



ATHLOS FITNESS

THE CORE STRENGTH BLUEPRINT

A 28-day program to build real core strength with your Athlos
Fitness Ab Mat

ATHLOSFITNESS.COM

WELCOME

Start here.

You bought an ab mat. That puts you ahead of 90% of people who say they want a stronger core but never do anything about it.

This program is designed to work with your Athlos Fitness Ab Mat. Three workouts per week, 10–15 minutes each. No gym required. No other equipment needed.

The program has three levels for every exercise. Pick the one that matches where you are right now, not where you want to be. You'll get there.

How to use this guide

1. Start with Week 1, Day 1. Don't skip ahead.
2. Do three workouts per week with at least one rest day between them.
3. Pick your level (beginner, intermediate, or advanced) for each exercise. You can mix levels.
4. If a workout feels too easy, move up a level on 1–2 exercises. If it feels too hard, scale back.
5. Track your reps using the progress tracker at the back of this PDF.
6. Not sure where to start? Use the scaling decision tree on page 7.
7. If you have an injury or limitation, check the substitutions guide on page 8.

CRITICAL**Start with Page 3.**

The ab mat setup guide on the next page is the single biggest factor in whether this program works for you. Most people use their ab mat wrong. Page 3 fixes that.

SETUP

Ab Mat Setup Guide

Get this right or nothing else in this program matters.

1

Orientation

Place the mat on the floor with the curved side facing up. The flat side sits on the ground. If you can see the Athlos logo, you've got it right.

2

Position

Sit on the floor in front of the mat. Lower your back onto it so the highest point of the curve lands just below your shoulder blades when you're fully extended. Your lower back settles into the curve. Your tailbone rests in the protector channel.

3

Foot position

Two options. Standard sit-up: feet flat, knees bent at about 90 degrees. Butterfly sit-up: soles of feet together, knees out to the sides. The butterfly position is harder because it removes your hip flexors from the equation.

4

Check your range of motion

Lower your shoulders past the top of the mat. You should feel your abs stretch fully. This is the extra range you don't get on a flat floor. If you're not extending past the mat, scoot forward slightly.

COMMON MISTAKES

- ✗ **Mat too high on your back.** The curve should support your lower back, not your upper back. Scoot forward.
- ✗ **Tailbone not in the channel.** The protector only works if your tailbone is actually in it. Center yourself.
- ✗ **Not using the full range.** If you're stopping at the same point as a floor sit-up, the mat isn't adding value. Extend past the curve.

METHODOLOGY

Why this program is built this way

Most core programs fail for one of three reasons. They're too random to build progression. They're too ambitious and burn people out by week two. Or they have no way to measure whether the work is actually doing anything. This program solves all three.

The four-week arc

1

Week 1: Foundation

Learn the movements. Focus on form. Moderate reps, generous rest. Rushing Week 1 is how people get injured or quit.

2

Week 2: Build

Same exercises, more reps, shorter rest. You're not learning anymore. You're working. This is the week most people quit because progress isn't visible yet. It's the week you have to finish.

3

Week 3: Push

A fourth set on key exercises. Less rest. Higher intensity. This is where the change happens. Movements that felt hard in Week 1 start feeling routine.

4

Week 4: Test

Max-effort sets on benchmark exercises. Compare to your Week 1 baseline. The gap between those two numbers is 28 days of work made visible.

Why butterfly sit-ups are the primary exercise

The butterfly foot position (soles together, knees out) removes your hip flexors from the movement. In a standard sit-up, your hip flexors pull you up. In a butterfly sit-up, your abs do nearly all the lifting. It's harder. That's the point.

Why three days per week, not daily

Your core recovers like any other muscle. Train it daily and you undercut your own progress. Three sessions per week with rest days between is the sweet spot for strength without overtraining.

LIBRARY

Exercise Library

1. Ab Mat Butterfly Sit-Up

PRIMARY EXERCISE

Soles of feet together, knees out. Arms extended overhead at the bottom, reach forward and touch the floor past your feet at the top. Full range of motion.

BEGINNER

Arms crossed on chest. Touch knees.

INTERMEDIATE

Arms overhead. Touch floor past feet.

ADVANCED

Hold 5-10 lb weight plate overhead.

