

5 Benefits of Doing Plank Exercises

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With exercise, sometimes the *simplest* of movements result in the greatest gains to your fitness, and this is certainly the case with planks. To do a plank, you hold your body (the trunk portion) off the ground, making sure to hold it in a straight line.

If you've never tried one, a plank may look easy, almost too easy to be beneficial, but this is deceiving. While getting into the proper form is straightforward, holding the position takes strength and endurance in your abs, back, and core.

The plank is one of the *best* exercises for core conditioning but it also works your glutes and hamstrings, supports proper posture, and improves balance.

There are many variations you can try to add intensity and work different areas of your body. In the video ([click here](#)), personal trainer Jill Rodriguez demonstrates plank variations you can use to help improve your posture, balance, and overall fitness.

Planking has become increasingly popular for core strengthening, and for good reason: it works – in large part because it engages multiple muscle groups simultaneously. What are some of the benefits you can expect from adding this exercise to your regular routine?

A Toned Belly

Planking will help build your deep inner core muscles that lay the groundwork for that six-pack look. As your abdominal muscles become stronger, your mid-section will tighten.

Keep in mind, however, that in order to really get "six-pack" abs, you have to shed fat. For men that would be a body fat of about 6 percent, and women around 9 percent, in order to achieve that classic six-pack. This is not necessarily healthy.

Reduce Back Pain

Planks work for back pain because they strengthen your core, which has the pleasant "side effect" of reducing back pain. They also strengthen your back muscles, especially those in your upper back. According to the American Council on Exercise (ACE):²

"Because the plank exercise requires minimal movement while contracting all layers of the abdominal fascia, it is an excellent way to strengthen the core, which, in turn, helps reduce low-back pain."





Flexibility

While building strength, planks also increase flexibility in your posterior muscle groups. The muscles around your shoulders, collarbone, and shoulder blades will expand and stretch (an area that often receives little attention), as will your hamstrings and even the arches of your feet and your toes.

If you do a side plank, you can also stretch out your sides (especially if you extend your arm up over your head in line with your body). To increase the stretching benefits, try a rocking plank – once in basic plank form, rock your body back and forth by moving your toes a few inches either way.³

Improve Your Mood

Virtually every exercise has the potential to give you a **mood boost**, and planks are no exception. Planks are unique, however, in that they help stretch and ultimately relax muscles groups that often become stiff and tense from prolonged sitting. The tension release that planks provide is uplifting for your spirit.

Improve Your Balance and Posture

To do a plank correctly, you must engage your abs to stay upright. Side planks or planks with extensions are particularly beneficial for building balance, as are planks performed on a stability ball. To test and strengthen your balance, try a side plank with a leg raise – get into side plank position, then lift your top leg and hold for one count. Lower it and repeat, then switch sides.⁴ In addition, planks work all the muscles you need to maintain proper posture, like your back, chest, shoulders, abs, and neck. If you do planks regularly, you'll find you're able to sit or stand up straighter with ease.



How to Perform a Basic Plank Exercise

You can view a plank demonstration in the video referenced above, but for those of you who prefer a written description, here are the basic steps for performing a plank, from the American Council on Exercise.⁵

“Hold your elbows directly under your shoulders and place your wrists in line with your elbows.

Push your body up into your upper back and hold your chin close to your neck (like you’re holding an egg between your chin and your throat).

In this position, brace your abdominals—contract them like expecting a punch in your stomach, squeeze your gluteal (tailbone) and thigh muscles simultaneously while continuing to breathe normally.

Hold a plank at least 20 to 30 seconds. (When using correct form, it is not necessary to hold it for longer than this amount of time.) Rest for approximately one minute and repeat three to five more times.

Start doing the plank using your elbows and toes (feel free to drop to your knees if necessary) and progress up to a high plank when you feel you have developed the necessary strength.”

Here are two additional points for performing a front-facing plank correctly:

While in plank position, pull in your bellybutton. Your bellybutton is attached to your transverse abdominis, that inner sheath that holds your gut inside and gives your spine and vertebrae a nice, weight belt-tightening type of support. So by pulling it in, you begin to contract that deep inner transverse abdominis muscle. If you want to work your six-pack rectus abdominis muscle, drive your chin down toward your toes while you're focused on squeezing your bellybutton in.

Next, do a Kegel squeeze. More women than men might be familiar with this term. A Kegel squeeze is performed by drawing your lower pelvic muscles up and holding them up high and tight. For men who aren't familiar with that term, it's similar to trying to stop urinating in the middle of the flow. This squeeze will allow you to feel and focus on your abdominal muscles.





How to Perform Plank Variations

As mentioned, you can perform the plank in many different directions: front, side, and reverse—each direction engages different sets of muscles for all-around toning and strengthening. The front-facing plank engages the following upper and lower body areas: abdominals, lower back, chest, shoulders, upper trapezius, and neck, biceps, triceps, glutes, thighs, and calves. Side planking is particularly effective for training your obliques, which really helps stabilize your spine, while the reverse plank places the focus on your glutes, hamstrings, abs, and lower back.

To perform a side plank, start by lying down on your right side, keeping your legs straight. Next, raise yourself up on your right forearm; your body should form a straight, diagonal line from head to toe. Your hips and knees should be off the floor. You can rest your left hand on the floor in front of you for support, on your hip, or behind your head. Brace your abs and hold for one minute.

For the reverse plank,⁶ start out by sitting on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Place your palms on the floor, below your shoulders, squeeze your buttocks and thighs, and then push your body up into a reverse plank position. Alternatively, you can begin by placing your elbows rather than your hands on the floor, for a less dramatic lift. Again, keep your body in a straight diagonal line from shoulders to heels, making sure your hips are in line.

