

Core Training Essentials — Workbook

This workbook accompanies Core Training Essentials and turns each module into hands-on practice. Use the exercises and worksheets during or immediately after each lesson to lock in technique, track your baselines, and build the habits that create lasting spinal resilience. Every section mirrors one course module so you can work through them in sequence.

What the Core Actually Is

Establish your anatomical mental model and gather honest baseline data before any training begins.

Exercise: Cylinder Mapping Exercise

Without referencing the lesson, draw or write the four walls of the core cylinder from memory. Then label the primary role of each wall in one short phrase. Compare your answers to the lesson and note any gaps.

- Name the four walls of the core cylinder and the primary muscle or structure for each.

- In your own words, explain why intra-abdominal pressure (IAP) reduces lumbar disc load during lifting.

- Which wall do you think is weakest in your own body right now, and why?

Worksheet: McGill Endurance Ratio Baseline

Perform the three McGill endurance tests described in Lesson 3. Record your times in seconds. Use these as your Week 1 benchmarks — you will repeat the tests at Week 4 and Week 8.

Front plank hold time (seconds)

Back extension hold time (seconds)

Left side plank hold time (seconds)

Right side plank hold time (seconds)

Side plank average (left + right / 2)

Flexor:extensor ratio (front plank / back extension)

Side plank symmetry gap (|left - right| seconds)

Weaker side (left / right)

Notes on form breaks or pain

Checklist: Anatomy Concept Checklist

- I can describe the difference between the local and global stabilisation subsystems
- I understand why sit-ups increase disc compressive load
- I know what an anticipatory postural adjustment (APA) is and how injury disrupts it
- I have identified my pelvic tilt (anterior / neutral / posterior) from a side photo
- I have performed the standing brace quality check and felt 360-degree expansion
- I have recorded my endurance ratio baseline numbers in the worksheet above

The McGill Big Three and Anti-Movement Foundations

Practise the Big Three with deliberate technique cues and track quality improvements over the first four weeks.

Exercise: Big Three Technique Log

Perform one set of each Big Three exercise immediately after reading the lesson. After each set, score yourself on the quality cues listed. Use this as a self-coaching tool — not as a performance test.

- McGill curl-up: did your hands maintain the lumbar arch throughout? Did you breathe during the hold rather than holding your breath?

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- Side plank: were both planks within 10% of each other in hold time? Did the top hip stay stacked (not rotated forward)?

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- Bird dog: could you extend without your hips rotating? Did you feel the sweeping lat activation before lifting?
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Worksheet: 4-Week Big Three Progression Tracker

Log each training session for the first four weeks. Record the prescription used (sets x hold time), a quality rating from 1–5, and any coaching notes.

Date

Exercise (curl-up / side plank L / side plank R / bird dog L / bird dog R)

Sets x Hold Time (e.g. 5 x 8s)

Quality rating (1 = poor form, 5 = textbook)

Key error noted

Correction applied next rep

Checklist: Big Three Readiness Checklist

- McGill curl-up: I maintain the lumbar arch with hands placed underneath
- McGill curl-up: my movement range is small (a few centimetres) — not a crunch
- Side plank: I can hold the beginner (knees bent) version for 10 seconds with no hip drop
- Side plank: the asymmetry between sides is under 10 seconds
- Bird dog: I can complete 5 reps per side without hip rotation (glass-of-water test)
- Bird dog: I use the elbow-to-knee tuck between reps to reset position
- I have completed the Big Three three times this week as a warm-up sequence

Exercise: Anti-Flexion vs Anti-Extension Contrast

Perform 5 McGill curl-ups (anti-flexion) followed immediately by 5 bird dog reps per side (anti-extension). Pay attention to which feels more natural to you. Reflect on the questions below.

- Which direction of resistance (anti-flexion or anti-extension) felt harder for you? What does this suggest about which movement pattern you should prioritise?

- After the bird dog set, did you notice any spinal rounding or arching that you had to consciously correct?

- How did your breathing change between the two exercises — were you able to maintain a brace-and-breathe pattern in both?

Expanding the Anti-Movement Toolkit

Apply the Pallof press, loaded carries, and plank progressions — tracking load, distance, and quality as you extend beyond the Big Three.

Worksheet: Loaded Carry and Pallof Press Log

Track every loaded carry and Pallof press session. Record load, distance or reps, and a brief form note. Use this to identify when you are ready to progress to the next variation.

