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Exercises to replace sit ups

Posted at 15:59h in Fitness by Toma 13 Comments Situps and crunches are two antiquated exercises that should have been replaced with safer and more effective abdominal muscle building workouts long ago. Why are they bad? For one, situps and crunches are both performed laying down on your back and then repeatedly bending the spine. The spine can only take so much before back pain manifests in the form of bulging discs and disc herniations. Lower back strain is all too common because of the constant rounding of the back during these movements. The second reason you should stop struggling with crunches and situps has to do with their effectiveness. Situps and crunches only target the rectus abdominis muscle while neglecting the obliques and the transversus abdominus. There are several core exercises that work the abdominal muscles to a much greater extent. Exercise 1: Front Planks Planks are a great core stabilizing exercise. Your entire core is stabilized through constant tension, so nothing is neglected and they are completely safe. Get in pushup position on your forearms with your elbows bent. Hold yourself up in a straight line and pull your belly button in to create tension. Hold for as long as you can before your back sags to the floor. For a more difficult variation, raise your opposite leg and arm off the ground. Exercise 2: Side Planks The side plank is the same concept as the front plank except this time you'll be extended on your side with only one elbow and forearm on the ground. Your other hand can point straight up in the air or rest of your hips. Raise your hips off the ground and keep tension in the core to form a straight line with your body. Hold until failure. A variation of the side plank can be moving your hips in a side to side motion (up and down off the ground) for repetitions instead of holding still. Side planks are great for targeting the obliques. Exercise 3: Ab Wheel Rollouts The ab wheel is a highly underrated core exercise. It's an even more difficult version of the plank because while assuming a similar position, your stability point rests on a small moving object. The great thing about the ab wheel is that you can use it to create many variations around one movement. If you don't have an ab wheel at home or in your gym, an Olympic barbell works just as well. For starters, get in a kneeling pushup position - like the plank but with your knees resting on the ground. Hold the ab wheel between your hands and push it out in front of you going as far forward and as low to the ground as you are able while at the same time keeping your back straight and core tense. Then, the hard part, is rolling the wheel back into the start position. The only part of your body that should be on the ground are your knees and toes. No more than 10 rollouts per set are needed with the ab roller. For a variation that will target your side abdominal muscles, the obliques, try rolling the wheel in a diagonally curved line to each side rather than straight forward. If you're able to do this easily, advance to not using your knees and only touching the ground with your feet and the wheel. Exercise 4: Pendulum / Windshield Wipers Lay flat on your back with your arms extended out on the ground in a "T" shape for stability as needed. Start with your legs 90º vertical in the air. Keeping them together, let your legs fall to a side until they are just a few inches off the ground. Make sure to keep your back and shoulders planted to the ground by only twisting at the waist. Now lift your legs back to the starting position and repeat the movement to the other side. These will absolutely obliterate your obliques. Exercise 5: Lying Leg Raises Leg raises have as many variations as ice cream has flavors. This is a very basic abdominal workout that has evolved over time to include different isolating movements and contractions. Simply lie down on your back with your arms on the ground for stability or crossed over your chest for a little more difficulty. Raise your feet 6 to 12 inches off the ground and hold until failure. Contract your ab muscles by pulling in your belly button and keeping your core tense. Alternatively, lift your legs vertically in the air to create a 90º angle and slowly bring them back down but never touching the ground and then bring them back up - repeat this movement for 10 repetitions. There are many ways to change up lying leg raises to keep the routine from becoming too dull. While holding your legs a foot above the ground, them over one another horizontally like they are a pair of scissors and keep crossing until failure. Or cross them up and down vertically. Or hold them together and move them in little circles. Or perform the bicycle motion with your legs. Endless possibilities. Exercise 6: Hanging Leg Raises A variation of the leg raise but instead of laying down on the ground or on a bench, you instead hang by your hands on a pullup bar. However, it can also be done on a set of parallel dip bars if only those are available. Start in the hanging pullup position on a pullup bar and lift your knees up toward the ceiling until they are at waist level. Don't forget to contract your abdominal muscles to aid you. Then lower to the starting position and repeat. For a more difficult version of this workout, extend your legs and bring the feet up rather than just your bent knees. Additionally, ankle weights may be added to apply more resistance. For a good challenge, try holding the position with your legs in the air for as long as you can before lowering