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FUNCTIONAL CORE FOR WOMEN



Targeted Training for Glutes and Abs

BY KIA WILLIAMS

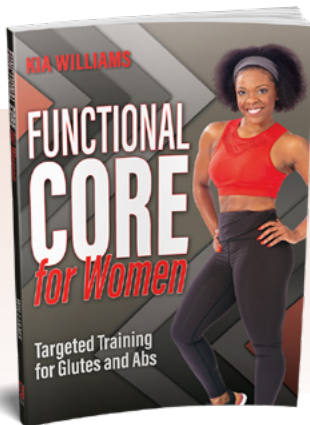
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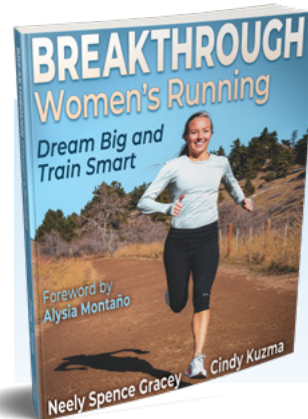
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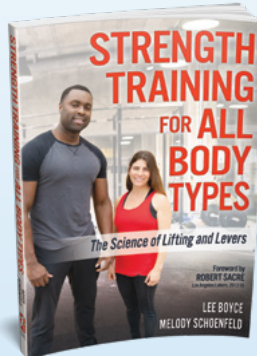
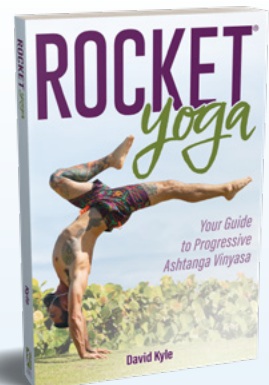
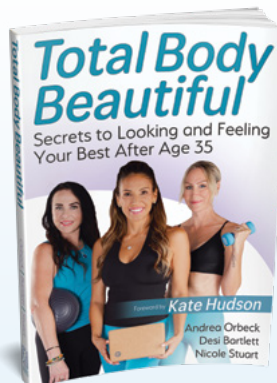
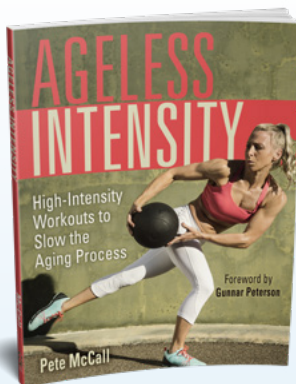
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PART 1

STANDING CORE EXERCISES

The number of hours you spend sitting each day may be alarming. Sitting for prolonged periods has a negative effect on gluteal muscle activation and body posture. Standing recruits and strengthens muscles of the abs, back, glutes, and legs, and it burns more calories than sitting. Why not add intentional exercises performed while standing to double up on the benefits?

Standing core exercises come in many forms and styles, so you can use them to mix up your regular training routine. A perk of standing core exercises is that you burn more calories in less time because you engage more muscles at once. Also, standing core exercises can be functional; they challenge your balance and stability while improving your posture. Finally, if you experience pain in the neck or hip flexors when doing core exercises on the floor, standing core exercises will be a welcomed alternative for you.

Keep in mind that training to make your glutes and abs pop takes time and commitment to your exercise program and diet; results will not happen overnight. Proper nutrition and strategic exercise goals will help to strengthen and define your core muscles and reduce the layer of body fat that covers them. Also remember that for safety, it is best to do all core exercises in a controlled and efficient manner that will not make you susceptible to injury.

The following standing core exercises will help improve your focus, functional strength, balance, posture, and physique.

SQUAT TRAPBACK

How It's Done

- ▶ Start in a squat position with a resistance band above the knees.
- ▶ Tap one foot back—about 1 to 2 feet (30-60 cm) behind you.
- ▶ Return the foot to the original starting position, then switch to the other side.
- ▶ Remain low in the squat position the entire time as you alternate from tapping one foot back to the other.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Decrease range of motion by keeping the thighs above parallel and taking shorter steps back.
- ▶ Increase range of motion by lowering farther in your squat and tapping farther back.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Avoid bouncing at the knees. Bouncing could add unnecessary strain and injury to the joints.
- ▶ Actively keep the core muscles engaged and strong.
- ▶ As you tap back, gently tap the big toe back rather than planting the entire foot down.