2. Ab Mat Crunch

CORE

Feet flat, knees bent. Hands behind head. Extend back over the mat, crunch up until shoulder blades clear. Controlled. Don't yank your neck.

BEGINNER

Hands on thighs, slide toward knees.

INTERMEDIATE

Hands behind head.

ADVANCED

Hands overhead with light weight.

3. Ab Mat Oblique Crunch

OBLIQUES

Same starting position as crunch. As you crunch up, rotate and drive your elbow toward the opposite knee. Alternate sides each rep.

BEGINNER

Hands on thighs, gentle rotation.

INTERMEDIATE

Hands behind head, full rotation.

ADVANCED

Holding weight at chest.

4. Ab Mat Leg Raise

LOWER ABS

Lie face up. Extend legs straight. Raise legs to 90 degrees, then lower slowly without letting your lower back arch off the mat.

BEGINNER

Bent knees, bring knees to chest.

INTERMEDIATE

Straight legs, raise to 90 degrees.

ADVANCED

Lower slowly to 6 inches, pause, repeat.

Exercise Library (continued)

5. Ab Mat Prone Back Extension

POSTERIOR CHAIN

Flip over. Place the mat under your hips. Lie face down, hands behind head. Raise your chest off the floor by squeezing your lower back and glutes. Slow and controlled.

BEGINNER

Hands at sides.

INTERMEDIATE

Hands behind head.

ADVANCED

Arms extended overhead.

6. Ab Mat Plank Hold

STABILITY

Place your forearms on the mat. Hold a plank position. The mat cushions your elbows and makes the position more comfortable for longer holds.

BEGINNER

20 seconds x 3 sets.

INTERMEDIATE

30 seconds x 3 sets.

ADVANCED

45 seconds x 3 sets.

7. Ab Mat V-Up

FULL CORE

Lie flat on the mat. Arms overhead. Simultaneously raise your legs and upper body to touch your toes at the top. V shape.

BEGINNER

Tuck-up (bend knees to hands).

INTERMEDIATE

One leg at a time, alternating.

ADVANCED

Full V-up, straight legs, touch toes.

8. Ab Mat Hip Raise

LOWER ABS

Lie face up. Legs straight up at 90 degrees. Push your hips off the floor by squeezing your lower abs. Small movement, big burn.

BEGINNER

Bent knees.

INTERMEDIATE

Straight legs.

ADVANCED

Straight legs, 3-second lower.

SCALING

Decision Tree

Don't guess which level you should start at. Answer the questions below.

1. Can you do 10 butterfly sit-ups with full range of motion and good form?

YES**Go to Question 2**

You have a working base. Next question decides between intermediate and advanced.

NO**Start BEGINNER**

Use beginner variations across all exercises. Focus on form for Week 1. Don't skip ahead.

2. Can you hold a plank for 45 seconds with good form?

YES**Go to Question 3**

Strong stabilizer base. Last question separates advanced from intermediate-plus.

NO**Start INTERMEDIATE**

Use intermediate variations. Mix in advanced on exercises you feel strong on.

3. Can you do a full V-up with straight legs touching your toes?

YES**Start ADVANCED**

Use advanced variations. Consider adding weight to sit-ups in Week 3 onward.

NO**Start INTERMEDIATE+**

Intermediate on most exercises. Advanced on the ones you can do cleanly. Adjust as you go.

RULE**You can mix levels.**

If you're advanced on planks but intermediate on V-ups, train that way. The program is a framework. Your form is the ceiling. Don't exceed it.

SUBSTITUTIONS

Injury & Limitation Guide

If any of these apply to you, use the substitutions below. Consult your doctor before starting any program if you have injuries or medical conditions.

CONDITION	SKIP THIS	DO THIS INSTEAD
Lower back pain or herniated disc	V-up, straight-leg raise	Bent-knee leg raises only. Planks and dead bugs. Glute bridges. Consult your PT before any sit-up.
Neck pain or cervical issues	Hands-behind-head variations	Keep hands on thighs or crossed on chest. Avoid pulling your neck.
Pregnancy (any trimester)	Supine ab work (sit-ups, V-ups)	Standing core work, side planks, modified planks on knees, bird dogs. Talk to your OB first.
Diastasis recti (post-partum)	Crunches, V-ups, anything that cones the abdomen	Modified planks, glute bridges, bird dogs, TVA activation. See a pelvic floor PT.
Tight hip flexors	Standard sit-ups with feet anchored	Butterfly sit-ups only. The open hip position removes hip flexor dominance.
Shoulder injury	Arms-overhead variations	Keep arms crossed on chest or at sides. The exercises still work.
Wrist pain	Planks on palms	Forearm planks only. The ab mat cushions the elbows.
Tailbone sensitivity	Nothing — the mat is the fix	Position the mat so your tailbone sits in the protector channel. If still uncomfortable, skip back extensions temporarily.