them. Just like the lying down version of the leg raises, the hanging version can have many variations. Exercise 7: Russian Twists with Barbell / Standing Russian Twists It's rumored that Russian shot putters created this exercise to strengthen their rotational throwing motions. The Russian twist can be performed on the ground in a situp position with the legs hovering above the ground and a medicine ball between your hands. However, we're going to avoid this method because of the high likelihood that the back is going to round quickly as it fatigues and instead of using the obliques to twist the waist, the lower back will come into play. A more safe variant of the seated Russian twist is performed standing with an Olympic barbell, but a medicine ball may be used as well in the standing version. Start with one end of the barbell held down by a barbell landmine, or some plates, or stuck in the corner of a room so that it doesn't shift from its grounded location. Load the other end of the bar. Grasp the top of the barbell above the collar and weights with outstretched arms. Your grip should be around eye level or just above your head. Now rotate your hips, while keeping your waists and lower back tight to one side with your outstretched arms acting as levers. In your rotation, pretend you are drawing a perfect circle with your arms rather than a diagonal line. The hip rotation will force your feet to slightly turn on the ground as well. When the barbell reaches one side of your hips, rotate it back the other way re-tracing a big circle with your arms. Exercise 8: Woodchoppers Similar in motion to standing Russian twists, this movement can be performed with a cable machine or medicine ball. Stand next to a cable machine with your side. You can start from the low position or the high position. Grab your preferred handles for the cable machine (ie. rope or D-handles). Keeping your arms as straight as possible and your hips facing forward, pull the cable across to the opposite side of your body while rotating your torso and slightly pivoting your hips in the direction of the turn. Now bring the arms back across your body back to the starting position and repeat for a few reps. Switch and do the same thing on the other side of your body. Exercise 9: Kneeling Cable Crunches / Ab Pulldowns Although this is a crunch, it's safer to perform than your regular lower back ache-inducing situps and more effective than a normal crunch if you do it right. The advantage here is that you're doing an upside down crunch and your back isn't fighting gravity to lift itself off the ground because it's now facing the ceiling and being pulled up by the weight of the cable, which is in your control. You now have the capability to create a longer range of motion as well as keeping your back from bending excessively. There still is some bending of the upper back to contract the abs at the end of the movement but you can adjust the resistance to what your core can handle. Start in the kneeling position facing a cable machine with rope a rope or bar. Grab the rope or whatever you choose to attach to the cable and extend your back, keeping your core tight. The cable can be held behind your neck or right in front of your head. Now pull the rope down toward your knees using your core as if you were doing a crunch. Stop after your abs contract and slowly raise your head and waist back up to the starting position. Repeat and don't round your lower back. One great variation of this exercise is pulling the rope down diagonally to each side rather than just straight down to work the obliques more. Exercise 10: Dragon Flags Of course the most difficult exercise on this list is the one made famous by Bruce Lee. Not many people can perform a dragon flag, but it is one of the most effective core strengthening and abdominal building exercises in the gym. Two or three repetitions will absolutely kill your abs but they'll thank you later. Lie on a bench or on the ground where you are able to use your hands to hold onto something near your head for stability. Now comes the incredibly difficult part: while keeping your legs and core straight, lift them off the ground and up into the air. Your shoulders and upper back should be planted into the ground or on the bench while the rest of your body is hovering in the air at a 45-90º angle. Now lower your body so that it is parallel to the ground and then bring the legs right back up. Unlike some of the other exercises listed here, you're going to have to work up to being able to do a dragon flag. This includes being able to plank for a good amount of time and doing plenty of lying leg raises with ease. First do a negative dragon flag by starting with your legs in the air and slowly lowering them while keeping the back and legs straight - squeeze your core and glutes tight. When you can do that, try holding the dragon flag in the parallel to the ground position for at least 3 seconds with your feet and glutes off the ground. After mastering this, you're ready to try a dragon flag. As trainers, we should know that sit ups are utterly overrated as an exercise for developing the core. Not only does it tend to favour the rectus femoris and rectus abdominis to the exclusion of the poor obliques and transverse abdominis, it also places a lot of shear stress on the spine which is a really great way to exacerbate existing disc injuries. So next time you are thinking of a core exercise to use in your workout, instead of just throwing in sit ups, try out one of these core exercises instead. Your client's spines and core strength with thank you. PlanksPlanks are a