STANDING LEG RAISE

How It's Done

- ▶ Stand tall with the shoulders back, chest up, and abs engaged, and softly bend the knees for a stable base.
- ▶ Firmly grip a weighted fitness bar or barbell for added stabilization. Anchor the resistance band around the bar and the ankle of the moving leg.
- ▶ Leading with the heel, lift one leg off the floor behind you as high as you can without bending that knee or arching the low back. Keep the torso upright.
- ▶ With control, lower the leg to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ For a regression, stand more upright, and do not lift the leg as high.
- ▶ For a progression, add an anchor point of resistance, and lean farther forward to protect the back while working against gravity and the added resistance.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Keep the abs and stabilizing leg engaged to avoid a swayback posture when performing the move.

LATERAL LEG EXTENSION



How It's Done

- ▶ Stand tall with the shoulders back, chest up, and abs braced, arms placed at the sides or hands on hips or in prayer, and softly bend the knees for a stable base. Toes and knees are facing forward.
- ▶ Loop a resistance band just above both ankles for added resistance while firmly gripping a weighted fitness bar for added balance support.
- ▶ Shift your weight to one foot (standing leg). Flexing the other foot (lifting foot) and leading with the blade of that foot, lift the leg to the side as high as you can without bending the knee or leaning the torso to the side. Keep the torso upright.
- ▶ With control, lower the leg, returning the foot to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Hold on to a stable surface to help support balance for a regression.
- ▶ For a progression, add a resistance band at the lower leg region to make the exercise more challenging.

Safety Cues:

- ▶ You do not have to lift your leg high for this move to be effective.
- ▶ Keep your torso upright and legs long the entire time while performing this exercise.

LATERAL FLEXION TO KNEE

How It's Done

- ▶ Stand tall with the shoulders back, chest up, and abs braced, and softly bend the knees for a stable base.
- ▶ Loop a resistance band around both feet.
- ▶ Place the hands behind the head, with the fingers spread wide, thumbs at the nape of the neck, and the elbows wide.
- ▶ Exhale as you crunch, laterally flexing to the side, lifting one knee toward the same-side elbow. The foot and knee are turned out on the moving leg.
- ▶ Inhale as you lower the leg, returning the foot to the starting position, standing upright with the chest lifted and proud.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Decrease the range of motion.
- ▶ Increase the range of motion.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Remember to stand tall the entire time, and avoid folding the torso forward during this exercise.
- ▶ Keep the knees slightly bent to help with balance and control.

CROSSBODY KNEE DRIVE



How It's Done

- ▶ Stand tall with the shoulders back, chest lifted up, and abs braced, and softly bend the knees for a stable base. Toes and knees are facing forward.
- ▶ Loop a resistance band around both feet.
- ▶ Place one hand on the hip and the other behind the head with the fingers spread wide, thumb at the nape of neck, and elbow wide.
- ▶ Exhale as you lift the knee opposite the hand that is behind the head and twist the torso in the direction of the lifted knee, reaching the opposite knee and elbow across the midline toward each other.
- ▶ Inhale as you lower the leg, returning the foot to the starting position, standing upright with the chest lifted and proud.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ For a regression, shorten the range of motion, and slow the tempo.
- ▶ For a progression, lift the knee higher while standing tall to recruit more abdominal muscles.

Safety Cues:

- ▶ Slow down the exercise tempo to maintain balance, alignment, and muscular control.
- ▶ Remember to stand tall the entire time and avoid folding the torso forward during this exercise.
- ▶ When standing, keep the knees slightly bent to help with balance and control.

