

Alignment, balance, and core muscle tone (in standing position)

There's a lot of talk these days about the critical importance of good tone in the core muscles around the pelvis: the lower abdominals (especially transversus abdominis), deep lumbar muscles (multifidus), and pelvic floor. It seems to be appropriate, since research indicates that dysfunction in these muscles is strongly associated with back pain. Unfortunately, for many people this has become something they know they should have, but don't know how to get.

So let's step away from specialized exercises and esoteric methods for getting in touch with the core muscles. Here's a simple fact: these muscles are *absolutely essential* for getting the pelvis poised over the tops of the legs in standing or sitting. The best way, then, to get them to do their job is to assume alignment that demands their use.

In less-than-optimal posture, the muscles around the pelvis (superficial and deep) tend to be compressed and braced. The pelvis is sinking onto the legs rather than poised over them. In most cases, one or both sides of the pelvis are sinking *behind* the top of the leg in the standing position.

To try something different, first assume that you are one of those whose pelvis rests behind the very top of the leg when you're standing. Now, notice that if you draw the tops of your legs back, there's a point where the upper body (including the pelvis) needs to shift forward for you to keep your balance. This is the same thing you do when you bend forward to pick something up off the floor: first, the tops of the legs go back. If you keep playing with this, you'll start to feel the ability to wobble more freely around your hip joints: as the legs go back, the upper body goes forward and vice versa.

As your upper body becomes more poised over your legs, your posture may feel quite unfamiliar: you're leaning forward and sticking your butt out. Partly, it's just that you're doing something different. Also, the rest of your body is adapted to your usual posture, and some other things may need to change. But notice how, as the pelvis shifts over the legs, the lower abdominal muscles are now firing strongly to stabilize you. If you feel into this carefully, you may also notice the pelvic floor and some of the low back muscles firing as well. *This is core tone coming in to stabilize your poised alignment.*