Published on *Happily Whole* (https://www.livinghappilywhole.com)

This is How We Plank!

May 26, 2014, written by katie

I heard many of you enjoyed the Members Core video I sent! So, I thought it would be good to continue focusing on the core but to take it in a bit of a different direction. (If you missed the video, please let me know and I will send it to you again.)

The "plank" is an incredible exercise. Yeah, it's tough to do. That's why it is so effective! While it strengthens and tones the core (those muscles in the front, sides and back of your entire midsection), it also targets other muscles in the body. Shoulders, chest, quads (those muscles in your thighs) and glutes (your bum) are all engaged when doing certain variations of the plank.

Even more awesome, though, you can execute a plank just about anywhere. You need NO equipment except your beautiful body. So when you are on vacation, at the park, in your living room or the gym and want to work your core, pull a plank out of your back pocket! I've even been known to pause in the middle of a walk or jog to plank a little.

Here are several plank variations. Each one will challenge your core a bit differently. My suggestion is to do some planking at least a couple times a week, especially if you have not done much other abdominal and spinal extensor work [1].

Plank

Elbow Plank

Side Plank Option 1

Side Plank Option 2

Side Plank Option 3

Side Crawl Plank

Side Crawl Step 2

Straight Arm Plank with Leg lifted

Tree Pose Plank

Side Plank with upper leg fully extended

Warm-Up

It's always good to get blood flowing to all your muscles before you begin a strength workout. Warm-up by doing any cardio exercise for 5 minutes that will get your heart pumping. Try brisk walking or jogging, jump rope, biking, or eliptical. Even just doing a set of stairs a few times will do. Or just use this brief core set as a follow up to your cardio exercise (a walk, jog, swim, cardio class or video).

Please note you can click on the photos to view them larger with captions.

Workout Set

Exercise	Description	Sets	Reps	Tempo
Straight Arm Plank to down dog	Place your hands beneath your shoulders, straighten your legs so you're holding your body parallel with the mat. Hold this position, making sure your hips don't sag. You body should look like a plank of wood. Then, press your hips up and back into downward facing dog, pause and return to plank.	2	Hold in plank for about 10 seconds then shift to down dog for a couple seconds.	Make sure you are breathing.
Elbow Plank	Lay face down, prop your elbows under your shoulders, lift to your toes so your body is parallel with the mat/floor. Support your body on your elbows and toes. Modification: drop to your knees and hold.	2	Hold for as long as you can.	Breathe

Exercise	Description	Sets	Reps	Tempo
Side Plank (on elbow or with straight arm)	Lay on your side. Bend your bottom leg and 'kick-stand' that foot to the back (see photo). Raise your hip off the floor and support yourself with a straight arm and extend the opposite arm to the ceiling. There is a progression/variations to try by extending both legs straight, stacking your feet.	2 each side	Hold for 1 minute each side.	
Side Crawling Plank	Begin in the plank position. Now with straight arms, move to the right by moving your right hand to the right and follow with your left hand. Take 2 more steps. Now go back to the left.	2	Move right and left 2-4 arm crawls each way	Crawl for 2 count.
Straight Arm Plank, 1 Leg Lifted	Get into a straight-arm plank, hands beneath your shoulders. Keeping core engaged, lift right leg but keep left hip down even with the right hip. Hold and repeat on other side.	2 each leg	Hold for about 30 seconds with each leg extended.	
Tree Pose Plank	See Progression Note: Get into a straight arm side plank (see picture), You may hold there or you can bend the upper knee and place your foot into on the inner thigh of the lower leg. (do not press foot into the knee joint of the lower leg.)	2 each side	Hold 20 to 30 seconds each side	
Straight Arm Side Plank with Leg extension	See Progression Note: Get into a straight arm side plank. Grasp the big toe or whole foot with your free hand. Slowly begin straightening that leg towards the ceiling as much as you can without toppling over. Pause and repeat on other side.	1 each side	Hold as long as you can with proper form on each side.	

Cool Down

Sit back into childs pose and breath deep for 1 minute. Then, lay on the floor on your back extending your legs straight and your arms overhead. Stretch. Hug your knees into your chest and let them fall to one side keeping your back flat on the floor to feel a spinal stretch. Change sides. Finally, hugs your knees into your chest and gently roll up...and pat yourself on the back for a job well done!

Tip to Progress

NOTE: The last two planks in the workout are for those of you already comfortable with the preceeding ones. Please take caution when trying a new and challenging exercise! I wanted to show you that the variations and progressions of planks never end! But be sure to listen to YOUR body, please.

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Links
[1] https://www.livinghappilywhole.com/content/spine-strong