

Scott's Killer Core Routine

Remember:

If done correctly, these exercises are difficult.

Each exercise is meant to be done slowly, in control, and with perfect form. **The difficulty comes from the proper execution of the movement, not from the volume of repetitions.**

This core routine is best done as multiple rounds. Do one round as a warm-up for a strength workout or two to three rounds as a standalone workout.

Exercise	Success is...	Scaled by...
Strict Sit-Up	10x with ZERO core flexion	Easier: Resistance bands Harder: Weight on chest
Bird Dogs	10x/side w/90° external hip rotation	Easier: Use both hands Harder: Wear ankle weights
Windshield Wiper	10x/side w/90° slow rotation	Easier: Bent legs Harder: Wear ankle weights
Power Point	30"/side with ZERO core sag	Easier: One limb at a time Harder: Wear a weight vest
Kayaker	10x/side full rotation to touch ground	Easier: Feet on the ground Harder: Hold a dumbbell
Super Push-Up	10x complete nose-chest drag	Easier: Knees on the ground Harder: Wear a weight vest
Hanging Leg Raise	10x toes to bar	Easier: Bent legs Harder: Add 5" pauses
Back Bridge	30"/side with ZERO hip sag	Easier: Both feet on ground Harder: Wear a weight vest
L-Sit	10" hold with straight legs	Easier: Use parallettes Harder: Higher legs (V-sit)
Side Plank	10x/side with ZERO core sag	Easier: Knees on ground Harder: Reach with dumbbell

Still too easy? Read on!

Guidelines

For all of these exercises, hold the best, strictest form possible. How many reps you can do (or how long you can hold a particular pose) is less important than your form. *Unlike endurance training, for these exercises quality is far more important than quantity.*

Always be guided by the principle of maintaining maximum core tension.

Some of these exercises may be easy for you and some may be impossible. Try them all at first. If some are too hard, just keep trying them. **If some become too easy you can add resistance as described within each exercise.** This is often done by modifying the position or adding weight.

When muscles tremor or form can't be maintained, it indicates that the muscles have reached the point of failure. They have received as much training stimulus as they can absorb. Stop the exercise rather than allow poor form to take over.

Do this routine once through as a warm-up for any strength training workout. Do it two or three times through as a stand-alone workout.

Each exercise consists of:

- An exercise or static hold;
- A target workload of ten repetitions or a ten-second hold
- Four ways to decrease or increase the load (labeled as A, B, C, and D)

The end goal of this routine is to do it three times through with perfect form, slow control, and using Level D for all exercises. It'll be a challenge.

Strict Sit-Ups

This version of the sit-up isolates the deep hip flexor muscles by *eliminating flexion of the spine*.



Instructions:

1. Assume a normal sit-up position. Your knees should be bent to about a 70- to 90-degree angle, back flat on the floor, toes hooked under something you can pull against.
2. Cross your hands over your chest so that your fingers are resting on your collarbones.
3. Now slowly, and in control, sit up by only flexing at your hips. *Do not crunch by curling your spine.*
4. Keep your spine completely straight while coming up to where your elbows touch the top of your thighs.
5. Return to the start position for one repetition.

If it feels easy, you are probably letting your spine flex. Even a small curl--usually in the lower abdomen--will make this significantly easier. To prevent your abdomen from curling forward, keep your head neutral and think about “leading” with your navel.

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do ten repetitions, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

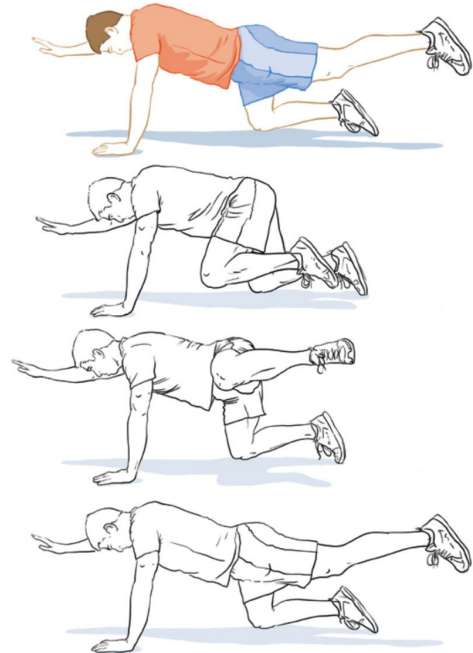
Level A	If strict sit-ups aren't possible, use resistance bands . Girth hitch a resistance band to a heavy, sturdy piece of gym equipment. (Make sure that the gym equipment cannot fall over!) Next, loop the other end of the band over your torso. Use lighter and lighter bands until you can move on to bodyweight.
Level B	Bodyweight only
Level C	Hold a weight on your chest. Work up to 10x 10% of body weight.
Level D	Work up to 10x 20% body weight.

