

# Core Stability and Balance for Cyclists

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Disclaimer: The exercises and drills introduced below are for general illustration purposes only and are not recommended to any athlete not under the clearance of a medical provider and guidance of a qualified coach. If you would like personal instruction in these exercises and drills, we recommend you schedule a consultation session with one of ATP Center's expert coaches.

As the winter slowly disappears and the days get longer and warmer, many cyclists will come out of training hibernation. You may have been hard at work but chained to a trainer, burning rubber. Yet as the hours riding in place ticked away, two important areas of fitness may have been forgotten: core stability and bike handling skills. Once back out in the wide open world of dodging potholes, admiring the scenery at high speeds, and zipping through singletrack you need these two components to get you safely back home.

As you sit on your bike, mounted in the trainer, core stability takes a long winter's nap. When it comes time to make that sudden move to avoid something on the trail or sustain a five hour tour of the neighborhood, your core can have a rude spring awakening. Following is a short introduction some of the exercises and core/handling drills workouts we assign to our athletes to prepare them for the streets and trails.

## Core Exercises

Many of these exercises are isometric contraction workouts in which there is no visible joint movement – a static contraction. Our core area works mostly in static contractions and it is best to train muscles in the mode they will be called upon. Thus, the first set of exercises are designed to train the static contractions asked of the core muscles.

**Planks** (4 positions): Sometimes referred to as bridging. Starting position, lay prone (Face down on stomach) on a flat surface and place your hands palm down directly under your shoulders (modification, elbows under shoulder). Lift yourself up and think of your head to toes as a plank. Hold this position with good form for 20-40 seconds and then without relaxing rotate to one side to balance on one hand (modified, one elbow) and maintain plank position. Hold for another 20-40 seconds and rotate to the other side to repeat 20-40 seconds. Last position is supine on elbows holding plank position. As you improve, add time to each position and or add sets.

**Hip lifts:** Lying supine (on your back) with knees bent and feet flat on floor, hold abdominal muscles tight, lift pelvis slowly up towards the ceiling until shoulders are about to lift off. Hold 30 seconds and slowly lower to repeat.

**Hip lift with knee extension:** Same as above with an added extension of a knee. Once at the top position slowly remove one foot from the floor by flexing the quad muscles to extend the knee, hold and return to floor and switch feet while maintaining the lifted pelvis.

**Floor back extensions:** Lay prone (Face down on stomach), hands by your side. Tighten your abdominal muscles by pulling your belly button towards your spine (helps protect the lower back). Using your lower back/gluteus muscles lift your head/shoulders and chest up off of the floor and hold for a 15-30 second count, repeat as needed.

**Oblique Crunch:** Lying supine (on your back) with knees bent and feet flat on floor, hold abdominals tight, flex quads to lift feet up to parallel to the floor. Place hands so finger tips are touching the back of the head. Concentrating on slow controlled movement lift

head/shoulders to touch right elbow to left knee, hold for 5-10 seconds and repeat to other side (don't pull on the head, put tension on neck). Continue movement for a count of ten each side. Repeat as needed.

## **Drills**

Mastering the balance and bike handling needed for these drills at low speeds will allow you to incorporate the skills into the split second action needed on the road and/or trail.

**Track Stand:** This balance move is performed at a stand still on the bike. Best practiced somewhere safe (grassy area) due to possibilities of falling. While clipped into the pedals seated or standing use the brakes, steering and pedal action to maintain an upright position. Move as needed to balance in one place. This comes in handy at stop lights, trail courtesy stops and slow moving maneuvers like switchbacks.

**Slow Speed Slalom:** Using cones, rocks, water bottles, etc., place them in a straight line equal distance apart. Slowly ride in and out of them from end to end and back. Concentrate on balance and slow speed. Variations include placement at unequal distances, each wheel passing on opposite sides of objects, and faster or slower riding. Spend 10-15 minutes just weaving around the objects, thinking about your core/balance. This is also a great relaxation tool.

**Slow Speed Pick-up Game:** Can be done with slalom mentioned above. Starting with tall objects, practice picking the objects off the ground. Make sure to switch hands to challenge both sides of your body.

**Hopping (Bunny hop):** Technique used to lift the wheels off the ground while on the bike. This should be practiced without being clipped into the pedals to get the full benefit of the proper skill used to defy gravity. Start out by leaning forward over the bars slightly and extend your knees and hips upward while slightly twisting on the handle bars in a forward motion. The feet can become slightly pointed down to help lift the rear wheel off. Once you get the hang of moving the rear around, you can incorporate the front in with a lift of the bars and concentrating your upward torso/leg motion more up than forward. This is good for clearing obstacles in the road or trail.

These are just a few of the many drills/exercises that can help you get tuned for the nearing sun filled summer days. Most of these can be done in the safety of your own home. You can also contact the ATP Center Coaches for further instruction in core strength training and bike handling skills. Practice these skills and even when the weather is being sloppy, your riding won't be.

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