great way to get clients up off the ground and working their core by creating stability. Below are some ways to make your planks more interesting and rep based (instead of time based).1. Plank Rocks Instructions: This is a good exercise for making the good old plank a little more interesting. It is quite subtle though, campers will need to focus. res! Start in a regular plank position. Dig your elbows and toes in. Brace core. By digging your elbows in, pull your shoulders forward over your hands. Resist the movement with your feet. Pull forward with elbows, resist with toes. Rock back to the starting position and repeat. If tension isn't created through the body it will just feel like you are rocking back and forth not doing anything.2. Plank with Forward Reach Instructions: From a plank position reach one arm straight out in front of you gently supinating the wrist. Bring the arm back in and repeat with the other side. Ensure a neutral spine is kept and there is minimal movement through the hips. You can make this movement easier by spreading the legs.3. Plank with Lateral Hand Tap From a plank position reach one arm out to the side and tap the ground with your hand. Bring the arm back in and repeat with the other side. Ensure a neutral spine is kept and there is minimal movement through the hips. You can make this movement easier by spreading the legs.4. Plank Clocks Start in a push up position. Keeping your feet in one place, walk your hands about 190 degrees, just like the hand of a clock (your feet being in the centre of the clock and your hands the extremity of the clock hand). From there, walk the hands back to the original position. Keep the core tight and avoid rocking the hips. These can also be done with the feet up on a step, bench or tyre to increase the difficulty. Sometimes referred to as Around The Worlds.5. Up Down Plank Instructions: Start in a high plank (top of a push up) position. Walk your hands down to an elbow plank position. Walk hands back to the push up position. Repeat - this time lead with your other arm. Sometimes called Plank Up Downs or Plank to Push Up.6. Scapula Push Ups Instructions: Great as a mobility exercise, not just a core exercise. begin in a push up position. keeping the elbows and arms straight, retract the scapula, then protract. continue for reps. many clients have trouble with this feeling, try starting them standing up doing it on a wall. use your hands on their back so your clients can feel their scapula moving.7. T Switches Instructions: Start in a pushup position, lift one hand up and reach it towards the sky. This should put you into a straight arm side plank. Bring the arm back down and repeat with the other side.8. Rope Plank Slam Instructions: Make a plank more interesting by adding a rope. Get in a straight arm plank with the end of the rope in front of you. Brace core and lift one hand off the ground. Maintain a neutral position. Begin slamming the rope.9. Partner High 5 Plank Instructions: Plank on hands facing your partner and slap 5 with opposite hands. Side Planks Get your clients to challenge their core from a different direction with these side plank variations.10. Side Plank Gravediggers Instructions: Begin in a regular side plank position. Lift your free arm and tuck your fingers behind your ear. Rotate your top shoulder forward lowering your top elbow towards the ground. Keep on rotating until your elbow touches the ground. Return back to the starting side plank position. You have now done one rep.11. Side Plank Leg Raises Get into an elbow side plank with your feet stacked on top of each other.12. Side Plank Hip Drops Instructions: Start in a side plank. Drop the hip and lightly touch the ground. From there raise the hips and resume a straight side plank again. Can be done on your elbow or with the arm straight and hand on the ground.13. Rope Side Plank Pull In Instructions: Just like the Plank Slam, you can make your side planks much more interesting with a rope. Just start with the rope laid out in a line in-front of the client. Start in a side plank facing one end of the rope. Grab the rope with your arm that is not supporting you and pull it towards you. Release and pull it a bit further towards you. Continue until the rope is in a pile in front of you. Drag it out in a line again and the repeat on your other side. Crunches and Similar Performed correctly, crunches can be a great way to get clients to learn how to engage their abdominals correctly.14. Flutter Kicks Instructions: Lie supine and place your hands under your butt. Raise both legs so the feet are above the hips. Keep the core braced while making a scissor like motion with the legs. Adjust the difficulty with range of motion and how high or low the legs are. Sometimes known as Scissor Kicks.15. Knees Up Crunches Instructions: Pop your hands behind your head to support your neck. Keep the knees over the hips and the knees at 90 degrees.16. Stir The Pot Instructions: Sit in a Russian Twist position. Clasp hands and move in a stirring motion like stirring a giant pot while bracing abs. What's your favourite sit up alternative? Share with us in the comments below and let's keep this list of exercises growing and growing. Want to see these exercises used in a workout? Check out BootCraft. Kyle Wood created Bootcamp Ideas in 2010 when he was hunting around on the internet for workout ideas. He ran a successful bootcamp in Victoria, Australia and spends his spare time managing this site, adventuring (or lazing) with his wife and find new ways to make bootcamps even better.

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