

HOMESCHOOLED



HELPING YOUR YOUNG ATHLETE BUILD A STRONG FOUNDATION: *Part Two*

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Home Strength Training for Young Athletes

1. Just like the perfect plank, I don't think you can beat the ***Perfect Push-up***. If you are looking for a way to help your young athlete get stronger, then this exercise is packed with benefits. How does improving core strength, arm strength, chest strength and shoulder stability sound?

Please do not get consumed with push ups from the toes versus the modified or 'girls' push up from the knees. Think of it this way; if I have an athlete in the gym that cannot bench press 75lbs dumbbells with perfect technique, I am not going to tell them 'Well, stick with the 75s and just get them up there however you can!' No, I would get them to lighten the weight so they can use perfect technique. As they get stronger, they will be able to move to the toes.

Make sure you are getting perfect technique and stop the set as soon as technique falters. Keep the body in a straight line – no butt up in the air or belly sagging down. The athlete should lower their body by bending the elbows (do not let them shrug their shoulders) until the upper arm is parallel to the floor. Start with 1-2 sets of 8-10 repetitions and build up to 3 sets of 15 repetitions.



2. It is essential that you maintain muscular balance across joints, so if you are going to do a pushing exercise, then you need to do a pulling exercise. Although I like the chin up, many people do not have a proper chin-up bar at home and many young athletes cannot get more than 4 chin-ups in a row, so here is my alternative:



The standing bungee row is a great exercise for everyone. When you perform a strength training exercise from a standing position you will automatically engage your core. Performing an exercise from the standing position also makes it more *functional* by completing the exercise on your feet, the same way you participate in most sports.

To complete any rowing exercise make sure you focus on squeezing the shoulder blades together slightly as you pull. The athlete should not be shrugging their shoulders.

Begin with 2 sets of 10-15 repetitions using a medium strength bungee.

3. Having covered a pushing and pulling exercise that not only use the target muscle groups in the arms, chest, shoulders and mid-back, but also engage the core and hip muscles, it is time to provide my favorite leg exercise which is the **split squat**.

This one must be completed properly or you may put stress on the knee leading to some pain around the knee cap. As with any exercise, if the individual feels pain, then it may not be an appropriate choice for that particular individual and they should stop.

Begin with a staggered stance – like you are in mid-stride. You will not step into and out of the staggered stance as one would with a lunge exercise, rather the athlete will maintain the staggered stance position and alternate between squatting and standing.

When teaching the split squat, instruct the athlete to bend both knees such that the hips travel along a vertical line straight up and down. The hips and torso should not shift forward as the athlete squats down. When this happens, the knee also travels forward, which increases the compression on the knee cap. For some individuals this will create knee discomfort, so in general we avoid it.

When the athlete is at the bottom of the split squat position, there should be a straight line through the torso and along the thigh of their rear leg which points straight down to the floor. If the rear leg is angled backward, then either the

athlete is not bending their back knee enough (in which case they are probably shifting their front knee forward) or the stride is too long.

Begin with 2 sets of 10 repetitions on each side and lower yourself into the squat using a three-second count down.



I hope these exercises give you some useful tools that you can add to your posture exercises covered in Part One of this series. I also hope that you are completing the exercises with your young athlete to show that fitness and active living are lifelong pursuits.

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