

Focus on the Core with Circuit Training

Written by Fred Hoffman, M.Ed.

In recent years, core training has become an essential component of most physical fitness and sport conditioning programs. From group exercise instructors and Pilates teachers to personal trainers and coaches—most fitness professionals agree that an emphasis should be placed on strengthening the ‘core.’ The core connects the upper body and lower body and often is referred to as the power center. Core conditioning is important whether a participant is starting a fitness program, or moving onto to more challenging exercise progressions.

According to the 2008 IDEA Fitness Programs & Equipment Survey, 69% of respondents offer circuit classes while 73% offer core conditioning classes. To benefit from the two activities in a single exercise session, I have put together a circuit-training program that focuses on the core. This full-body workout, designed to use the BOSU® Balance Trainer (BT) and the BOSU® Ballast® Ball (BB), is easy to implement and can be adapted to all fitness levels.

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The circuit-training program emphasizes closed kinetic chain, multi-joint exercises to address strength, endurance, balance training, core muscle conditioning, trunk stabilization techniques and postural alignment exercises. To target the core muscles and challenge the body's proprioceptive system, both static and dynamic, open and closed chain exercises are performed in a variety of positions.

FORMAT

The class model is a multi-station resistance training circuit. Participants perform one exercise at a designated station, and upon hearing a cue from the instructor, move to the next station in an orderly fashion.

The circuit is composed of 10 stations, each involving an exercise that targets the core muscles. For dynamic exercises, 8 to 12 repetitions are performed. For isometric exercises, positions are maintained for 3 to 5 slow, deep breaths. The duration at each station is 1 to 2 minutes, including set up time and recovery. Stations may alternate between standing and floor positions.

WORKOUT DURATION

20 to 50 minutes (45 to 90 seconds per station, 1 to 3 cycles)

EQUIPMENT (for participants)

The BT and BB are used during the workout. To format stations, pre-determine which exercises will be performed, what additional equipment may be used and whether or not there are sufficient quantities per participant.

Possible equipment choices include, but are not limited to:

- Dumbbells
- Body Bars
- Resistance tubing
- Gliding discs
- Steps
- Medicine balls

EQUIPMENT (for instructor)

- Stopwatch
- Whistle (used to signal both the start and completion of the station)

MUSIC

Using music is recommended, but the musical choice is left up to the discretion of the instructor. A music speed of 126-130 BPM will allow proper form and execution, especially if exercises are 'choreographed'. Working on the beat of the music is an option, not an obligation.

WARM-UP (6 to 8 minutes)

The warm-up should consist of movements that prepare joints and muscles for the forces and mechanics of the selected exercises to be performed.

10 STATIONS

Station # 1 - SINGLE LEG SQUAT

Stand holding a BOSU® Ballast® Ball (BB) between hands in front of the torso. Lift BB upward while flexing knee to execute a single leg squat. Return to starting position. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions on each leg.



Station # 2 - TORSO ROTATION

Stand in a forward flexed position (hip flexion) with knees bent. Hold the BB between hands with arms extended towards the floor. Rotate torso to the right (R), lifting BB towards ceiling. Return to center. Repeat to left (L) side. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions total.



Station # 3 - PUSH UP TO T-STAND

Place both hands on the dome of the BOSU® Balance Trainer (BT) in a push up position. Perform push up (on toes or knees), move to T-stand pose, and return to push up position. Complete 8 to 12 repetitions total, alternating to L and R sides.



Station # 4 - SUPINE BALL LIFT

Lie on the floor with back, shoulders and head touching. Hold the BB in between the lower legs. With bent or straight legs, lift the BB towards the ceiling and lower back towards the floor. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions.



Station # 5 - QUADRUPED ALTERNATING FLEXION/EXTENSION

Place both hands on the floor and center one knee on the dome of the BT with bent leg. Extend opposite leg behind keeping the foot off of the floor. Extend arm that is opposite to the extended leg. Flex elbow of extended arm and knee of extended leg at the same time, moving arm and leg towards the center of the body. Then, return to extended arm and leg position. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions on each side.



Station # 6 - TORSO TRIPLE ROTATION

Stand with feet placed directly under the hips. Hold the BB between hands. Rotate torso in quick succession as follows: 1) slightly backward to the R while lifting the ball upward, 2) slightly forward to the L while lowering the ball downward, and 3) slightly backward to the R while lifting the ball upward. Repeat exercise starting with the BB lifted in the upward position. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions, alternating starting positions.



Station # 7 - ALTERNATING BACKWARD LUNGE

Stand on the dome of the BT. Perform alternating backward lunges. Lift arms above the head during the lunge. Complete 8 to 12 repetitions.



Station # 8 - SUPINE TORSO FLEXION, or BALL CURL UP

Lie supine on the BB with head positioned towards the floor, knees bent, feet on the floor and arms crossed at chest level. Perform torso flexion, or ball curl up without going to a full sit-up position. Return to starting position. Complete 8 to 12 repetitions.



Station # 9 - SINGLE LEG PLANK

Place forearms on the BB in a plank position with knees or toes on the floor. Lift 1 leg off of the floor. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds. Return to starting position. Repeat exercise with opposite leg. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions.



Station # 10 - ALTERNATING FORWARD LUNGE WITH BALL LIFT

Stand on the floor with the BB held between hands. Position the BT in front a couple feet away. Lunge forward, place R foot on the dome of the BT and lift the BB upward to the R with a slight backward rotation of the torso. Return R foot to starting position. Repeat exercise on L side. Perform 8 to 12 repetitions total.



STRETCH AND RELAXATION (5 to 7 minutes)

For an easy way to conclude the workout and bring the group back together, do a final stretching session.

INSTRUCTOR TIPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Pre Workout

- Ensure that all participants understand 'neutral posture' and are able to establish correct body alignment.
- Review proper usage of the selected equipment.

During the Workout

- Emphasize proper body mechanics and technique through verbal and visual cueing.
- Encourage students to work at own pace and compete with selves only, and not with other participants.
- Remind students to slow down or rest when needed.
- Have FUN!

Fred Hoffman, M.Ed., is the Director of International Services for the Club & Spa Synergy Group. As a consultant and master trainer for companies such as Reebok®, Body Bar®, BOSU®, Beamfit™ and Gliding™, he has traveled to nearly 50 countries on six continents to present at conventions and conduct instructor trainings. A published author and advisory board member, Fred is the recipient of the 2007 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year Award and was elected to the International Who's Who of Professionals in 2001. Contact Fred at www.FredHoffman.com.

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