Bird Dog

This exercise combines hip flexibility with transverse core strength. It works both hip strength and range of motion.

Instructions:

1. Get on all fours with knees directly below your hips and hands directly below your shoulders.
2. From this dog-like position, extend one arm forward. Pick up the opposite leg and draw your knee up to your chest.
3. Next, externally rotate your hip, drawing your knee out and up to the side.
4. With your hip externally rotated, extend your leg so that it's straight out behind you with your toe pointed to the side.
5. Lastly, internally rotate your hip so your toe points to the ground.
6. Return to position #2 for a count of one. Repeat.



If it feels easy, then it's more than likely that you have poor hip mobility. Even our fittest athletes can make this exercise feel difficult. If these feel easy, then it's even more important that these exercises are done to increase your mobility.

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do ten repetitions per side, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	As described, but with both hands on the floor.
Level B	As described.
Level C	Once you have the full range of motion in your hips, wear ankle weights.
Level D	Wear ankle weights and a weight vest.

Windshield Wiper

The name describes the action of your legs as they wipe across an imaginary windshield.



Instructions:

1. Lie on your back with your arms outstretched 90 degrees from your shoulders. Your palms should be pressing against the floor.
2. Now flex your hips so that your feet are pointed at the ceiling.
3. Keep your legs straight and your feet together.
4. Slowly rotate your hips and torso until your feet touch the floor on one side.
5. Next, press with the same arm into the floor and rotate your legs back to vertical for a count of one.
6. Continue rotating right through to the floor on the other side. Alternate back and forth on both sides from floor to floor.

If it feels easy, make sure that each rotation is going all the way to the floor, slowly, and in control.

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do ten repetitions per side, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

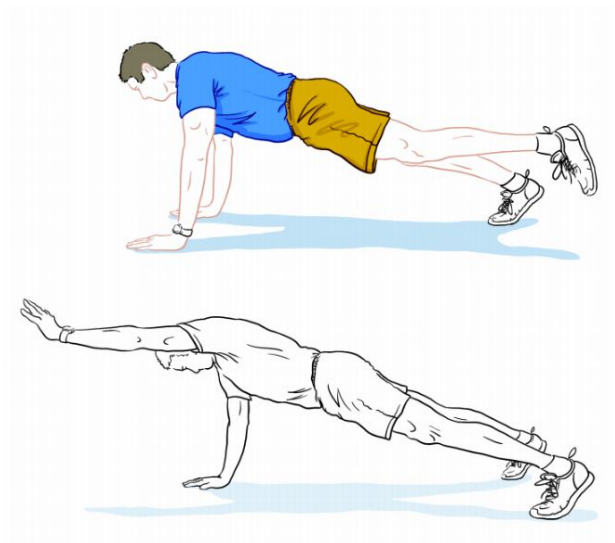
Level A	Do the same motion, but with bent knees. Make sure that your thighs stay together and that your knees go all the way to the floor.
Level B	As described, with straight legs and no shoes.
Level C	Wear shoes to increase the weight on your feet.
Level D	Wear ankle weights.

Power Point

The intention of this exercise is to build a strong neural connection between opposing limbs of the anterior chain.

Instructions:

1. Assume a good push up position with your hands directly under your shoulders and feet spread about two feet apart. There should be a straight line running the length of your back and legs, without any sag.
2. To start, pick up one hand without rotating your shoulders or hips. Point that hand straight out in front and in line with your spine. Lift the opposite leg.
3. Hold until you feel your hips or shoulders rotate, your back sag, or anything that gets you out of the straight line you were in when you started.
4. Change sides.



If it feels easy, make sure that you're not sagging in your torso. You should feel as if a rigid rod is running through the length of your spine.

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can hold a position for 30 seconds with perfect form, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	Instead of opposing limbs, lift just one limb at a time.
Level B	As described, lift opposing limbs.
Level C	Wear a weight vest.
Level D	Wear a weight vest, ankle weights, and hold a light dumbbell.

Kayaker

This exercise targets the deepest core muscles connecting the spine to the pelvis by mimicking the counter-rotation of the hips and shoulders of a kayaker.

