



Introduction

When people talk about 'core', they often mean just the abdominal area. I frequently hear riders talk about need for better abs to support posture. That elusive 6-pack comes to mind. This superficial understanding of the core concept is fed by the media and billion dollar diet industry which focuses on the external, most visible layer of your body.

Actually, from a sport conditioning perspective, it is more useful to understand core strength as being a little more like an apple core: in the physical centre, and all the way around. Everything about an apple is connected around it's core. We are not talking about the little lumpy part with seeds in the middle, but the whole central portion which wraps around the 'spine' of the apple from it's stem to the button on the bottom.

The Muscles *(so much more than abs)*

When we say core in sport training, we mean all the muscles in your torso, virtually from your neck to the top of your thighs. That's a lot more than the rectus abdominus sitting on the surface of your abdominal area. Key muscles to think about in core training for riders include all those which are responsible for keeping your torso erect, stabilizing your hips and shoulders, and rotation. Main muscles involved are your diaphragm, transverse abdominus, obliques, hip flexors, erector spinae, quadratus lumborum, intraspinales, gluteals, adductors, lower trapezius, rhomboids and rectus abdominus.

The muscles in your limbs which you use riding originate as close to your torso as they can, and attach further out. In sport conditioning, all motion is connected to core function and strength because the musculature of your limbs anchors to your core through the fascial system, or by physical connection within your torso.

In Sport *(the difference between completion, and high performance)*

With core strength, we are concerned about a whole lot more than pretty posture. Similarly to a golfer, a polo player transfers power from the legs and thighs through the torso to the shoulders, and only eventually into the arm for a swing. The legs and thighs themselves are only as strong as the player's torso which stabilizes their hips. To wind up for a mallet swing, or to remain balanced in the saddle while your shoulders corkscrew over a tricky cross country fence, you need incredible hip stability and rotational power. In other disciplines the requirement may be more subtle, but it is still there.

In Leisure *(why you should care even if no-one ever watches you ride)*

In fact, even if all you do is hack out on trail once in a while, you might find a sudden demand placed on your core in a spook situation. Without appropriate strength, a sudden rotational demand or jolt will be more likely absorbed by your spine and other joints, or cause you to lose your balance. *(read between the lines: accident or strain waiting to happen)* You certainly need good tone around the middle to keep your weight even throughout your ride and avoid slouching. Even if no-one on the planet ever watches you, your horse *never* spooks and you *always* get off long before you are fatigued, your horse's back and legs will pay the consequences or enjoy the benefits of the degree of your self-carriage.