Date

Exercise (farmer carry / suitcase carry / Pallof press / overhead carry)

Load (kg or band colour)

Distance (metres) or Reps x Side

Form rating (1–5)

Ready to progress? (yes / not yet)

Next variation to try

Exercise: Suitcase Carry Asymmetry Test

Perform a 20-metre suitcase carry on your right side, then immediately on your left side with the same load. Record your observations. This reveals lateral stability asymmetry that may not show up in a bilateral carry.

- On which side did you notice more lateral lean or hip drop?

- Did one side require more mental effort to maintain an upright trunk?

- Based on this test, which side needs more unilateral carry volume in your programme?

Checklist: Anti-Movement Toolkit Progression Checklist

- I can perform a standard Pallof press for 3 x 8 reps per side with no spinal rotation
- I have progressed to at least one Pallof variation (half-kneeling, overhead, or tallest kneeling)
- I can complete 3 x 20 m bilateral farmer carry with good posture and packed shoulders
- I have introduced the suitcase carry on both sides and identified my weaker lateral side
- I can hold an RKC plank for 3 x 10 seconds with maximum full-body tension

- [] I have attempted the body-saw plank or plank shoulder taps as a dynamic progression
- [] My total anti-movement training volume is 3 sessions per week on non-consecutive days

Integrating Core into Your Training Programme

Build your personalised weekly core schedule, apply bracing to compound lifts, and identify habits to sustain progress beyond the course.

Exercise: Bracing Mechanics Drill Reflection

Before your next squat or deadlift session, perform the towel-roll wall bracing drill described in Lesson 10. Do 10 reps. Then immediately apply the same cue to your first set of the compound lift and reflect on the questions below.

- Could you feel the 360-degree outward expansion when bracing against the wall? Which direction (front, side, or back) was hardest to expand?

- Did the bracing cue change anything about how you set up for your squat or deadlift?

- At what point in the rep did you feel your brace slip — on the eccentric (lowering), at the bottom, or during the concentric (lifting)?

Worksheet: Personal Weekly Core Programme Builder

Design your own 3-day weekly core programme using the exercises from this course. Assign each day a focus (anti-flexion, anti-lateral, anti-rotation, or carry) and list the exercises, sets, reps, and hold times. Review and update every 4 weeks.

Programme start date

Day 1 — date and focus (e.g. Monday — anti-flexion + plank)

Day 1 — Exercise 1: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 1 — Exercise 2: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 1 — Exercise 3: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 2 — date and focus

Day 2 — Exercise 1: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 2 — Exercise 2: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 2 — Exercise 3: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 3 — date and focus

Day 3 — Exercise 1: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 3 — Exercise 2: name, sets, reps/hold time

Day 3 — Exercise 3: name, sets, reps/hold time

Current weak point to address (lateral / rotational / endurance / carry load)

4-week review date

Checklist: Course Completion and Habits Checklist

- I have re-tested the McGill endurance ratios at Week 4 and compared to my baseline
- My side plank asymmetry is now under 10 seconds (or I have a plan to address it)
- I apply the bracing breath before every compound lift over 20 kg
- I hip-hinge habitually when picking items off the floor
- I walk at least 8,000 steps on most days
- My weekly programme is written and scheduled for the next 4 weeks
- I know which 3 of the 6 common mistakes I am most prone to and have a cue for each
- I can identify when I should seek a physiotherapist rather than train through discomfort

Your Action Plan

1. Complete the McGill endurance ratio baseline test this week and record all four times in the Baseline Worksheet
2. Take a side-profile photo to identify your resting pelvic position (anterior / neutral / posterior)
3. Perform the McGill Big Three every morning for the next 7 days as a 5-minute activation routine
4. Add the Pallof press (3 x 8 per side) to your next 3 gym sessions using a light band
5. Practise the bracing breath drill against a wall for 10 reps before every lower-body session this month
6. Introduce bilateral farmer carries at 50% of bodyweight for 3 x 20 m, twice this week
7. Film one set of bird dogs from the side to self-review hip rotation before the next session
8. Complete the Personal Weekly Core Programme Builder worksheet and schedule 3 core sessions per week for the next 4 weeks
9. Re-test the McGill endurance ratios at Week 4 and compare against your baseline
10. Identify one daily spine-hygiene habit (e.g. hip hinge, active sitting, 8,000 steps) and track it for 21 consecutive days

