

HEALTH & FITNESS

Walking the plank

Learn how to perfect your technique to strengthen muscles and relieve pain

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While performing a plank exercise may appear simple, it can be anything but easy to perform it to perfection. The static exercise, which strengthens core muscles in the abs, back and hips, stabilizes your spine and can help to prevent back injuries, requires great form to be done well, according to Teris Espinosa, co-owner of Fitness Together in North Attleboro, below. We recently asked Espinosa to demonstrate and explain the proper form and techniques for a plank so that you, too, can begin getting the most out of the exercise.



1 **TO BEGIN**, get on all fours and lay your forearms flat on the ground. Your arms should be shoulder-width apart, with your hands flat in front of you. Your arms and forearms should be perpendicular, with your elbows directly below your shoulders.

3 **AS YOU** raise your body up, you want to pull your belly button in, so your back doesn't arch and your rear doesn't sag. Your back and legs should remain as straight as possible, creating the appearance of a plank, hence the exercise's name. You want to make sure you take deep, full breaths while holding the position, never trying to hold your breath for the duration.

4 **THE LENGTH** of time you need to hold the position can vary greatly by your experience and overall health. While a good target can be to hold the position for 45 seconds, a beginner should not be disheartened if they can only hold it for 10 or 15 seconds, Espinosa says. The key, she says, is to gradually increase the time you hold the pose over time, with some experts being able to hold the position for over 3 minutes.

2 **RAISE YOUR** body weight up on your toes, making sure your knees are no longer touching the ground. Beginners should start with their feet about shoulder-width apart, though moving them closer together will make the exercise more difficult.