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with legs stretched out in front of you.
2. Bring your knees up to a 90-degree bend with your feet a few inches off the floor.
3. Clasp your hands together in front of your belly button. The only thing touching the floor at this point will be your buttocks.
4. Now rotate your shoulders so that you can touch your hands to the floor lightly just beside one hip.
5. Rotate all the way to the other side and touch the floor again. Your feet will naturally counter-balance your rotation.
6. Do each rotation slowly and in control.



If it feels easy, make sure that each rotation is done slowly, in control, and complete (so you can touch the floor).

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do ten repetitions, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

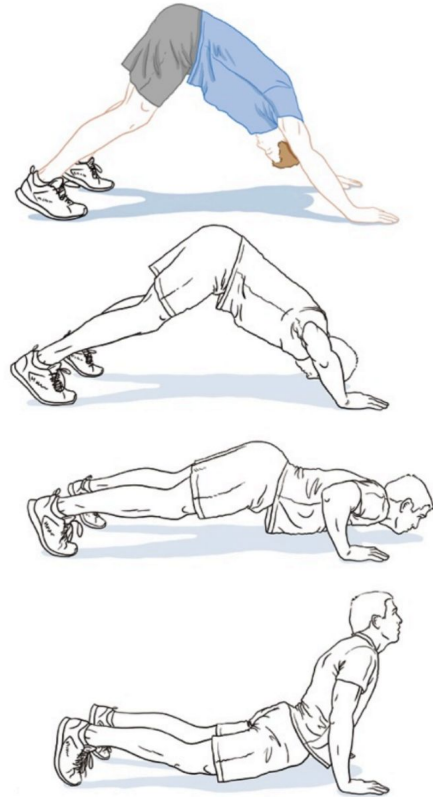
Level A	Do the exercise with your feet on the ground.
Level B	As described.
Level C	Hold a dumbbell in your hands as you rotate.
Level D	In addition to a dumbbell, wear ankle weights.

Super Push Up

This exercise combines the yoga postures of downward dog and cobra.

Instructions:

1. Start in a modified push-up position with hands and feet just wider than shoulder-width.
2. While keeping your arms and legs straight, walk your feet closer to your hands so that your hips rise up toward the ceiling.
3. From this inverted V-position, bend your elbows to touch your nose to the ground between your hands.
4. Then, without rising up, move forward to touch your chin and then your chest to the same spot. Brush the front of your body across an imaginary line drawn between your hands.
5. As your rib cage reaches this line you begin to raise your head in an upward arc. At its apex your arms are straight, your hips pressed near the floor, your shoulders pulled back and your spine hyperextended.
6. Reverse this movement by slowly lowering first your ribs and then brush all the same body parts across the imaginary line between your hands until you are back in the inverted V-position.



If it feels easy, make sure that your body is right close to the ground as you move through the position. You should be able to feel the floor on your chest as you move back and forth.

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do ten repetitions, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	Do normal push-ups, staying rigid from toes to shoulders.
Level B	Push through as described, but don't go as low to the ground.
Level C	As described, with your chest rubbing the floor on each repetition.
Level D	Wear a weight vest.

Hanging Leg Raise

This is a great climbing-related exercise for steep routes and general core strength. This combines a climbing-specific shoulder position with core control.



Instructions:

1. Hang from a bar. For climbers, hang with your arms bent at a locked-off position of 90 degrees. For a core focus, keep your arms engaged and almost straight. (But don't hang from a completely straight arm; it can injure your shoulders and elbows.)
2. While keeping your legs straight, raise your feet through a hanging L-sit and right up to the bar.
3. Touch your toes to the bar and slowly lower. Do not let your legs swing back down. Lower them in control.
4. Do not let your legs swing from the bar with either variation.

If it feels easy, make sure that your body is not swinging back and forth. The exercise is a slow raise and a slow lower, not a back-and-forth swing.

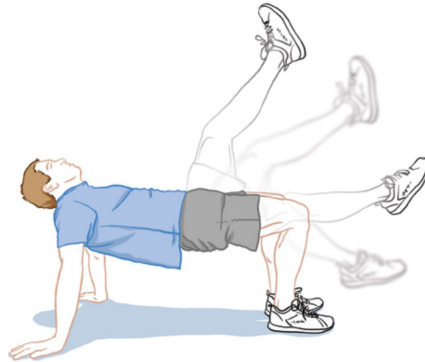
Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do ten repetitions, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	With bent knees. Even easier, use a partner-assist on the way up.
Level B	As described.
Level C	Add five-second pauses at the top and with legs horizontal.
Level D	With ankle weights or heavy boots.

Bridge

The intent of this exercise is the same as the Power Point (to build a strong neural connection between opposing limbs) but along the posterior chain rather than the anterior.



