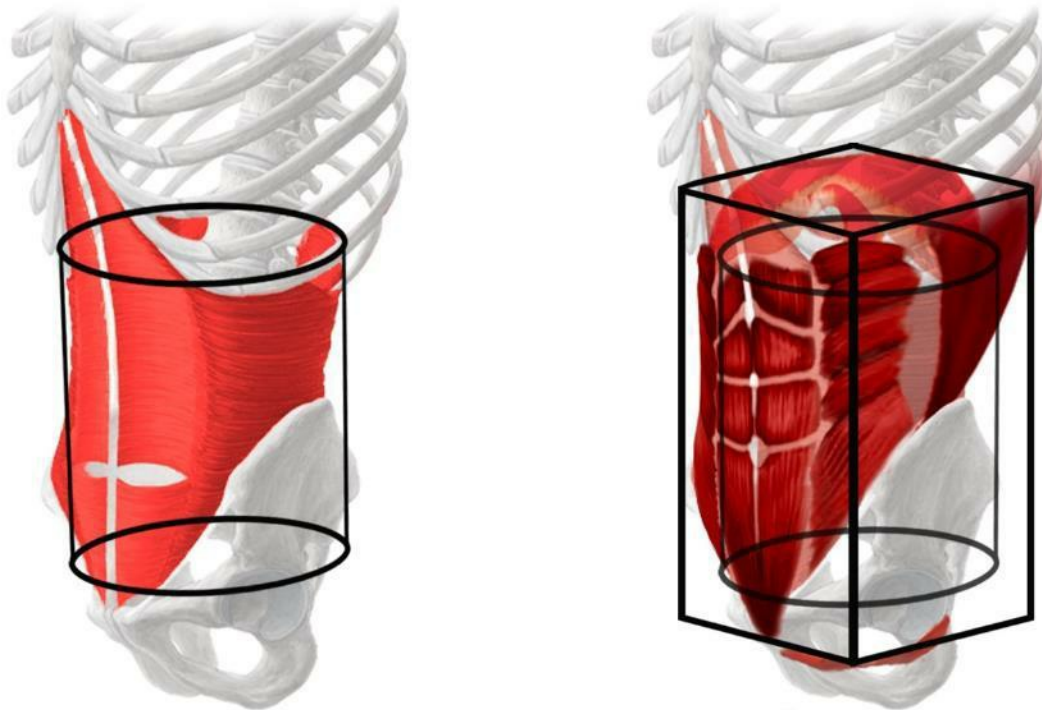
## **Major and Minor Core**

We can also divide the muscles of the core into major and minor core muscles. The major core muscles are located at the midsection of the body, the ones we most often think of as being part of the core.

The minor core muscles are located farther away from the midsection. They connect the arms and legs to the midsection. While they are not traditionally thought of as being part of the core, they are important in helping the core work effectively.

## Major Core Muscles

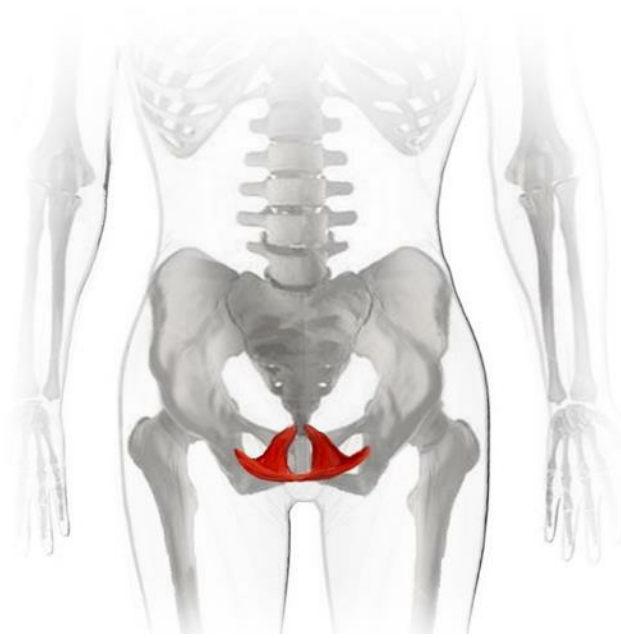
The seven major core muscles of the body can be described as a cylinder inside a box located around the abdomen, lower back, and pelvis.



### Bottom of Box

- **Pelvic floor:** Also known as the “Kegel muscles,” this is a group of dome-shaped muscles located at the bottom of the pelvis. The pelvic floor lifts upward to help you control bowel and bladder movements and works with other stabilizers to support the spine.





