

Taiko Body / Taiko Life!

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Increasing your core strength, flexibility, and muscle integrity improves one's overall quality of life. As it pertains to playing taiko, core strength translates into injury reduction. Having core strength and ease of movement --or not having them-- impacts us on a daily basis, certainly; but it's critical in taiko in that it determines safely maintaining alignment and stamina. Yes, core strength keeps us out of the chiropractor's office, at work, off of muscle relaxers, and out of pain, but most importantly: IT KEEPS TAIKO PLAYERS DRUMMING! When it comes to taiko, core strength keeps drummers safe and stable while fine tuning a great stance, and maintaining the great stance while working on perfecting technique. Strength and range of motion enable taiko players to more effectively function injury free while creating movements inherently necessary within the art of taiko.

It's been said that the core begins with the pelvic floor functioning a bit like a "piston" within the abdominal cavity "cylinder". Using that auto engine analogy, I like to think of that piston and cylinder as being held within the engine block (which we all know doesn't function well when cracked or otherwise weakened!)

Personally, I like to think of the core in a more Gestalt setting ~ as a rectangular shape (the engine block), with the shoulders marking the upper corners of the rectangle, and the bottom of the pelvis the lower corners. These 4 corners create nice reference points for us exercise instructors to use when cueing. In this scenario, "the core" houses the piston/cylinder within the abdominals/obliques, but also includes shoulders, chest, upper/lower back, hips, and buttocks. Both anterior (front) and posterior (back) sides of the body need to be addressed.

Today, let's start with The Core of the core: finding, strengthening and developing this cornerstone. Joseph Pilates called it The Powerhouse. We'll be synchronizing our breathing with our movements. Get out your exercise mat, and let's get started!

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor (sometimes called hook position). Push your shoulder blades down your back, and settle. Line your ankles and knees up in a straight line with your hip bones on the front side of your body. The weight of your feet should be centered with your second toe on each foot and the position of your feet should have a very slight duck foot, outward rotation, or V position to them.
2. Draw a long slow breath in through the nose. During each inhale, always expand the ribs out to the side as the lungs fill. As you slowly exhale through the mouth, slowly nod your head as though you are nodding yes, and then release the head. Your head likely will have landed in cervical neutral with a slight nod remaining in place. Keep that slight cervical nod in place for the future.
3. Visualize yourself wearing a bikini bottom, or speedo. Tune into the backside of the body where the top elastic holds the speedo in place above the glutes. Draw another long slow inhale through the nose. With this exhale, visualize the spine of a skeleton. Visualize the very last tippy end of the tail bone. Begin tipping the tippy end of the tailbone toward the ceiling until the speedo elastic band on the backside touches the mat. Hold the alignment in place. You should feel that there is a much denser connection on the backside of the body at the locations where the pelvis and rib cage meet the floor and a less dense connection where the lumbar meets the floor.
4. Chances are good that you are now in neutral spine and ready to add on. Holding neutral spine, draw another long slow inhale through the nose. Exhale slowly through the mouth and activate the pelvic floor with a Kegel. (Kegel explanation for women: visualize stopping urination mid-flow. For men: visualize wearing the speedo as you walk into the cold ocean; the moment the speedo and the ocean connect, there is a "lift" sensation – that's a Kegel.).
5. Repeat #4 and after you again activate the pelvic floor with the Kegel, pull the belly button to the mat, and flatten the abdominals from sternum to pubic bone.
6. Repeat #5
7. Repeat #5 but after flattening the tummy, pretend you are holding a quarter between the glutes.
8. Repeat # 7



Perfecting this routine, and strengthening the piston of our taiko engine block is the beginning of more fitness tips to come in subsequent editions of Taiko!Magazine.