

ask **Fernando!**

THE SCOOP ON CORE TRAINING

By **Fernando Paredes**



Q. I have a low back problem that gives me trouble now and then. My doctor says to keep exercising and stretching it. What exercises do you recommend to help strengthen my back so I can exercise like I used to and get in shape again?

A. While I am not a physical therapist, I have had considerable experience with helping people correct their low-back problems, which includes my own! If you have been discharged from therapy and are not under the specific care of a physician, there are certain things you can do at this point.

It sounds like your back problem is mostly muscular. If that's the case, you may need to increase the balance and stability of your core so your body will be strong enough to resume your previous workout intensity and get back in shape.

Many times low-back problems stem from two things:

1. Weak oblique and abdominal muscles.
2. A lack of "teamwork" between all the muscles within the core.

These are commonly referred as muscular imbalances. Having muscular imbalances can really throw a big monkey wrench into your workout, cause discomfort, pain and even injury.

Here's the cycle imbalances follow:
Imbalances lead to => Compensations => Distortions => Pain or Injury.

Muscle imbalances come in two forms:

Strength imbalance - when one muscle is very weak and

does not support the area.

Flexibility imbalance - when one muscle is very tight and restricts movement in an area.

Now, without performing a full core assessment on you it is impossible for me to tell which exercises and stretches you need to do. However, here's a quick self-assessment you can perform on yourself which will give you a general idea of where your issues may lie.

Quick Low-Back Imbalance Self-Assessment:

Side View - using a mirror, look at your midsection and hips from the side. What do you see? Is your low back extra curved with your rear sticking out or is it extra flat with your rear tucked in?

WHAT TO DO:

Extra Curved?

You may have TIGHT low back and hip flexors with WEAK abs and glutes so you may need to do more low back stretches with some glute bridges, ab and oblique strengthening exercises.

Extra Flat?

You may have TIGHT glutes and abs with WEAK low back and hip flexors and may need some more glute, hamstring and various hip stretches with some low back strengthening exercises.

There are many more factors involved here, but these simple recommendations will get you started on the right path and fall under the same principles I personally used to cure my own back problems. Since everyone's body structure, degree and type of muscle imbalances will vary, please seek the assistance of a qualified professional experienced in performing these types of assessments prior to resuming your exercise program.

Q. Can you give me an abdominal routine to make my waist smaller?

A. Sure! The key to making the waist smaller is to work your oblique muscles and not just the abs. Crunches, knee-ups and hanging leg raises will give your abs a great workout but will NOT make your waist smaller!

It is the "criss-crossing" internal, external and posterior oblique muscle systems on the sides of your midsection that "pull in" the waistline from ALL angles, making it smaller. You also have to make sure that you perform your exercises in the proper "functional" order.

The functioning order for the mid-core looks like this: Stabilization, twisting & flexion emphasizing deceleration (using a slow return movement)

Your exercise order would be:

Bridge • Rotation • Flexion

The waist-reducing routine looks like this:

Ab bridge	30 seconds - Front, right side and then left side
Upward cable rotations	1 x 15 - 20 (slow return on each repetition)
Downward cable rotations	1 x 15 - 20 (slow return on each repetition)
Crunches on ball	1 x 15 - 20 (slow return on each repetition)
++Perform as one (1) cycle and repeat 2-3 times.	

Keep in mind this is only one way of designing this type of routine. There are many variations and some may be better for you than others depending on your structure, core fitness and overall fitness level. Try it for four to six weeks. You may be pleasantly surprised with the results!

Q. I want to lose some weight, but I am confused about what diet program to use. There are so many diet books and programs out there today. Which one is the best?

A. Tell me about it! Seems like every time I turn around, there is a new diet or program out there promising you a world of results, which makes the real issue something totally different. Have you ever wondered?

With SO many diets out there today:

- Why are so many people having problems losing weight?
- Why do overweight and obesity rates continue to increase every year?

Think about it. If there are so many "solutions", why aren't they solving the problem? Know why? Typical commercial diets don't work. If any did, they'd work for everyone that used them. None can say that. Oh, some may work for the short term, but who wants that? I don't know about you, but my clients want to lose weight and keep it off forever! I have never had a potential client say to me, "Hey Fernando, I want to lose twenty pounds, get in shape, look and feel great, but only for three months. After that I want to go back to my previous condition. Can you help me?"

What? Sounds crazy right? Well, that is exactly what typical diet programs deliver- temporary results for the masses and permanent results for a few. However, there is a method that works for everyone, delivering permanent results for the masses. Something that is so simple, people have a hard time believing it!

The method to permanent weight loss results is as follows: Utilize sound nutrition principles and healthy eating habits every single day.

It's the "every single day" part that is the secret. Let me tell you, when followed consistently day in and day out, I have seen the above method produce "miraculous" results for people regardless of age, fitness level or physical condition. So what are these sound nutrition principles and healthy eating habits for weight loss? Thought you'd never ask!

Sound Nutrition Principles and Eating Habits are:

1. Consume mostly whole foods.
2. Follow a high protein, moderate fat, low starch diet.
3. Eat 4 - 6 moderate sized meals a day.
4. Eat a big breakfast everyday.
5. Eat a lot of colorful vegetables and salads.
6. Take in less calories than you expend during the day.

All the scientific and empirical research has shown that any nutritional program focusing on the above principles will lead to the results you desire. Of course there may be some slight variations based on your individual body's physiological responses to foods; however, the above gives you a solid fundamental base to work from.

No doubt about it, if you practice the above everyday your body will have no other choice but to lose weight, get fit and have energy to burn!



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