Instructions:

1. Form a bridge by getting onto all fours with your belly facing the ceiling. Your hands should be directly below shoulders, and your feet flat on the floor directly below your knees. Knee and shoulder joint angles should be 90 degrees.
2. First, flex your glutes and push your navel toward the ceiling as far and hard as you can. Note the position of your hips.
3. Lift one foot to a tip-toe. Press with the same hand to keep your hips high. If your hips sag, press harder into your hand and the opposing heel.
4. Hold the position for a count of ten and then switch sides.

If it feels easy, your hips are probably sagging. Go back to all four limbs pressing and extend your pelvis to the ceiling. It should not sag at all when a foot is lifted.

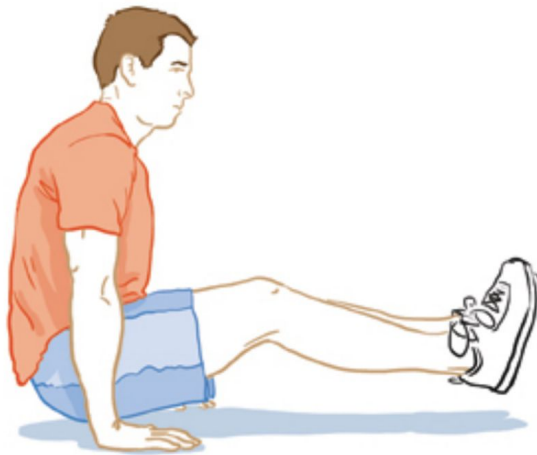
Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do a 10-second hold, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	Keep all four limbs on the ground.
Level B	As described, raise each foot to a tip-toe. Unweight the toe as much as possible.
Level C	Lift the tip-toe right off the ground. Extend one leg straight out horizontally.
Level D	Raise your leg above you, still extending your hips. The raised leg can be bent or (harder) straight up in the air.

The L-sit

This exercise teaches balance, hip flexibility, and tension from the fingers to the toes.



Instructions:

1. First, take your shoes off. (They're likely too heavy for this...)
2. Sit squarely on the floor, toes pointed, knees straight.
3. Place your palms on the floor so that your fingers point toward your toes and the palms of your hands are about mid-thigh (well forward from your hips).
4. Slowly rock your shoulders forward so that your shoulders come over your hands as your elbows straighten and your shoulders press down. These two actions combined will lift your hips off the floor.
5. Push down hard through your hands, contract your lower abdomen, "sit back", and lift your feet while keeping your knees straight.

If it feels easy, then you must be a gymnast...

Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do a 10-second hold, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	Sit on a bench.
Level B	As described, sitting on the floor.
Level C	Wear shoes.
Level D	Wear shoes and ankle weights.

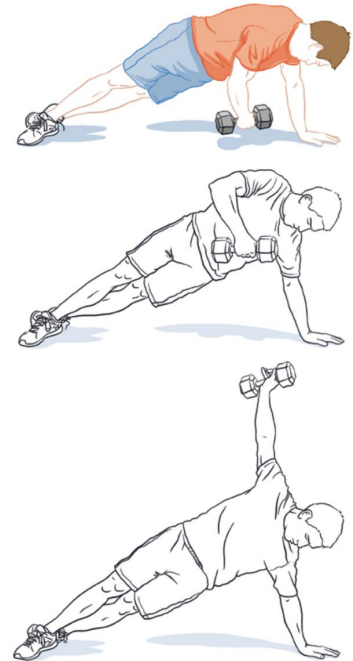
Side Plank

This exercise works the lateral core muscles.

Instructions:

1. Make your body into a rigid plank with your shoulders supported by one hand and both feet on the floor. Stagger your feet for stability.
2. Keep your legs straight and in line from your head through your shoulders and hips to your feet.
3. Raise the high arm and point the fingers to the ceiling. Slowly rotate about the weighted shoulder so that your high arm (while remaining straight) can come down and touch the floor next to the supporting hand.
4. Raise the arm back to the top position for one repetition.

If it feels easy, you may be sagging. Make sure that from your feet to your head, your torso doesn't flex as you rotate up and down. It is important to maintain plank-like straightness (both vertically and horizontally) along your back and legs. Don't sag or stick your butt in the air as you rotate about the shoulder.



Progression:

Use the following chart to increase or decrease the difficulty. **Once you can do 10 repetitions, increase the sets or increase the resistance.**

Level A	If straight-bodied isn't possible, start with one hand and both knees on the floor.
Level B	As described
Level C	Hold a dumbbell in the reaching hand. Work up to 10x 10% of body weight.
Level D	Work up to 10x 20% of body weight.