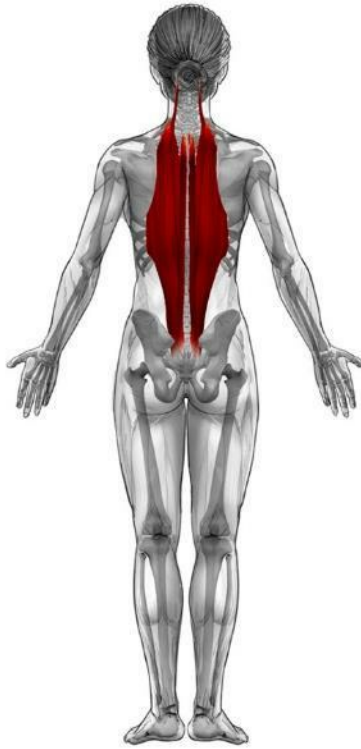
## Top of Box

- **Diaphragm:** This thin, flat muscle sits under the lungs and is the main muscle used in breathing. The diaphragm moves downwards when you inhale and can support the torso from inside the body when you breathe all the way down to the lower abdomen.



## Back of Box

- **Paraspinals:** These large muscles on the surface of the body look like speed bumps running along either side of the spine. The paraspinals bend and twist your torso and are important postural muscles that help you stand upright.

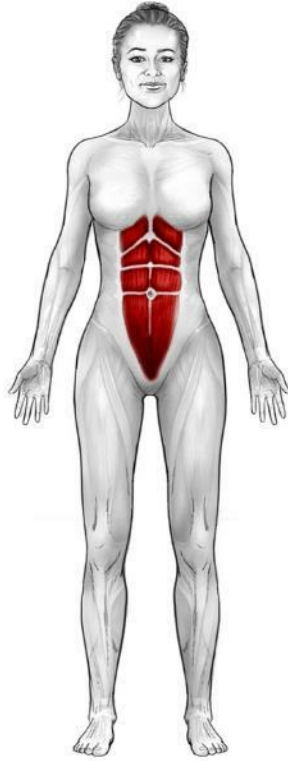


- **Lumbar multifidus:** These muscles also run along either side of the spine but are located deeper than the paraspinals. They are important for taking pressure off the spine. If this muscle is weak, you will most likely experience lower back pain.



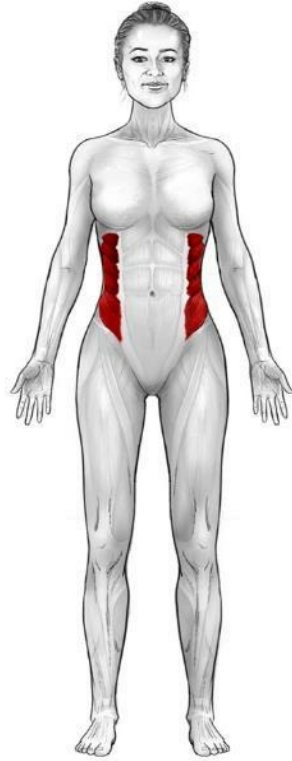
## Front of Box

- **Rectus abdominis:** This prominent abdominal muscle on the surface of the body is most well-known as the six-pack muscle. The rectus abdominis bends the torso forward by pulling the ribs and the pelvis together, and is an important muscle for posture.



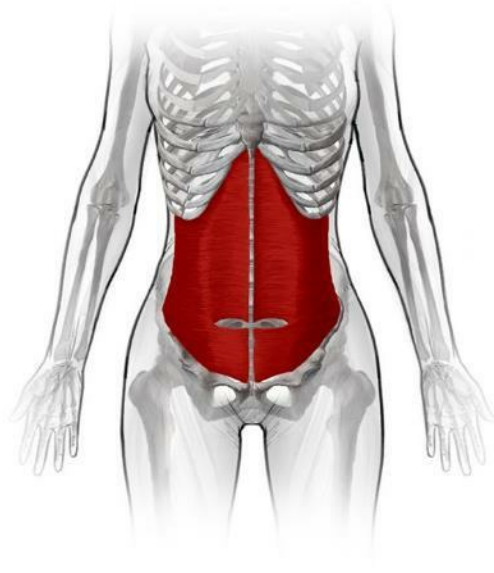
## Sides of Box

- **Obliques:** These are actually two muscles, the internal and external obliques, located on the sides of the abdomen that bend and twist the torso. The internal obliques are directly under the external obliques and both work with other stabilizers to support the spine.



## Cylinder

- **Transverse abdominis:** This muscle is the deepest muscle of the core and forms a cylinder inside the box. The transverse abdominis is an important stabilizer that works like a back brace or weightlifting belt to support the spine.

