

“The Plank” is it the ultimate core exercise?

First of all what is the plank? The plank is what we call a core exercise, it targets the muscles responsible for controlling posture. It creates a rigid support for the spine without this our posture would be lost.



How to perform the plank correctly

The elbows are placed directly under the shoulders and the ankles are kept at a 90 degree bend. You can draw a straight line from the shoulders, through the hips, through the knees and through the ankles. This line will clearly slope downwards considering that the ankles are lower than the shoulders. But there shouldn't be any 'breaks' in this straight line. The most important part of the plank is that the pelvis is kept in 'neutral tilt'. This means that the natural curve of the lumbar spine is maintained. It neither over-arches or overly flattens (flexed or posterior tilt of the pelvis).

Those who can hold this position for 3+ minutes are considered professional, 1-2 minutes average and less than 1 minute novice. Those who have great strength in this exercise tend not to suffer from back pain. When timing this exercise you stop as soon as your posture starts to slip.

So is the plank the best core exercise? I'd most likely say yes, it is **one** of the tests I use for a measuring core strength but there are draw backs. If you are someone who does not take part in regular exercise than you need to build up to this exercise. If you are a high level athlete then this exercise is a good challenge.

There are many other muscles involved in the plank which can compensate for weak abdominals, these are known as cheats. (Other muscles involved in the plank are triceps, anterior deltoid, pectorals, serratus anterior, tfl, rectus femoris, adductors and calf)

Cheat 1) pushing the wrists and feet into the ground hard 2) resting the head on top of the hands 3) allowing the pelvis to tilt anteriorly pushing the buttocks into the air and 4) bending the knees. If these occur you are just training ability and the dysfunctional weakness of the abdominals.

As mentioned earlier the plank creates a stiffness in the muscles to control posture but is this what we want to develop for sport. When first starting out then maybe yes but as you progress you need to start to lift one limb off the ground, bring in unstable surfaces like medicine balls and wobble boards, so it can become more functional.