

Take Your MEDICINE

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The old-fashioned medicine ball is a simple yet effective means to strengthen the body's core while preparing you for the greatest game: Life.

Weightlifting, progressive resistance exercise, weight-bearing activity, strength training—they're all terms used to describe the practice of resistance training. But contrary to popular belief, you don't have to lift heavy weights to see progress. Resistance training has little to do with *how much* weight you lift and a lot to do with *how* you train your muscles.

The medicine ball, considered outdated until recently, is a form of resistance training designed to strengthen the trunk and mimic a golf swing, tennis backhand or knockout punch. Your abdomen, hip flexors and low back, collectively known as the body's core, serve many important roles. Core muscles maintain the integrity of the spine, shield vital organs and transfer forces between the upper and lower body. If a washboard midsection is your goal, combine the versatile medicine ball with portion-controlled nutrition, quality sleep and stress management. Better still, medicine ball training improves the dynamic and explosive characteristics of both sport and everyday life. It makes sense: If you want to move quickly, you need to practice moving quickly.



Functional Exercise

Most everything you do involves some “core” combination of hip flexion and extension (raising the knee toward the chest and lowering it, respectively), trunk flexion and extension (bending forward and backward, respectively), and rotation (twisting at the hips). Next time you serve a tennis ball, swing a golf club or shovel snow, try not to rotate your hips—just make sure no one is watching. It’s challenging, to say the least. Resistance training with a medicine ball requires core muscles to bend and twist in the same manner as they are used on the court, golf course or snow-covered sidewalk. In other words, carefully planned medicine ball training brings you a step closer to functional exercise.

Traditional squats, presses and rows are the building blocks of a dependable resistance-training program. Continue to use these reliable tools to develop general strength. For example, a torso curl (abdominal crunch) stresses the *rectus abdominis*—one continuous sheath of muscle that runs vertically from below the chest, all the way to the pelvis. The torso curl is a bread-and-butter abdominal movement that improves general strength; however, place a one-pound ball in your hands and toss it to a partner at the top of each repetition and you’ve just creat-

ed an exercise that requires balance, stability and provides functional strength. Now stand up and toss the ball to a partner with one hand—like you are pitching a baseball or serving a tennis ball—this is called specific strength. These functional training techniques mimic real life and directly affect performance.

Before You Begin

Warm-up activities stimulate blood flow, increase muscular temperature and loosen joints—this creates a smooth transition between rest and exercise and ultimately reduces the chance of injury. Chris B. Cox, M.S., C.S.C.S., a Pennsylvania-based exercise physiologist recommends performing a general warm-up prior to medicine ball activity. “Walking on a treadmill or pedaling a stationary cycle will stimulate muscles and joints while increasing core temperature,” he says. The often overlooked, specific warm-up mimics medicine ball exercise while synchronizing the brain/body connection, adds Cox. “A specific warm-up resembles the actual movement—like a practice swing in golf, before you tee off.”

The exercises featured below will strengthen the abdomen, hips and low back. Most of them involve the use of a light medicine ball. Consult your doctor or physical therapist before you embark on your core-training journey. And don’t hesitate to ask for help. Elite athletes have coaches and so should you. A strength and conditioning professional will teach you the safest, most efficient way to make resistance training a part of your life.



Medicine ball standing trunk circles warm-up



Warm-Up

Medicine ball standing trunk circles warm-up

Grasp a three- to five-pound medicine ball, assume a shoulder-width stance and extend your arms above your head. Inhale and slowly move the ball in a large clockwise circle. Bend your knees and exhale as you lower the ball past your ankles. Return to the start position and repeat in the opposite direction. Perform one set of 20 repetitions.

Tip: Concentrate on stretching your muscles as you perform this exercise.

Medicine ball standing rotation warm-up

Maintain your shoulder-width stance and slightly flex your knees. Position a three- to five-pound medicine ball in front of your chest, with your arms extended. Alternately twist to the left and right in a controlled manner while breathing normally. Keep the ball at chest-level. Do one set of 20 repetitions.

Tip: Pull the ball into your chest for less resistance.



**Medicine ball
standing
rotation
warm-up**



Core Exercises

Medicine ball hip extension

Position yourself on the hip extension machine and hold a medicine ball close to your chest. Lower your upper body until you feel tension in your hamstrings. Pause, inhale and contract your hamstrings and glutes as you raise your upper body to the start position. Exhale as you complete the movement. Repeat for two sets of 10 repetitions.

Tip: For added resistance, extend your arms and hold the ball overhead.



