



BEYOND THE PLANK

This month, our running editor, Fiona, joined Jenny Meadows for a master-class in core training, led by the 800m runner's husband and coach, Trevor Painter...

Have you heard that it's good to train your "core"? Do you know what it is, what exercises you should do, and why a strong core makes you a better runner?

Most of us have heard of "core stability". It's a term that's stayed in the fitness news for at least a decade. The "core" consists of many different muscles that stabilize the spine, pelvis, and shoulders, and run the entire length of the torso. These muscles provide a solid foundation for movement in the extremities (ie your arms and legs).

What exercises are best for a strong core? Recently, physiotherapists and sports scientists have questioned the value of emphasising the core, particularly as many coaches and fitness enthusiasts seem to have misunderstood why they need to train the core - and how to do it!

One of the problems with mainstream core exercises for runners and sports people has been the focus on static

exercises and the abs alone. Core stability has only been defined by the ability to recruit the deep stabilising muscles, with exercises such as abdominal hollowing (drawing the navel to spine in a controlled way), and the plank (supporting your body weight on your elbows and feet, then drawing in the lower abdominal muscles and maintaining a plank-like, straight back).

These exercises are a good starting point, but they can't be the only thing you do. Professor Eyal Lederman has written a paper, *Core Stability, The Myth of Core Stability*, in which he discusses a study that looked at the effect of training on a Swiss ball on core stability muscles and the economy of running. As he says "practicing the banjo does not help to play the piano," and, he points out, "The subjects got very good at using their muscles for sitting on a large inflatable rubber ball but it had no effect on their running performance."

So, as the master class with Jenny and

Trevor shows, it's vital that as runners we learn to stabilise and align the pelvis and spine whilst the limbs are moving.

Another buzzword in the fitness industry over recent years is "functional". A functional exercise replicates the movements that are to be carried out in every day life, or in sport. So for runners, it makes sense to incorporate the legs, and to make your exercises more dynamic.

Trevor explains: "We're never totally still when we run. Core training needs to replicate athletic movements." So, he adds, "A lot of the exercises are on one leg, as that is how we are when we run!"

A strong core trained to work when you're moving will keep you upright and balanced as your legs move. And this will help you be an economical and efficient runner as well as keeping injury at bay.

"The plank alone won't do that," says Trevor. "It's vital that runner's include major leg muscles for a really effective workout."



A BIT ABOUT JENNY

JENNY MEADOWS HAS RUN SINCE SHE WAS SEVEN (AND THREE QUARTERS!), BUT IT'S ONLY NOW THAT SHE'S REALLY REAPING THE REWARDS

- In March 2010, *The Times* said her "transformation from 'also ran' to 800m front-runner has been remarkable."
- In 2009 at the World Championships in Berlin she won a bronze medal, achieving a life-time best of 1:57.93. In 2010, she went on to break Dame Kelly Holmes' indoor 800m record and she won silver at the World Indoor Championships in Doha as captain of the Great Britain team (and this time, broke her own record)!
- She's been praised for her ability to

inspire others with uplifting speeches to team members in her role as GB captain.

■ Jenny's not just a talented runner; she was also head athletics coach for Manchester Leisure before becoming a full-time athlete. Trevor Painter, her husband and coach is a former 400m runner and rugby player, and sprint coach for Wigan Warriors.

■ **Jenny Meadows is an ASICS ambassador. For further information head to www.asics.co.uk.**

FIONA WEARS CLOTHES FROM THE ASICS AYAMI RANGE, AND SHOES ARE LANDRETH-6