

# Anterior Core Training

Who do we believe? The old school guys still believe you need to do 500 crunches/sit-ups a day. The strength guys say something like "forget doing abs, just do heavy squats and deadlifts". Don't even say the word core around these guys. The functional guys say "lying down is not functional". The functional guys seem to be against any core training not done standing. If we proceeded logically we would see that all groups, the old school guys, the strength guys and the functional guys, all disagree what good core training is.

I'm going to disagree with everyone. I'm a results guy. I'm a best practices guy. I think some of the proponents of functional training have gone too far and, I'm not the only one.

Truth is everybody has their own definition of functional training. Mine is the application of functional anatomy to training. This means I'm going to take what I know about anatomy and apply it what I know about training. The important thing is I'm not going to forget or dispose of what I know about training. I still think that one leg exercises are more functional than two leg exercises because we move on one leg at a time. I still think dumbbells are more functional than a bar because of the unilateral nature of dumbbells. We are unilateral machines. Face it. With that said, I still believe in lifting weights. I want my athletes to be strong, and to be strong you have to lift heavy stuff. Reaching with and or waving a five lb. dumbbell in three planes of motion is not training. It might be warm-up but, it's not training in my book.

However, this article isn't about the function debate but rather about training the anterior core, the abs. I think there is a compromise between the old school guys, the functional guys and the strength guys.

The function of the anterior core is absolutely not flexion. That is where I 100% agree with the functional guys and 100% disagree with the old school guys. When does anyone ever do anything in real life that looks like a crunch? I agree with the functional folks that lying on your back doing abs is not only a waste of time but probably dangerous. Check out Stuart McGill's work. Not a lot of flexion. Look at McGill's method for causing disk damage in a lab setting, repeat flexion. Ideally we need an anterior core or "anterior chain" exercise that doesn't involve flexion. So the key in my mind was to find a progression to get athletes to safely do Ab Wheel/Barbell Rollouts.

## Phase 1 - Front Planks

If your athletes can't hold a perfect plank for 40 secs, start there. Remember a perfect plank looks like what the person looks like in standing. It's not a prone crunch.

## Phase 2 - Stability Ball Rollouts

The Stability Ball is like a big wheel. The weaker the athlete the bigger the ball. It is essential that everyone starts with Stability Ball Rollouts. I don't care how strong you think your abs are. Do yourself a favor and do Stability Ball Rollouts twice a week for the first three weeks. If you start with a wheel there is a good chance you will strain your abdominal muscles.

## Phase 3 - The Ab Wheel

Simply grasp the sides of the ab wheel and roll out. I like the wheel better as you get better diagonals when you get more advanced but, for phase 3 it really doesn't matter. The key is that the moving piece is now a full arms length away.

## Phase 4 - Slider or Slideboard Rollouts

The slider or Slideboard now adds a frictional component. Instead of the wheel rolling, bodyweight creates drag. This again makes the exercise harder, particularly the concentric or return portion. You actually have to pull yourself back in.

## Phase 5 - Bar Rollouts

I almost left these out but they actually work as a progressive resistance exercise. Start with an empty bar and add 10 lbs. a week. The bar rollouts don't change the eccentric nature of the exercise but, boy can they change the concentric.

There is no denying the role of the abdominal musculature in pelvic control when the body is in motion. The abdominal musculature or core muscles must act to prevent the spine from going into extension. In order to do this a specific stress must be applied. The anterior core progression gets the body to use the muscles the right way and does it in a way that can keep anyone healthy.