

Good to the Core: Children and the importance of core stability

By Marilyn J. Hintz, MS, ATC/L, CSCS

Times have changed.

Youth athleticism levels have developed drastically and research on fitness topics has grown exponentially. As hard-working, on-the-go parents, it is difficult and exhausting to try to keep up with all of the new knowledge and trends most applicable to our children.

As a certified strength and conditioning specialist, core stability training for children has become a very important topic in my profession. In recent years, obesity levels amongst kids have skyrocketed. Parents are working overtime car-pooling their kids from one event to the next and picking up fast food along the way for dinner. Parents may keep snacks in the car for mid-day “nutrition” to hold the kids over until after their piano lesson. When the car finally pulls in the driveway at the end of the day, the children pile out with instructions to finish their homework, grab a snack, and go to bed. Physical education has been removed from most school days, leaving many children with no structured form of physical activity for a big part of the week, therefore inhibiting the development of the core stability muscles substantially.

There appears to be an increased number of club sports that require try-outs and a decreased number of school-sponsored sports and recreational programs in which everyone who signs up makes the team. This only continues to build a larger divide between those who are athletically gifted at a young age and those who may not have been blessed with as much athleticism from birth. Club teams are by nature much more competitive and for kids who want to go far in their sport. These factors limit the number of athletes fortunate enough to have the opportunity to play for such a team. Children who just want to play for fun as a way to be active and social are not able to find the same opportunities. However, one thing I have found that is similar across both groups is the lack of proper education given to these kids on “core” or abdominal strengthening.

Changing Times

Older, generic techniques of strengthening abs are not as effective with the lifestyles and body types of children today who range from extremely athletic to couch potatoes extraordinaire. The knowledge and expertise on core stability has grown tremendously over the past two decades. It is important that this new information reach our elementary and middle school children, in addition to adolescents and adults to ensure that they learn the right techniques for safe and effective exercise.

The muscle that is most closely associated with “core stability training” is the transverse abdominis. Did you know that this muscle highly influences obesity? The transverse abdominis is a muscle that wraps around the “core” and compresses and supports the content in the abdominal cavity of the body.

When the core is strengthened properly, it has the potential to add pressure to the stomach and intestines eliciting a feeling of fullness more quickly, and results in eating less. Along with preventing overeating, when strengthened properly, this muscle can also help kids walk with more power, run with more strength, and improve posture, which in turn helps them burn more calories more efficiently.

Although “core stability training” has been mainly advertised to the adult and athletic communities, once a child reaches the age of eight, one should consider enrolling him/her into a core stability training program to help decrease the high incidence of obesity and injury. All children can benefit from this type of program and for those who are not as athletically talented as their peers, this could give them the opportunity to be social in a non-competitive, but physically active environment. Additionally, it could give them just what they need to be a more coordinated, athletic individual.



I would love the opportunity to evaluate your child and help you guide them safely toward greater health for the rest of his or her life. Please contact us now and see visible improvements in your child quickly!