

The role of the transverse abdominus in promoting spinal stability

In order to speed your recovery from back pain it is important to begin stabilizing it immediately. There are specific exercises which can begin this process. Some of them involve learning to tighten your deep abdominal muscles so that you can 'brace' your spine in a 'neutral' position. This involves a certain level of awareness of your body which most of us don't instinctively have, but which can be easily learned. Once you learn to activate these inner 'core' muscles you will find that many previously painful

activities can now be performed with less discomfort.

The first step is to attempt to draw your navel towards your spine by hollowing your abdomen (Fig. 1). If you can learn to do this then try it frequently throughout the day in a variety of positions such as sitting or standing.

At first it may be tricky to draw your navel towards your spine. It is important not to raise your ribs up or hold your breath when you do this (Fig. 2). Try to just think about tightening your abdominal muscles to stiffen your back.

Once you have learned to perform this abdominal hollowing manoeuvre you can brace your spine with this exercise whenever you are performing an activity which you feel may irritate your back. For instance during lifting, carrying, rising from a chair or bed, bending forward, etc.

Abdominal hollowing is an excellent method for training your muscles to protect your spine. This is essential for prevention of further injury and later will form the basis for more advanced conditioning exercises.

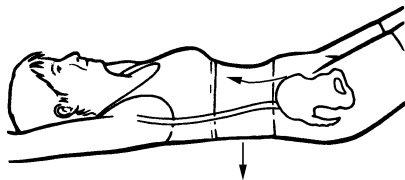


Fig. 1 Abdominal hollowing.

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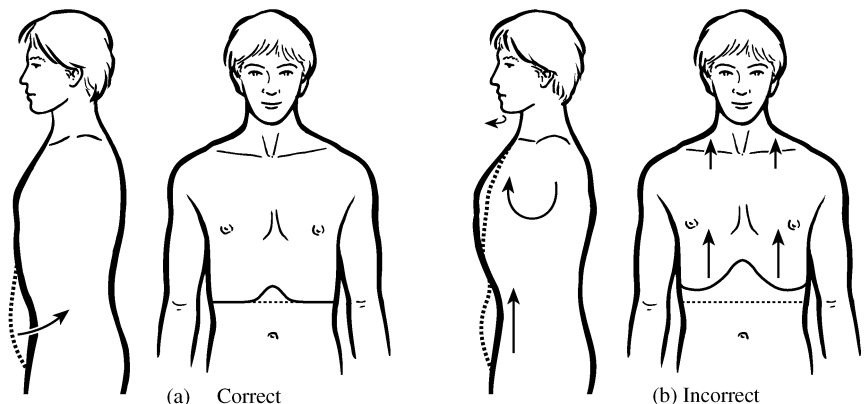


Fig. 2 Avoiding raising the ribs while performing abdominal hollowing. (a) Correct, (b) Incorrect.