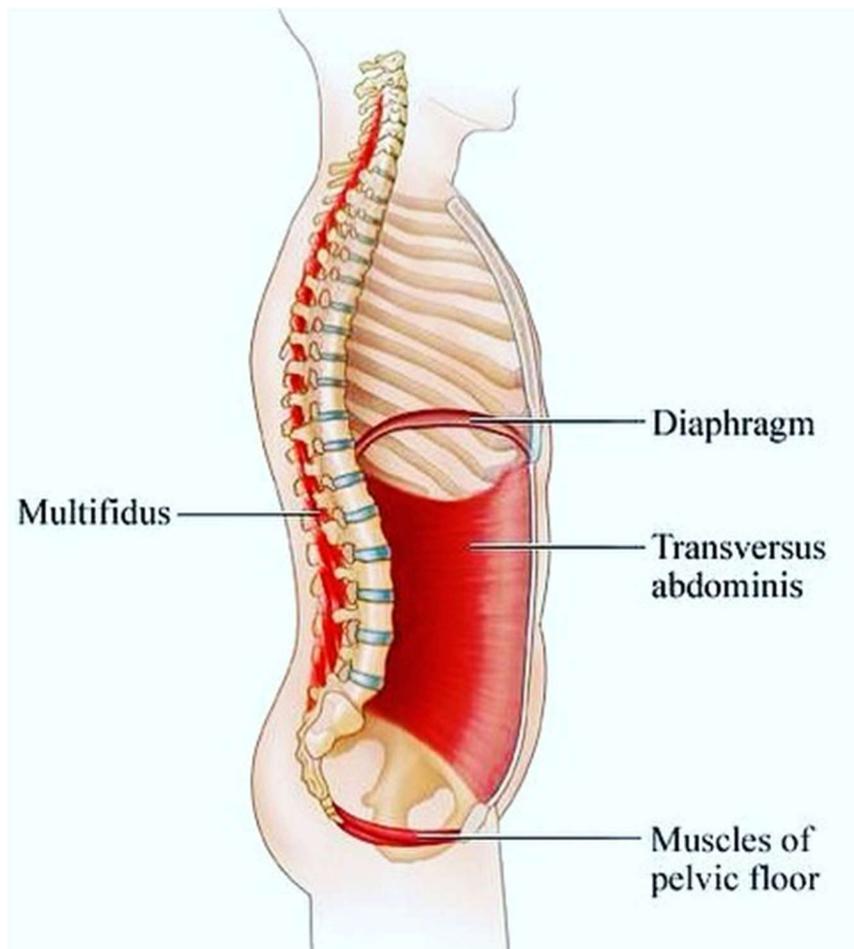


Ever wondered what people are talking about when they say "your core"? Here's a great visual for the core muscles:



The "core" are the muscles that surround your midsection and generate power and stability for the rest of your body. Top (diaphragm), bottom (pelvic floor), front (transverse abdominis), and back (multifidus). I'm planning to write an article about breathing and core strengthening, but for now, here's a simple exercise, largely from [Julie Wiebe, PT](#), to 1. get your core to start kicking in 2. get comfortable with one of the basic building blocks of a core strengthening program and 3. engage the muscles that help prevent incontinence. "Common" and "normal" are different. Incontinence or leaking urine is common especially after childbirth or pelvic surgeries (such as prostate) but it doesn't have to be normal. The italicized parts are the actions (important parts) and the non-italicized are the mechanisms.

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet on the ground.
- *Take a few slow, easy breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through pursed lips (like you're slowly blowing out a candle).*
- *As you breath in, the diaphragm lowers towards your feet. This causes your belly to rise towards the ceiling and the bottom of your rib cage to expand like an umbrella (imagine your diaphragm lowering and pushing all your organs down, which causes the belly to expand). If you notice your chest rising, focus on only allowing your belly to move.*
- *As you breath out, the diaphragm rises towards your head, back to its starting position. This causes your belly to fall back towards the ground and that umbrella at the bottom of your rib cage to slowly close.*
- *After you get comfortable with the breathing above, add the pelvic floor muscles. These muscles work with the diaphragm, so they lower when the diaphragm lowers and rise when the diaphragm rises. You contract your pelvic floor muscles, which will happen on the exhale, by imagining that you're stopping the flow of urine in midstream.*
- *So, as you breath in, your belly rises and rib cage expands while you slowly relax the pelvic floor.*
- *As you breath out, your belly falls back towards the ground and you slowly contract the pelvic floor.*
- *As you practice breathing, notice tension you may be holding in any area of your body (buttocks, abs, neck, shoulders, etc.) and let those areas soften.*
- *Practicing this breathing for 5-10 minutes per day, in a quiet space with no interruptions, will help improve your use of the diaphragm, pelvic floor, and core. Its also helpful for relieving stress and unnecessary tension.*