



MIDDLE MATTERS

BY TANIA MADDOX, ATC

As we continue to focus on staying in the Green Zone, one vital piece of that puzzle is core strength. And, no. That doesn't mean six pack abs. Core strength is really about our ability to stabilize and control the muscles throughout the torso. Whether we're lifting, standing, reaching, or reacting, the core is always on. It's the body's stabilizer, shock absorber, and power source, and it plays a major role in keeping us safe and strong on the job. Let's break down what the core really is, why it matters, and how to train it with purpose.

THE CORE

The core includes the deep muscles of the abdomen, lower back, pelvic floor, and diaphragm. These muscles work together to support and stabilize the spine during nearly every movement an industrial athlete makes, from lifting and reaching to walking, bending, and standing for long periods.

A strong core reduces the risk of injury both on the job and at home. It provides a stable foundation for the rest of the body, helping prevent strain in the shoulders, hips, and back. It also supports power generation, giving us better control, balance, and efficiency with every movement.

BRACE FOR IMPACT

The core's most important role is to protect the spine as we move. Injuries often happen outside the Green Zone - sometimes in a single moment, sometimes from repeating the same movement with poor form. Think of the core like a corset or a brace that supports the body during twisting, bending, or lifting. A strong center keeps the back safe, especially under load, and helps prevent other joints and muscles from overcompensating.



What about power? That's when we have even more reason for core strength. When we move within the Green Zone, we can better access the strength that comes from the core. Trying to lift or reach too far from our center puts us at a disadvantage and increases the risk of injury. Lifting a heavy box from the ground is more efficient when it's closer to the body because in the Green Zone, we can access more power coming from a strong core.

A strong core also helps maintain posture, alignment, and balance throughout long shifts. Whether we're standing, walking, or driving for long periods, core stability keeps us upright and reduces the fatigue that leads to slouching, strain, or discomfort. It also supports overall balance, helping to prevent trips, slips, or falls.

NO CRUNCH REQUIRED

When it comes to building core strength, focus on proper form and muscle engagement. Don't limit your thinking to crunches or sit-ups (our core is deeper than the muscles we call our "abs!"), and there are plenty of exercises to challenge it in different ways.

Plank exercises are a great starting point, and there are plenty of variations if the traditional hold starts to feel stale. Movements like dead bugs and bird dogs challenge our ability to maintain stability in the core while our arms and legs move away from center. Russian twists and other rotational exercises target the obliques, which are useful for functional tasks that involve reaching or turning.

For more exercise ideas, check in with your onsite Injury Prevention Specialist. And, if you're interested in revving up your core strength this month, join the [Plank-tastic Challenge!](#)



Tania Maddox, ATC || Tania is a Certified Athletic Trainer in the Normal, IL area. She has spent time working in California and has worked with athletes and team members as they recover from injuries. She enjoys talking about health and fitness and believes it's a big part of injury prevention. Outside of work, she likes to spend time with her family and friends, and stays active by going to the gym or going on hikes. She also enjoys watching sports, especially basketball.

Work Right is changing the way that companies view workplace hazards. Our focus is on educating the workforce to prevent injury. We provide access to Injury Prevention Specialists in the workplace to address the early signs of discomfort. We are changing the industry one company at a time by helping one person at a time.

