

Cancer Answers

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The Why's and How's of Core Strengthening

I can hear it now...some of you are groaning, some of you are asking "how?" while others of you are saying, "bring it on!". Core strengthening is so important for overall health, yet at a time when your health is already compromised, the thought of this kind of an exercise regimen may feel impossible and downright diabolical of me to even mention.

However, this is such an important part of regaining and maintaining health that I simply cannot pass the subject by without a word. Why is it so important and how can you make core strengthening a part of your daily life? ...Read on!

Core strengthening, or conditioning, targets the core muscles of your body. These muscles include the abdominal muscles, but there are many other core muscles. The "core" actually consists of many different muscles that stabilize the spine and pelvis and run the entire length of the torso. When they contract they stabilize the spine, pelvis and shoulder girdle and create a solid base of support. With this solid support base you are able to generate powerful movements of your extremities. Additionally, the muscles of the core also make it possible to stand upright and move on two feet. These muscles help control movements, transfer energy, shift body weight and move in any direction. A strong core distributes the stresses of weight-bearing and protects the back. Its easy to see why this type of exercise is SO important.

Here's is a list of all the core muscles. Space does not allow me to include the location of each of these, but you can look it up in any anatomy book.

- Rectus Abdominis
- Erector Spinae
- Multifidus
- External Obliques
- Internal Obliques
- Transverse Abdominis (TVA)
- Hip Flexors
- Gluteus medius and minimus
- Gluteus maximus, hamstring group, piriformis
- Hip adductors

Core conditioning exercise programs need to involve ALL these muscles to be effective. The "seated core exercise regimen" that follows is from www.bodyresults.com. It has only three exercises - but, each involves all the core muscles. My hope is this will encourage you to begin doing them AND not overwhelm you ...so you keep doing them.

1. Knee Raise Crunch: Sit up tall with feet planted flat on the floor, abdominals held tight, and shoulders squeezed together in order to hold yourself upright throughout the exercise. As you raise one foot at a time in a slow and deliberate movement, simultaneously curl forward with your shoulders and hold for a second in the fully contracted position before returning the

Core Strengthening, cont'd.

the foot to the floor. Repeat for each leg or alternate legs. Build up to 1-2 minutes per side or 15-20 repetitions with both legs, for 2-3 sets.

2. Reclining Curl: Hold your arms across your chest and bring an elbow down and across toward the opposite thigh or knee as you raise the foot 1-2 inches off the floor, then alternate with the other knee and elbow. If you are doing the exercise correctly, you will feel the right obliques contract as you bring the right elbow to left knee, and vice versa. Be sure to keep the abdominals tight and return to upright and center with each repetition, exhaling as you crunch down and inhaling up. Count to 16-20 (8-10 repetitions to each side) Complete 2-3 sets.

3. Seated Oblique Crunch: Sit toward the front of your chair or bench with legs fairly wide apart to allow you to bend forward unencumbered by your lap. Focus on keeping the spine erect and extended even as you bend-in other words, do not let your chest collapse toward the thighs. Inhale as you bend forward, exhale as you lift back up to the starting position. Build to 2-3 sets of 15-20 repetitions to increase your endurance in the lower back.

*There are variations for each of these exercises at: www.bodyresults.com for those who may have already been exercising on a regular basis prior to their cancer diagnosis OR are ready to tackle a bigger challenge.

I KNOW you will find these exercises helpful and healthFULL!

I look forward to your emails with comments and feedback about the newsletter articles. Please keep them coming!