

## Fitness Forum: Get to the core of the matter

*by Copley News Service*

Exercises that strengthen the "core" - the large muscles of the trunk that stabilize the body - are hot because they improve posture and support the rest of the body through its motions.

**WORKS ON:** Stabilizes core (abdominal and low back) muscles and strengthens gluteus maximus (buttocks) and hamstrings (back of your thighs) muscles.

**BRIDGE EXERCISE** - Firefighter Joe Penolio demonstrates the bridge exercise to strengthen core and gluteal muscles. On his back with knees bent, he raises hips until his knees, hips and shoulders form a straight line. CNS Photo by Nadia Borowski Scott.**SET UP:** Lie on the floor facing up with knees bent at 90 degrees, toes pointing forward and arms by sides.

**STEP 1:** Suck in your stomach and remember to keep breathing. Try to touch your belly button to your spine. This abdominal position is maintained throughout the exercise.

**STEP 2:** Slowly bring your hips up by contracting buttocks until your knees, hips and shoulders form a straight line. Do not arch your lower back. All the movement should come from your hip joints.

**STEP 3:** Hold the position for two to three seconds while squeezing the buttocks.

**STEP 4:** Bring your hips down slowly until they almost touch the floor and bring your hips up again.

REPETITIONS: Do six to 12 repetitions for two to three sets.

**SAFETY TIP:** If you cannot maintain normal breathing with your stomach sucked in, practice it first standing or sitting. Keeping the belly button in helps activate deep abdominal muscles and provides stiffness to your lumber spine.

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