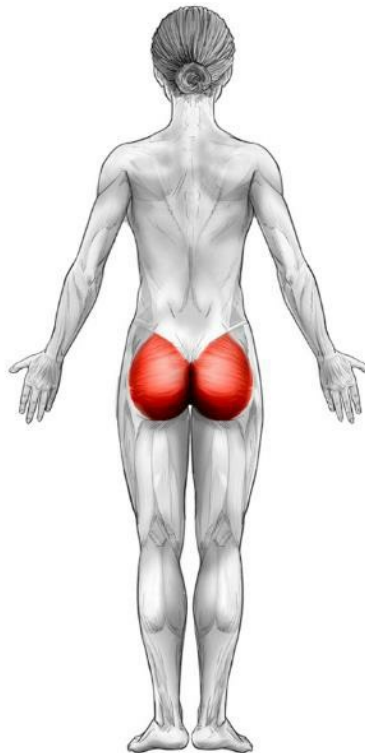


# Minor Core Muscles

The six minor core muscles support the major core muscles during movements or activities. These muscles are located around the hips, back, and shoulders and connect the arms and legs to the torso.

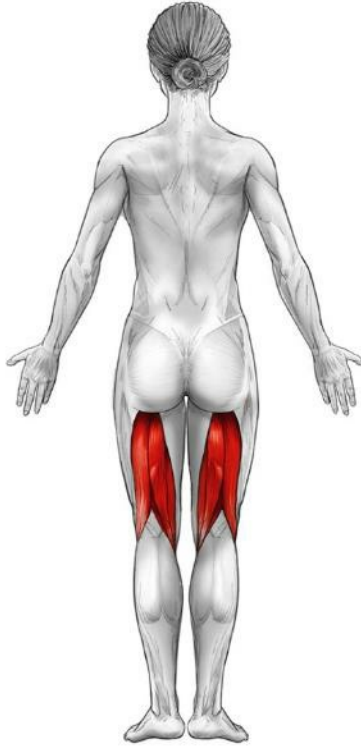
## Hips

- **Gluteus maximus:** These large buttocks muscles, located on the back of the hips, help you stand up from sitting or squatting. The gluteus maximus is also important for stair climbing, running, jumping, and maintaining an upright posture.

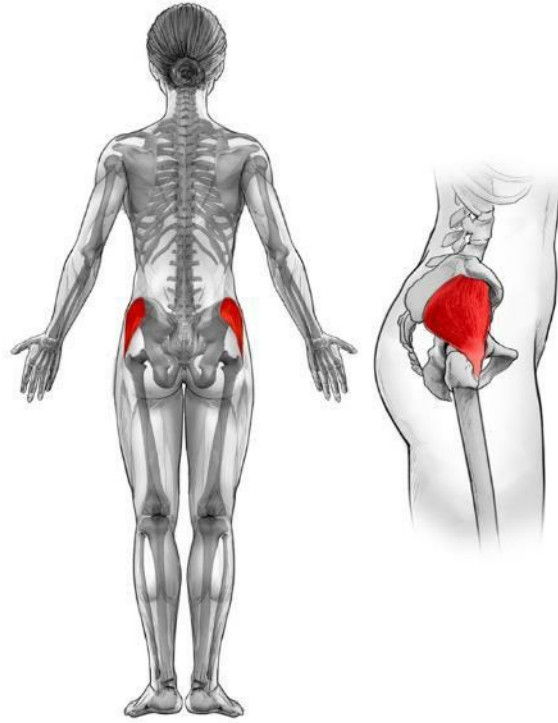


- **Hamstrings:** These muscles, located on the back of the thighs between the hips and the knees, bend your knees and move your legs backward. The hamstrings are important for pushing off during walking and running and for maintaining an upright posture.

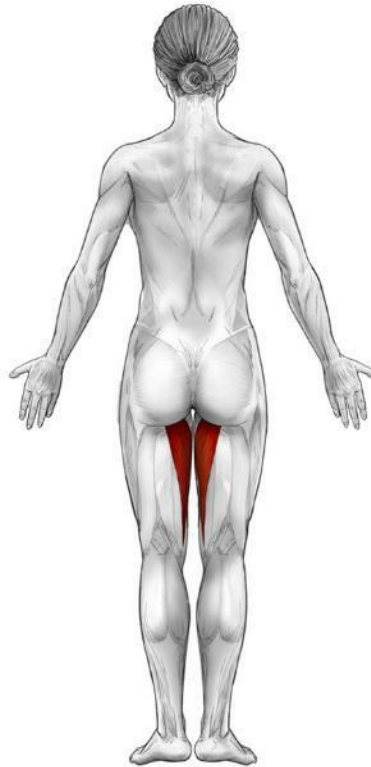




- **Hip abductors:** These muscles, located on the outer hips, bring the legs out to the side. The hip abductors hold the pelvis level when standing on a single leg during walking or running, which is important for preventing knee pain and increasing performance.



- **Hip adductors:** These muscles, located on the inner thighs, bring the legs toward the midline of the body, like the motion you make while making angels in the snow. The hip adductors are important stabilizers for the hips and pelvis.



## Back and Shoulders

- **Latissimus dorsi:** This muscle connects the upper arms and shoulders to the torso. Known simply as the lats, they bring the arms backward and toward the sides of the body. These muscles are used during pull-ups and swimming and are important torso and shoulder stabilizers.