① Prone Plank
This is a "must-do" foundational exercise that works the entire core area. The deep core stabilizer muscles are also worked with this exercise.
Try to do your best 30 Sec. or more you can

② Plank Side

③ Plank Side With Upper Legs

④ Plank Up

⑤ Plank Side With Upper Arms
Do 4 sets of eight to 10 reps,
Repeat Switch arms
Resting for 30 Sec. between sets.

⑥ Plank with Front Raise
(A). Brace your abs, and keeping your left arm straight, raise it in front of you to shoulder height
(B). Return to plank, then repeat with your right arm.

- Grab a pair of two- to three-kilo
- Do 4 sets of eight to 15 reps,
- Repeat Switch arms
- Resting for 30 Sec. between sets.

4 Common Plank Mistakes

Proper form is very important when performing planks and overdoing it could lead to injury. As noted by certified personal trainer Estelle Underwood in the Huffington Post:⁷

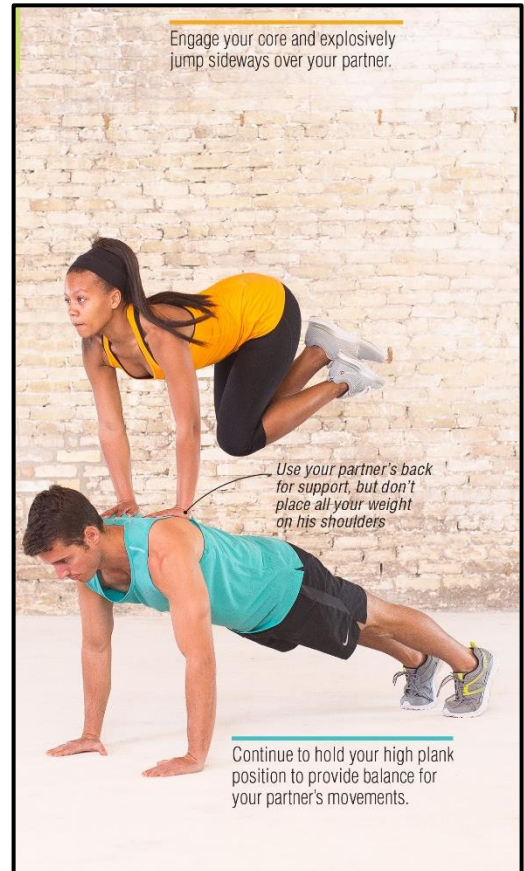
"If you feel any neck or low back pain while doing the exercise, this may be an indication of weakness in the upper or lower regions of the spine. If the core is too weak, the spine will sag, causing compression in the vertebrae, pressure on vertebral discs, and/or shoulder joint inflammation."

Be particularly careful doing planks if you have back pain or injury. And if you're just starting out, try holding the plank position for several seconds only, slowly working your way up to where you can hold it longer. In addition, be careful to avoid these common plank mistakes:⁸

1. *Allowing your hips, head, or shoulders to drop.*
2. *Placing your hands too close together, which creates internal rotation and instability at your shoulder joint.*
3. *Holding your breath.*
4. *Trying to hold the position too long – it is better to maintain proper form for a shorter period of time than to hold improper form for longer.*



Fun with Partner Plank Exercises!



Be Creative!

Challenge Yourself!

31

day

PLANK CHALLENGE

1 FOREARM PLANK	2 FOREARM SIDE PLANK	3 EXTENDED ARM PLANK	4 EXTENDED SIDE PLANK	5 KNEE TAPS	6 SHOULDER TAPS	7 PLANK UP-DOWNS
8 FRIDAY FLOW	9 TRICEPS PUSH-UP	10 FOREARM HIP DIPS	11 PLANK JACKS	12 SIDE PLANK DIPS	13 KNEE TO OPPOSITE ELBOW	14 KNEE TO SAME ELBOW
15 FRIDAY FLOW	16 WIDE GRIP PUSH-UP	17 PANTHER	18 SIDE PLANK ROTATION + LEG LIFT	19 PLANK REACH	20 SIDE PLANK HIP DIP + LEG LIFT	21 MOVING PANTHER
22 FRIDAY FLOW	23 TRICEPS PUSH-UP ROTATION	24 PLANK ROWS	25 THREAD THE NEEDLE + LEG LIFT	26 ARMY CRAWLS	27 SIDE PLANK CRUNCH + TOE TAP	28 ONE-LEG PULL
29 FRIDAY FLOW	30 CROUCHING TIGER PUSH-UPS	31 BONUS! PLANK HOLD				

30 DAY PLANK CHALLENGE

#PlankChallenge

DAY 1 - 20 SEC	DAY 11 - 1 MIN	DAY 21 - 2.5 MIN
DAY 2 - 20 SEC	DAY 12 - 1.5 MIN	DAY 22 - 3 MIN
DAY 3 - 30 SEC	DAY 13 - REST	DAY 23 - 3 MIN
DAY 4 - 30 SEC	DAY 14 - 1.5 MIN	DAY 24 - 3.5 MIN
DAY 5 - 40 SEC	DAY 15 - 1.5 MIN	DAY 25 - 3.5 MIN
DAY 6 - REST	DAY 16 - 2 MIN	DAY 26 - REST
DAY 7 - 45 SEC	DAY 17 - 2 MIN	DAY 27 - 4 MIN
DAY 8 - 45 SEC	DAY 18 - 2.5 MIN	DAY 28 - 4 MIN
DAY 9 - 1 MIN	DAY 19 - REST	DAY 29 - 4.5 MIN
DAY 10 - 1 MIN	DAY 20 - 2.5 MIN	DAY 30 - 5 MIN