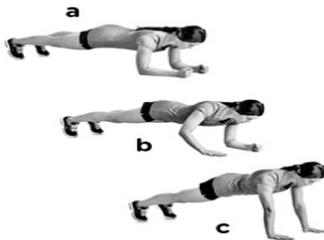


# The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness

## News and Views

OK, we get it... planks are boring. Staring at the floor with sweat dripping down your nose waiting for the seconds to pass by is almost as exciting as visiting the in-laws. However, if you've been living under a rock as of late? Planking (no not that bizarre craze) is a simple but very effective bodyweight exercise. Planks are the new sit-ups for modern-day core training. The plank is one of the best exercises because it tightens the deepest core muscles. Sometimes the simplest of movements result in the greatest gains to your fitness and this is certainly the case with the plank. It is a static exercise where you use your arms to raise yourself off of the floor and hold the body straight and rigid, like a plank of wood. The best part? Planking requires no equipment and can be performed just about anywhere. (well use your judgment).

The key to success is right there in the name: you're forming a strong, stiff plank with your entire body. From toes to head, you must be firm, not flaccid. For proper technique you must be in the push up position (any wrist issues you are on your forearms instead of your hands) your elbows should be stacked directly under your shoulders. Hips lifted and knees or toes on the ground. Pull you belly button into your spine. Keep a neutral neck (looking at the ground) and spine. Create a straight strong line from head to toes or knees, depending on the level of plank you are executing. Hold that position, and don't forget to breath. Don't let your hips sag, and when your form begins to suffer, pull the plug. Overdoing it could lead to injury.



Depending on the type of plank you do, you can also engage your back, arms, shoulder, glutes, hamstrings the list goes on... Not only will planking help build deep inner core muscles that lay the groundwork for that six pack look, it will also reduce back pain. Many people don't realize that a weak abdominal muscle group is a direct contributor for lower back pain. The muscles of the abdomen, hips, back and glutes comprise the core muscle group that work together to provide support to the spine. Planking can help improve stability in these regions and keep your spine protected and supported.

Planking can also increase posture and flexibility in the posterior muscles. The muscles around your shoulder blades, lat's traps and delt's expands as you plank. This

area often receives little attention when it comes to stretching. Flexibility will also improve in your hamstrings and even the arches of your feet and your toes. When planking to increase stretching and flexibility try a rocking plank, once in basic plank form, rock your body forward and back by moving your toes a few centimeters either way.

Side planks or planks with variations and extensions are particularly beneficial for building balance. From plank position, press your right hand into the mat and turn your body so your weight is on the outer edge of your right foot, stack your left foot on top. The side plank differs from the standard plank in the way that it targets oblique's as well as the side deltoids. It is a unique exercise that strengthens your entire core region, but is even more impressive because it targets a relatively difficult to pinpoint muscle known as the quadratus lumborum. All of these muscles aid in maintain strong balance and stability. Try a side plank where you position your body on the side, resting on one hand/elbow with the top leg extended into the air. Lift and lower the top leg.

Now that you're planking like a boss, step up your game by adding some movement and asymmetric balancing. Not only will this increase the number of muscles worked, these moves will also improve your coordination and endurance. The plank can be the basis for so many different exercises, in fact, you can create an entire body workout staying on the ground. Try performing the plank in many different directions, front, side, and reverse each direction/position engaging different sets of muscles for all round toning and strengthening. You can make the plank even harder — you know you want to! — by adding a pair of dumbbells or a stability ball. Be careful with adding weights, be mindful of the **point of failure** in the core and since plank position can be tough on the wrists, alternate plank variations with moves that give your hands a break.

It's a plankoff! Think: Planks with purpose.. Why not challenge your friends, family and coworkers to "The Ultimate Plank Challenge". There are plenty of options for plank challenges out there. Some are based on increasing seconds/minutes you hold the plank position for. Others add a level of difficulty or increased number of reps as you progress through the challenge. Each day builds upon the last, leading to stronger leaner muscles than ever before. Just don't blame me for how your muscles feel by the end (the burn is a good thing, trust me!).

Planks are a great exercise to ensure your entire core is strong and supporting you during your workouts and in everyday life. So, in the spirit of health, let's plank it up!