

For the past three years, we have not been able to *consistently* ride, walk, hike, and run in our valley and mountains as the inevitable rain or snow usually invades the valley until July. This year is different! Everyone is outside walking and running the pathways and cycling the roads and trails and *right they should be!* We deserve it! It's our golden spring!

This year, because we WILL get five or more months of summer, maintaining your core is crucial. Many people forget to incorporate pillar-core strengthening because they are always outdoors doing a specific activity.

The center of every movement begins within the core. Many people from Pilates instructors to doctors describe the core differently. At Training to be Balanced, we describe the core as 'the area in which your organs live'. Your core is defined as the area where all the muscles between your hipbones, armpits and everything around it live; including the glutes, which are the driving force in keeping your back healthy and not hurting. Abdominals are also part of your core but incidentally, only about 20%, an important 20%, but nonetheless, only 20%.

It amazes me the number of folks, who are not body builders that are still doing crunches as the sole component to a "core" workout. When you perform repetitive trunk flexion (ab crunches) without a stable spine (pillar strength) it weakens the core and can cause back problems ("can" is the key word there). A stable core is essential during outdoor activities such as mountain biking, for example. How many crunches do you do during a downhill or cross-country mountain bike? I can think of only one - when you crash, are lying on your back and then have to sit up!

Your body requires core stability! Removing your bike from the top rack is core stability. Hopping on your foot over your bike onto the pedals is core stability! Pedaling up hill and riding down is core stability!

To augment this idea, I have been directed by one of our members to review a column that *James Wilson*, Strength and Conditioning Coach for World Cup Mountain Biking Teams wrote. He addresses the core as such through a video - mountain biking along with exercise ensures you are properly executing the movement. Check it out at <http://www.pinkbike.com/news/4-Core-Exercises-2012.html>. The below is a brief insert of core training:

"Core training is one of those subjects I could probably do an article on every month and riders would still want to learn more. By now almost everyone realizes that without a strong, injury resistant core it is impossible to be the best mountain biker you can. Luckily core training has come a long way over the last few years and we now know that there is a lot more to it than just doing some crunches and planks.

In this month's training feature I wanted to share 4 more core training exercises that I use in my programs to help riders develop not only a strong core, but ability to apply that core strength in a way that will help them on the trail. Being able to create movement around a solid core and resist twisting and bending is what we need as mountain bikers and these 4 exercises will help you do just that.

**Sandbag:** High Plank or Push Up with Lateral Pull - This exercise has you either holding a High Plank or performing a Push Up and then pulling a sandbag laterally across the floor under your chest. This exercise is great for teaching you how to resist rotation through the hips which is important for stronger, more efficient pedaling.

**Kettlebell:** Half Kneeling Halos - This exercise has you get down on one knee holding a kettlebell "bottoms up" and then bringing the kettlebell around your head and back to the starting position in front of your chest. This exercise is great for teaching us how to balance and stay strong in a modified split stance position, which is important for building stability when standing up in the attack position on the bike with either foot forward, i.e. being able to ride switch foot effectively.

**Dumbbells:** Single Leg Renegade Rows - The Renegade Row, or Plank Row, is actually a pretty popular exercise where you get into a High Plank position with your hands resting on dumbbells placed on the ground and then rowing each dumbbell up one at a time. This version takes the core demands to another level by having you balance on one hand and the opposite leg as you row the other arm up, which forces you to stay much tighter through the core. This exercise is another great one for teaching you how to resist rotation through the hips and core and also how to create a

stronger platform for muscling your bike up and over obstacles on the trail.

Bodyweight: Inchworms - This exercise has you bend over, place your hands on the ground and then walk your hands out as far as you can before walking your feet back up to your hands. This exercise requires a lot of core strength to resist letting the belly sag towards the ground as you walk out and the further out you can get your hands the higher the core demands. This exercise is great for building core strength, upper back strength and hip mobility, all things that we need to ride with maximum control and flow on the trail.”