SUMO LATERAL SQUAT

How It's Done

- ▶ Stand in a sumo squat position with the feet in a wide stance (wider than shoulder-width apart); the toes and knees are turned out at about a 45-degree angle. With the chest lifted and proud, the shoulders back, and the hips aligned under the shoulders, lift through the arches of the feet, and bend the knees toward a 90-degree angle.
- ▶ Loop a resistance band around the wrists and extend the arms overhead.
- ▶ As you exhale, bend the torso to one side, reaching towards the same side with your arms.
- ▶ As you inhale and keep the abs engaged, lift the torso to return to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Decrease the range of motion by standing more upright.
- ▶ Increase the range of motion by deepening the sumo squat.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Keep the shoulders back, chest lifted and proud, and knees back the entire time.
- ▶ Keep the hips solid; control the pelvis, resisting the urge to rock or lift the hip to reach the elbow.



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PART 2

FLOOR & SEATED CORE EXERCISES

Training your glutes and abs in various positions and planes of motion will challenge your mind-body connection and improve your daily functional movements, such as turning around, picking yourself up from the floor, and moving side to side. The exercises in this section will help train your glutes and abs while also adding extra posture training for your back.

The floor-based exercises in this section may feel more accessible for some people because they require less balance challenge or less work against gravity compared to some exercises performed standing.

Be sure that your floor surface is clean and dry. Carpet and cushioned floors are great for these exercises. If you are exercising on a hard floor surface, an exercise mat is encouraged.

INCLINE GLUTE BRIDGE

How It's Done

- ▶ Lie supine (on your back) with the knees bent at 90 degrees. Relax the head, neck, and shoulders on the floor.
- ▶ Wear a resistance band around the thighs (the area above the knees and below the hips) and open knees outward for added abduction.
- ▶ Place the heels of both feet on a stable, lifted, flat surface, such as a box or weight bench. The feet should be hip width apart, and you should not feel pain in the knees.
- ▶ Extend the arms along the sides of the torso with palms facing down.
- ▶ Drive up through the heels to lift the glutes off the ground. Engage the glutes through this motion, keeping the navel drawn in and up. All of your weight should be balanced between the backs of the arms and the feet.
- ▶ Make sure you lift the hips straight up and that the knees remain aligned with the hips and toes.
- ▶ Return to the starting position by lowering the hips down with control and softly landing on the floor.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ To lessen the challenge, move the feet from an elevated surface to be flat on the ground, at the same level as the hips on the floor.
- ▶ Add a barbell to increase muscular challenge.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ If you experience pain in the knees, try stepping the feet farther away from the glutes to increase the angle in the knee joints.
- ▶ The head, neck, and shoulders should remain relaxed on the floor while performing this exercise to avoid straining the neck or back.

HIP ADDUCTION

How It's Done

- ▶ Sit tall on a bench or chair with the ankles aligned under the knees, the knees hip-width apart, and a resistance band around the thighs.
- ▶ Press the knees outward in a controlled motion, keeping the feet relatively in place; the feet may supinate or roll out.
- ▶ Keep tension in the resistance band as you slowly bring the knees back in toward the midline of the body.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Shorten the range of motion or distance that the knees move outward for a regression.
- ▶ For a progression, increase the resistance level on the band for added challenge.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Maintain an upright position, keeping the abs engaged and shoulders back.
- ▶ Do not rush the movement, work in a controlled manner.
- ▶ Wear the resistance band above the knees and not on the knees.

KNEELING KICKBACKS

How It's Done

- ▶ Begin on all fours, aligning the hands directly under the shoulders and the knees under the hips.
- ▶ Loop a resistance band around the arches of both feet.
- ▶ Dorsiflex at the ankles.
- ▶ Extend one leg by pressing one foot back and up, lifting the knee and ankle to align at hip height.
- ▶ With control, lower the knee back down to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Decrease the height of the leg on the lift to avoid pinching in the lower back to regress the exercise.
- ▶ Add a resistance band under the bottom of the foot with handles anchored under the palms for more muscular challenge.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Keep the spine long, and avoid dipping or sagging in the lower back and shoulders.
- ▶ Work to steady the hips and keep the abs engaged throughout the exercise.
- ▶ Press the floor away with the arms, and keep the shoulders away from the ears.

