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IT'S ALL IN THE CORE

Explosive movements needed for sports like football and cheerleading depend on a strong core. Here's how you can get one.

Photos by Gaby Alonso

By John Platero, CPT, RTS

If I said "core," you might think of the earth's core or an apple core, but you probably wouldn't instantly think of your own core. The dictionary defines the core as the central or inner part of anything. So where is our center?

Actually, we have a few centers, depending on whom you ask. According to Shirley Sahrmann, a prominent professor of muscle and movement imbalances, every joint in our body has a core, which she calls the path of instantaneous center of rotation (PICR). This is the deepest point of the joint where a rigid body rotates at a given instant of time. Each core is surrounded by soft-tissue such as cartilage and ligaments and is always affected by any movement. If it becomes injured, pain will impede motion.

Our center of gravity is somewhere inside the body at the height of spinal segments S-1 or S-2, known as the sacrum. For a point of reference, the belly button is at L-3. If you were to imagine three to four spinal segments down, then you would be close to the center of gravity of your body. This would be your core.

Or is it?

Some experts refer to the body's core as the thoracic and cervical spine. The spine houses the central nervous system, so should we be training the spine? Other physical therapists and health care professionals talk about an inner and outer system. But it starts getting a bit too technical from here. So, let's just talk about why a strong core is important.

Athletes and dancers have long known the benefits of a strong core. The rest of the world has only caught on in recent years. For quick, explosive, turn-on-a-dime movements necessary for sports like football, a strong core is essential. Plus, if you have a strong center, you'll be less likely to injure yourself during an intense game or workout session. And, by strengthening your core, you'll stand taller and you'll be able to lift heavier things - be it dumbbells or a massive load of laundry. So, maybe it's time you started thinking about your center.

If you perform this workout, you will hit all the muscles that attach to the pelvis and the spine, which is what the first few paragraphs of this article were attempting to define as the body's core. Perform two to three sets of each exercise. As always, consult with your physician before trying any new training regimen.

You don't want to risk hurting yourself by training your core to impress your friends in a pick-up game of flag football.