

## Rider Fitness: Groundwork Core Exercises

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Horse Illustrated May 2008

Most riders would be surprised to get Linda Denniston's take on what keeps them in the saddle. "Your legs are not what keep you on the horse," she says. "It's your upper body that's going to fall; not your legs. Without a strong core, you can't balance your body." And even though most people think of crunches, they're not the only way to build up abdominals and other muscles in the torso.

### The Woodchopper

One of Denniston's recommended exercises, "the woodchopper," works the abs and obliques, and has a cardio benefit, too.

Stand upright with your feet shoulder-width apart and knees soft. Hold a medicine ball or light dumbbell with both hands above your right shoulder. Then with your arms extended in front of your torso, pull the ball or weight across your body until you reach a point just outside of your left hip. Reverse the movement along the same path until you reach the starting position above the right shoulder. Complete 15 repetitions, then switch sides. **The Plank**

When it comes to cultivating core strength, McAllister calls for "the plank." Lie face down on the floor and support your weight on your forearms. Slowly lift your torso and legs off the ground until only your forearms and the balls of your feet touch the floor. Keep your back straight and squeeze your abs. Hold the position for 15 to 30 seconds, then relax. Do eight to 12 repetitions.

### Cat Up/Down

Equestrian Pilates co-founder Elizabeth Hanson says core muscles mean more than abs. Muscles that support the spine need work, too. So she recommends the "cat up/down" exercise to stretch and relax lower back muscles.

Get down on all fours with your knees under your hips and your hands under your shoulders with a neutral spine. Inhale through your nose, then exhale and engage the core abdominal muscles. Round your spine upward and lower your head to your chest, keeping your shoulders down. Inhale as you arch in the other direction — head up, chest up and tailbone up. Repeat seven more times.

Read on for more groundwork exercises.

Read on for mounted exercises.

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