FIRE HYDRANT

How It's Done

- ▶ Begin on all fours, aligning the hands directly under the shoulders and the knees under the hips.
- ▶ Wrap a resistance band around the thighs.
- ▶ Brace the abs, and engage the glutes.
- ▶ Keep the torso and pelvis stable as you laterally move one leg so that the knee opens out and the inner thigh is parallel to the floor.
- ▶ Contract the thigh as you lower the leg back to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Shorten the range of motion of the leg lift to lessen the challenge.
- ▶ Keep a long spine, but lower from the palms to the forearms to stabilize the setup.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Keep the spine long, abs activated, and glutes engaged the entire time.
- ▶ Keep the hips aligned with the shoulders.
- ▶ To prevent knee pain, you can put something soft under the knees for extra cushion.
- ▶ Avoid dipping in the low back or lifting one hip higher than the other.

BUTTERFLY HIP LIFT

How It's Done

- ▶ Start by lying supine with the palms down, the knees comfortably bent, and the feet flat on the floor.
- ▶ Wear a resistance band across the front of the hips.
- ▶ Separate the knees outward as far as they will comfortably open. You will feel a slight stretch in the inner thighs.
- ▶ Bring the soles of the feet together, and activate the glutes.
- ▶ Pressing the sides of the feet into the floor, lift the hips up. Your body should form a straight line from the shoulders all the way to the pelvis.
- ▶ Balance on the backs of the shoulders.
- ▶ With control, slowly lower the hips.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions starting with step 4.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ A regressive option is to keep your knees together or not open them as wide.
- ▶ A progression is to add weight at the front of your hips to make this move more glute intensive.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Be sure the spine remains long from the neck to tailbone.
- ▶ Pay attention to how the hips and knees respond to this move. It should not cause pain in the joints.

CLAM

How It's Done

- ▶ Start in a side-lying position, with the bottom arm extended on the floor and the head resting on the arm. The hips, legs, and feet are stacked and the knees are bent at a 90-degree angle.
- ▶ Wear a resistance band around the thighs. Keep the band above the knees, and keep tension in the band the entire time.
- ▶ Place the top hand on the floor in front of the navel to stabilize the torso.
- ▶ Keeping the bottom leg on the floor and activating the glutes, lift the top knee away from the bottom knee as if opening a clamshell. You should feel the tops and outer edges of the glutes engaged.
- ▶ Lower the top knee to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions or switch sides.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ Arm placement is optional, based on comfort and preference. You can support your head on the arm or in the hand with a bent elbow for comfort to the neck.
- ▶ You can prop yourself on the forearm as a progressive option that challenges the obliques.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Be sure that the hip bones are stacked.
- ▶ Brace the abs to stabilize the pelvis and torso during this movement.

SEAL HEEL CLAP

How It's Done

- ▶ Start in a prone position (lying flat on your abdomen), with the legs extended behind you. Fold the arms, and rest the forehead on the forearms.
- ▶ Loop a resistance band around the thighs.
- ▶ As you exhale, engage the thighs, glutes, and back muscles, lifting the heels up and thighs off of the floor. Keep the legs extended long behind you.
- ▶ Once the thighs are lifted from the floor, start clapping or beating the heels together while they are suspended in the air.
- ▶ Keep clapping the heels together for a number of repetitions or until you feel the burn in the glutes.
- ▶ Disconnect the heels, then lower the thighs and feet to the starting position.
- ▶ Repeat for repetitions.

Regressions and Progressions

- ▶ For a regression, lessen the range of motion when lifting the legs away from the floor.
- ▶ For a progression, stabilize on your forearms and palms by pushing the forearms and palms deeper into the floor as you lift the chest completely off the floor for a back extension.



Safety Cues:

- ▶ Keep the spine long.
- ▶ Keep the forehead in contact with your forearms.
- ▶ Lift the legs using the glutes and thigh muscles and not the low back.