



Preventing Back Pain and Injury

According to Dr. Stuart M. McGill, professor of spine biomechanics at the University of Waterloo and author of [Ultimate Back Fitness and Performance](#), spinal flexion (rounding the lower back) is a key contributor to disc herniations. Think about it. When do you throw your back out? This often happens when you are bending forward (spinal flexion). This is the exact motion that occurs during crunches and sit-ups.

The common misconception is that your core is only the group of visible muscles that you see on the models in Bowflex commercials. The truth is that your core is comprised of several muscles that work together to stabilize and protect the spine against external forces. Because the true function of the core is to brace the spine, planking exercises are far more effective at working your core and strengthening your back than crunches.

Do you sit for extended periods of time at your desk or in your car? If you are like most, the answer is yes. The last thing you want to do if you spend large amounts of time in a forward flexed position (sitting) is reinforce that poor posture with an exercise. Planking will teach your core to stabilize your spine in the optimal position.

Do you golf? By tightening your six pack muscles, you are essentially shortening your abdominal wall. This shortening can limit your thoracic mobility and thus reduce your ability to rotate. Last time I checked, rotating was kind of important to your golf game!

I know what you are thinking. What if I just care about getting a washboard stomach? Fear not my faithful cruncher- your regular exercises like squats, lunges, push-ups, etc. will work your abs enough to make you proud next summer. Throw in a few planking exercises for spinal health and you are good to go.

Remember, if you really want great looking abs, you must have very low levels of body fat. There is one certain exercise that you should perform every single day. This magic exercise is aptly named Push-Backs and it involves pushing away from the table a little earlier than you normally would. This is the only thing that I guarantee will make your abs look great!