Medicine ball hip extension

Medicine ball reverse leg raise

Lie facedown on a flat bench and press your stomach firmly into the pad. Hold onto the edge of the bench or a stable object. Place a one- to three-pound ball between your ankles. Inhale and tense your abdomen as you slowly raise your legs to a point that is almost parallel to the floor. Hold and exhale as you gently lower your legs to the start position. Repeat for two sets of 10 repetitions.

Tip: Do not swing your legs or lift your stomach from the bench.

Tip: Do not allow the ball to touch the floor.

Tip: Place the medicine ball between your knees for less resistance.



Medicine ball reverse leg raise

Medicine ball trunk twist

Hold a three- to five-pound ball at chest-level with arms extended. Assume a shoulder-width stance. Stand back-to-back, about an arm's length away from your partner. Without moving your feet or hips, quickly twist your torso and pass the ball to your partner—who twists in the same direction. Repeat for two sets of 10 repetitions in each direction.



Medicine ball trunk twist

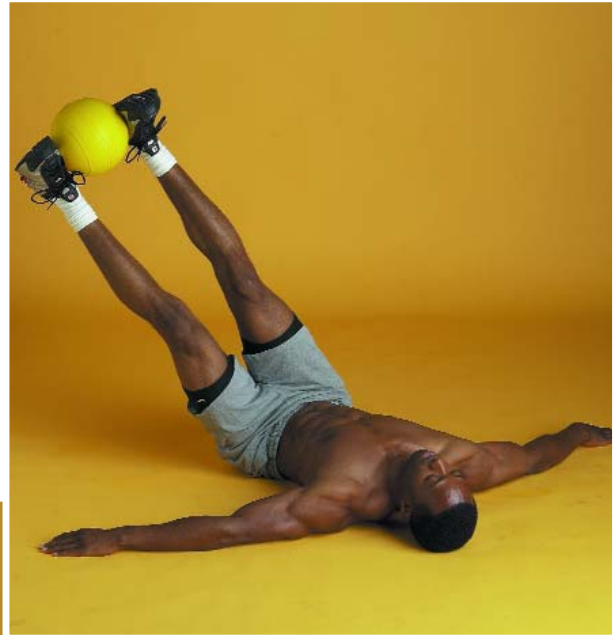


Medicine ball supine torso rotation

Lie on your back with your legs extended straight overhead and arms out to the sides. Carefully place a two-pound ball between your ankles. Inhale and tense your abdomen as you slowly lower the ball to the left side. Exhale as you return to the start position and repeat on the opposite side. Do two sets of 20 repetitions.

Tip: Try to keep both shoulder blades in contact with the floor during the exercise.

Tip: Avoid touching your feet to the floor—this will release tension from the trunk, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the movement.

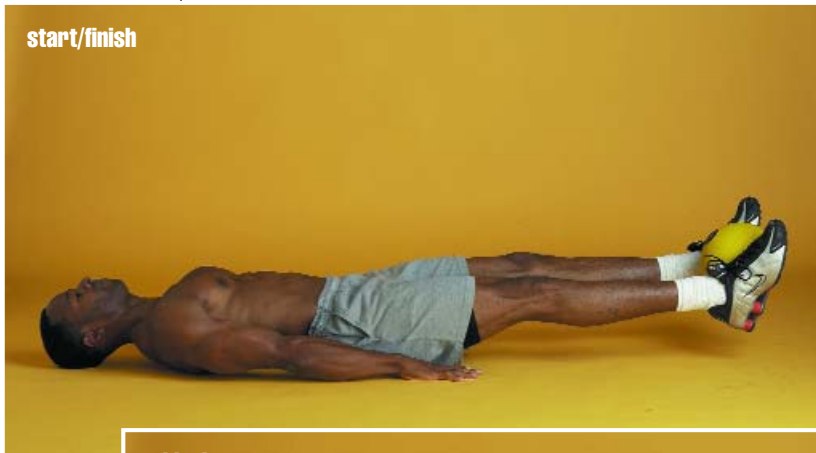


**Medicine ball
supine torso
rotation**



Medicine ball supine leg raise

Lie on a mat and press your upper back firmly into the pad. Place a one- to three-pound ball between your ankles. Inhale and tense your abdomen as you slowly lift your legs to about a 45-degree angle from the floor. Hold and gently lower your legs to the start position. Repeat for two sets of 10 repetitions.



Medicine ball supine leg raise



Conclusion

Just like a carpenter has specialized tools in a toolbox, the strength and conditioning professional utilizes a wide array of devices to achieve a desired outcome. When used in an organized, scientific manner, barbells and dumbbells may enhance general strength, increase muscle size and improve muscular endurance. The medicine ball is a surefire training tool if your goal is to mimic sport or functional activities *and* chisel a sturdy midsection. **||mm||**