

TRAINING GUIDE

The Core Training Guide

Building a core that supports your whole body. Not by just doing 100 situps.

Core training isn't about visible abs, it's about a stable midsection that protects your back, improves every other lift, and enables you to keep up with your kids without tweaking something. This guide covers what builds real core strength.

8 Best Exercises

Weekly
Programming

Key Principles

Do's & Don'ts

BILLY BUTLER

PT · Dad of 2

WHY CORE TRAINING MATTERS

Your core isn't just your 6-pack, it's the entire system that stabilises your spine under load. A weak core shows up as lower back pain, poor performance in every other lift, and difficulty with everyday movements like lifting a toddler awkwardly.

VOLUME & FREQUENCY

- **FREQUENCY**

2-4x per week. Core recovers quickly and benefits from frequent, shorter sessions.

- **WEEKLY VOLUME**

Think time under tension rather than just reps, aim for 5-8 minutes of quality core work per session.

- **REP RANGE**

Varies by exercise. Planks are timed, rotational work is typically 10-15 reps per side.

THE FOUNDATION RULE

Train all three core functions: anti-extension (planks), anti-rotation (Pallof press), and controlled flexion (dead bugs), rather than just doing endless crunches.

8 BEST EXERCISES FOR REAL CORE STRENGTH

Plank (weighted)

STABILITY

3 × 30-60s

The foundation of core stability. Simple, effective, endlessly progressable.

Dead Bug

STABILITY

3 × 10 ea.

Excellent for training core control without straining the lower back.

Pallof Press

ANTI-ROTATION

3 × 10-12 ea.

Builds real functional strength most people never train at all.

Hanging Leg Raise

FLEXION

3 × 8-12

Advanced but highly effective once you've built a foundation of control.

Cable Woodchop

ANTI-ROTATION

3 × 10-12 ea.

Trains rotational power and control, genuinely useful for sport and life.

Ab Wheel Rollout

STABILITY

3 × 8-12

One of the most demanding core exercises there is, build up to it gradually.

Side Plank

STABILITY

3 × 30-45s ea.

Targets the obliques and improves lateral stability, often neglected.

Farmer's Carry

STABILITY

3 × 30-40m

A heavily underrated core exercise disguised as a grip and conditioning drill.

HOW TO FIT THIS INTO YOUR WEEK

Core work is different from other muscle groups, it responds well to frequency, so fit it in wherever you can.

End of every session

Add 2-3 core exercises to the end of any training day. 5-8 minutes is enough and doesn't require a dedicated day.

Dedicated short sessions

On rest days, a 10-minute standalone core circuit keeps frequency high without adding fatigue to your main lifts.

Woven into warm-ups

Dead bugs and Pallof presses work well as activation exercises before your main lifts, not just as finishers.

KEY PRINCIPLES FOR REAL PROGRESS

Core training progresses differently to other muscle groups. Here's what drives results.

1

Progress time, not just reps

For planks and holds, add 5-10 seconds per week rather than jumping straight to advanced variations.

2

Add instability gradually

Progress from stable surfaces to unstable ones (e.g. floor to Swiss ball) only once the basic version is easy.

3

Control breathing under tension

Learning to brace and breathe properly is more valuable than any single exercise.

4

Increase load on rollouts and carries

These respond well to simply adding weight or distance, not just more reps.

5

Prioritise quality over quantity

10 perfect reps beats 30 sloppy ones. Form breakdown here is where injuries start.

EXAMPLE: 4-WEEK PLANK PROGRESSION

Week	Target
1	3 × 30 seconds
2	3 × 40 seconds
3	3 × 50 seconds
4	3 × 60 seconds, or add light weight

DO

- ✓ Focus on control and bracing rather than speed or rep count.
- ✓ Train anti-rotation and anti-extension patterns, not just crunches.
- ✓ Breathe properly through core work, holding your breath increases injury risk.

DON'T

- ✗ Don't do endless crunches expecting visible abs, that comes from nutrition, not more reps.
- ✗ Don't ignore your core just because it's not a 'main lift', it supports every other lift you do.
- ✗ Don't sacrifice form for time on planks, a shorter, well-braced plank beats a longer sloppy one.

REMEMBER

Visible abs are a nutrition outcome, not a training one. Core training builds the strength and stability underneath, what shows on top depends on your body fat percentage.

WANT THE FULL SYSTEM, NOT JUST ONE PIECE?

This guide is one piece of the puzzle. The Fit Dad Challenge brings training, nutrition and mindset together into one 6-week programme built around a dad's actual life.

[Join the Fit Dad Challenge — £99](#)