



A Simple guide to:

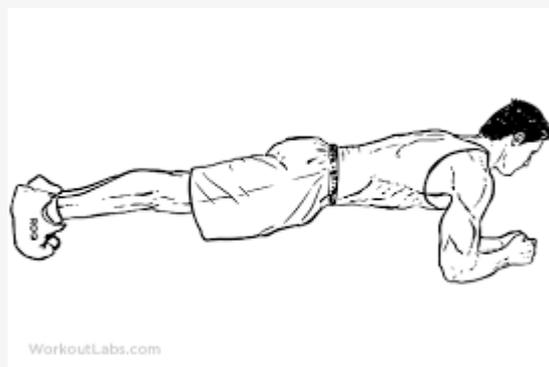
PLANK

The plank is one of the best exercises you can do for your core because it builds isometric strength to help sculpt your waistline and improve your posture.

Holding the body stiff as a board develops strength primarily in the core (the muscles that connect the upper and lower body) as well as the shoulders, arms, and glutes.

How do you do a plank?

- This is what most people consider to be a standard plank.
- Lie face down with legs extended and elbows bent and directly under shoulders;
- Clasp your hands.
- Feet should be hip-width apart, and elbows should be shoulder-width apart.
- Contract your abs, then tuck your toes to lift your body (forearms remain on the ground);
- You should be in a straight line from head to heels.
- Hold for 60 seconds or as long as you can.



Why are planks such a good exercise?

1. Your Core Strength Will Improve

One of the top benefits of doing planks regularly is that they strengthen the core - those muscles, bones, and joints that link the upper and lower body. Because we engage the core constantly during everyday life – when we lift, turn, reach and bend – it's probably the most important area of the body to work on.

Successfully holding the plank position requires that you squeeze and engage all the main core muscle groups – the transverse abdominus, the rectus abdominus, the external oblique muscle, and the glutes. When core strength improves, everyday tasks become easier, we feel stronger and our athletic ability improves.

2. You'll Tone Up That Tummy

Forget counting crunches every day as they aren't all that efficient when it comes to getting a flat and toned stomach anyway. A recent editorial in Navy Times, an independent publication that covers the U.S. Navy, also referred to sit-ups as 'an outdated exercise today viewed as a key cause of lower back injuries'.

Instead, planks are the way to go! A study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning found that the plank provides 100% activation of your six-pack muscles whereas crunches only engage 64%.

3. You'll strengthen Your Back

While some exercises to work the core can actually weaken and potentially injure the back (such as sit-ups or crunches), the plank will actually help to strengthen it. In particular, the upper back muscles become stronger. What's more, the plank is carried out whilst maintaining a neutral spine, eliminating the constant strain caused by flexing and extending

4. You May Enjoy Increased Metabolism and Fat Burn

While doing a quick plank or two won't burn as much fat as cardiovascular exercises, it's a more efficient way of burning fat. When you engage in strength training, your metabolic rate increases even after you've stopped exercising. That is something that doesn't happen with cardiovascular activity. For every pound of muscle you gain, your body burns around 50 calories more per day. So, if you gain 10 pounds of muscle, you can burn up to 500 more calories per day than you did when you were weaker.

5. You'll Increase Flexibility and Lower Your Risk of Injury

Staying supple and limber throughout your lifespan is vital in order to prevent injury – which is why functional exercises that increase flexibility should be part of any well-rounded workout plan. Performing certain simple exercises daily, including the plank, can offset some of the natural loss of elasticity of the muscles, tendons and ligaments that comes with age. It can be an especially useful tool for those who sit at a desk all day.

Planks work to increase or maintain flexibility by expanding and stretching the muscles around the shoulders, collarbone, shoulder blades, hamstrings and even the arches of the feet and toes. To really limber up, consider adding in some side planks to your workout regimen. These stretch out the oblique muscles, particularly if you extend your arm up over your head in line with your body.

6. You'll enjoy Better Bone and Joint Health

Physical activity doesn't just keep our heart healthy and our muscles toned – it's vital for strong bones and supple joints. In particular, weight-bearing exercises are key for bone health. These types of activities put stress on the bones attached to our muscles, stimulating them to rebuild themselves. Supporting your own body weight – as you do with the plank movement – is a fantastic weight bearing exercise which won't see you overdo it

7. Your Posture and Balance Will Improve

Doing planks greatly improves both your posture and balance and, when carried out regularly, helps you to sit or stand up straighter with ease.

Strengthening the core muscle groups leads to better posture as the stomach and back muscles have a huge impact on the other muscle groups in the body (why they are known as 'the core!'). Planks also help prevent or reverse postural deficiencies, including lordosis and posterior pelvic tilt which result from weakness in the abdomen or hip flexors respectively.

Side planks or planks with extensions are particularly beneficial for building balance, as are planks performed on a stability ball.

8. Everyday Tasks Will Become Easier

Planks are classed as a 'functional exercise' because the benefits they bring translate into 'real-world' activities. When undertaken regularly, planking sessions make real life tasks easier because they don't focus on single muscles, but are designed to utilize several groups of muscles all at once – exactly how our body is designed to function.

As you lose fat, build muscle and strength; improve flexibility, bone and joint health; and enjoy increased mobility and balance you should notice things like shopping, cleaning, decorating and gardening all require much less physical exertion!

9. You'll be Happier and Less Stressed

Like most other exercises, planks can lift your spirits (and raise your energy levels). Desk workers in particular should take note of the plank's benefits for their mood – these poses help to stretch and relax the muscles in the neck, shoulders and back that often become stiff and tense from prolonged sitting.

The Yoga Journal recommends plank exercises for stress reduction, as they are said to help calm the brain. At least one scientific study has found strength training to be beneficial for relieving the symptoms of depression. Some fitness experts say that weight-bearing exercises may boost mood as strengthening the core gives you an overall sense of strength.

10. You'll get hooked!

Once you start planking every day and see the benefits to your body, you won't be able to stop!

