

October 2015 | mapmyfitness.com | Molly Hurford | Exercise

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The 5 Best Core Moves for Runners & Cyclists

Core work used to mean doing a lot of crunches or hitting the Ab Roller. But crunches aren't exactly going to make you a stronger runner. Think about the motion you use while crunching. Do you ever find yourself doing that on a run?

Sarah Applegarth, MSc, CSCS, CSEP-CEP, owner and one of the top trainers at Active Life Conditioning in the small ski town of Collingwood, Ontario, works with endurance athletes of all levels. She tries to find dynamic core strengtheners that work the muscles your chosen sport specifically targets. Applegarth believes that even planks, while useful, are only a starting point. Adding movement and trying to mimic the motions you're making on a bike, for example, will better serve your training—and it'll give you a stronger, more badass-looking torso.

Keep core work simple. You can do most of the following exercises in a gym, at home or in the park—all you really need is a spot to hang from, a spot to stretch out or something heavy to move. However, if you're just starting out, the one thing that's worth considering is going to a personal trainer for 1 or 2 sessions to get one-on-one instruction about how to do each move. If you're holding a plank wrong to begin with, it's not going to improve your sport-specific performance, no matter how long you can hold it.

Best for Runners

Standing Weighted Side-to-Side



Because runners don't run lying down, a standing move is great for working the core. Applegarth's favorite move involves a landmine, a hinged pole that's rooted to the ground that you lift. You can mimic this move with a medicine ball, kettlebell or small weight if you're not in a gym. Here's how:

1. Stand tall.
2. Stabilize your hips so they stay in place.
3. Start with the weight lifted to chest height, holding the weight to your left side with both hands.
4. Rotate your upper body slowly, from 1 side to the other and back, keeping the weight at chest height.
5. Do 10 reps, then start again from the right side to do 10 more.

Note: Keep your hips forward as you go. This mimics the way your upper body moves as you run, when you swing your arms from side to side to oppose the forces of your legs as they hit the pavement. "You're counterbalancing the force for rotation," Applegarth explains. "You want to stabilize through your hips, moving through your upper body."



Best for Cyclists

Romanian Deadlift

For cyclists, hip hinging within core work is key, Applegarth believes. Cycling is also single-leg-focused, so a 1-legged Romanian deadlift is the perfect move for building a cycling-ready core and glutes (which do count as part of the core).

To articulate this move perfectly, start by standing on 1 foot, holding a kettlebell or weight in the opposite hand. Then bring the leg that's on the same side of the weight slowly back as you bend down, keeping your torso in line with the leg that's being raised. By the end of the move, you should be parallel with the floor in a

straight line. Take your time coming back to standing, and make sure you repeat it on the other side as well.

"You want to squeeze your core and slowly control the descent and as you come back up," Applegarth adds. "You're getting a lot of core work because you can't open up through your side."



Best for Runners and Cyclists

Hanging

There are 2 options here, and both imitate the hip-hinge motion that a cyclist needs to develop, while building core strength that runners need as well. The moves focus on keeping a flat spine, and the latter exercise mimics the pedaling motion or the running motion, depending on which version you choose.

Hanging leg raise: Start by hanging comfortably from a pull-up bar (or monkey bars, if you have a playground nearby). Slowly raise your legs together to hip height, keeping the legs straight and extended directly out in front of you. Use your core muscles to raise the legs, then hold them in this position. Hang on for as long as you can before lowering slowly. Try to keep improving on your hang time! Don't have a bar? Lie on the floor and slowly lift your legs to about 45 degrees, keeping them straight and using your core to make the movement. Hold there for a few seconds, then very slowly lower, and raise back up. Do this 5–10 times, holding as long as you can, and taking your time on the way down.



Garhammer: For this one, you'll start the same way, hanging comfortably, but instead of raising your legs straight out and holding the position, bring your bent knees slowly up to your chest (or as high as you can get) before slowly straightening them back out. Keep repeating this movement, but focus on slow and steady. You don't get bonus points for speed.



Best for Runners and Cyclists Side Planks with Movement

"I like planks, but I like planks with movement," Applegarth says. A good side plank begins with the body in a straight line, similar to a normal plank, but on your side, with only 1 arm and 1 foot on the ground, and the other foot stacked directly on top. Once you can hold the side plank with relative ease, you can add motion. For runners, swing the top leg out in front as you swing your top arm forward. For cyclists, mimic a pedal stroke by bringing your knee up toward your chest as you bring your arm forward. Repeat on the other side.



To make the move even harder, imitate Applegarth in the picture and use a box to lift your feet a few inches for an added challenge.

Core strength doesn't need to be complicated, but it is more than just simple crunches and basic planks. Mix up your routine with some of these movements, and make sure you're paying attention to your entire core. A six-pack won't get you up the hill faster, but a strong core certainly will!



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