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## WELLNESS, HEALTH & FITNESS

### Core is Key

By Joan Maiden



As I was contemplating what to include in my first article of 2016, I considered all the typical New Year's messages but thought "what is one key element of fitness everyone can incorporate to improve their lives this year?" Having a strong core.

A strong core stabilizes your body allowing for better balance and reduces the risk of falls. It improves posture, helping you stand up straight which lessens the wear and tear on the spine and even improves breathing.



A six pack is nice and washboard abs look great, but a strong core involves much more. Everything you do involves using your core—from putting on your shoes, looking over your shoulder and even sitting at a desk. Your core muscles are the support struts for your body. They are what hold you upright.

When the core is not supporting your body in the way it is supposed to, the back and joints end up carrying more of the load, causing back and joint pain. Four out of five Americans are afflicted with back problems at one time or another. Many back issues and back pain can be relieved by having a strong core.

The core is more than just the abdominal muscles. It consists of twenty-nine muscles. It is the center of your body—the abdomen, hips, back,

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butt and diaphragm. You don't have to do sit-ups and crunches to have a strong core.

- 1) Be aware of tightening your abdominal and butt muscles and standing up straight throughout your day. Everything you do should engage your core.
- 2) Plank. The plank is one of the most effective exercises for strengthening the entire core. Lie on the floor on your stomach and support your body on your toes and forearms without arching your back or sticking your butt in the air—stay as straight as you can—like a board. Hold this position for 10-30 seconds or more. If you are not able to get on the floor, plank against a table or chair.

Being aware of your core is the key. Doing these simple exercises a few minutes 3-4 times a week will help you be well on your way to having a stronger core, less back pain and better posture.

For more exercise ideas, the Center for Disease Control has a good beginner's exercise program for seniors, Growing Stronger. ([http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/growing\\_stronger.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/downloads/growing_stronger.pdf))

Or contact me for a personalized program. Make 2016 a STRONG year.

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