Week 1: Foundation

Focus on form. Learn the movements. Don't chase reps.

Day 1 Monday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	10	3	45s
Crunch	12	3	30s
Plank hold	your level	3	45s

Day 2 Wednesday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Oblique crunch	10/side	3	30s
Leg raise	10	3	45s
Back extension	12	3	30s

Day 3 Friday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	12	3	45s
V-up	8	3	45s
Hip raise	10	3	30s

Track your reps in the progress tracker (page 20). Compare to Week 4.

Week 2: Build

Same exercises. Increase reps by 2-3. Reduce rest by 5-10 seconds.

Day 4 Monday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	13	3	40s
Crunch	15	3	25s
Plank hold	+5 sec	3	40s

Day 5 Wednesday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Oblique crunch	12/side	3	25s
Leg raise	12	3	40s
Back extension	15	3	25s

Day 6 Friday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	15	3	40s
V-up	10	3	40s
Hip raise	12	3	25s

Week 3: Push

Add a 4th set to two exercises per workout. Reduce rest to 20–30 seconds.

Day 7 Monday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	15	4	35s
Crunch	18	3	20s
Hip raise	12	4	30s

Day 8 Wednesday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Oblique crunch	14/side	3	20s
Leg raise	14	4	35s
Back extension	18	3	20s

Day 9 Friday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	18	3	30s
V-up	12	4	35s
Plank hold	+10 sec	3	30s

Week 4: Test

Max effort on key exercises. See how far you've come.

Day 10 Monday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	Max reps	3	60s
Crunch	20	3	20s
Plank hold	Max time	3	60s

Day 11 Wednesday

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Oblique crunch	15/side	4	20s
Leg raise	Max reps	3	60s
Back extension	20	3	20s

Day 12 Friday (Final Test)

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest
Butterfly sit-up	Max reps	1	—
V-up	Max reps	1	—
Plank hold	Max time	1	—
Hip raise	Max reps	1	—

Write down your final numbers in the progress tracker. Compare to Week 1. That's your proof.

CHEAT SHEET

Form at a Glance

One-page quick reference. Use it gym-side when you don't want to flip through the full library.

EXERCISE 1**Butterfly Sit-Up**

Soles together. Arms overhead at bottom. Full range.

WATCH: Stopping before shoulders touch floor behind you.

EXERCISE 3**Oblique Crunch**

Rotate across the body. Elbow to opposite knee. Alternate.

WATCH: Pulling with the elbow instead of rotating the core.

EXERCISE 5**Back Extension**

Mat under hips. Squeeze glutes and lower back. Slow.

WATCH: Cranking the neck back instead of lifting the chest.

EXERCISE 7**V-Up**

Raise legs and torso together. Reach for toes.

WATCH: Using momentum to swing up instead of controlled lift.

EXERCISE 2**Crunch**

Feet flat. Shoulder blades clear the mat. Control the descent.

WATCH: Yanking your neck with your hands.

EXERCISE 4**Leg Raise**

Lower back stays flat on the mat. Slow descent.

WATCH: Lower back arching off the mat at the bottom.

EXERCISE 6**Plank Hold**

Forearms on mat. Body in a straight line. Squeeze glutes.

WATCH: Hips sagging or piking up to rest.

EXERCISE 8**Hip Raise**

Legs straight up. Lift hips by squeezing lower abs.

WATCH: Swinging legs instead of lifting hips.

WORKOUT CARDS

Print. Clip. Track.

Print these pages, cut along the card borders, hole-punch the top-left corner, and put them on a ring. Take them to the gym. Log your reps in the "Done" column.

DAY 1 · MONDAY WEEK 1 · FOUNDATION

Butterfly + Crunch + Plank

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	10	3	45s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Crunch	12	3	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Plank hold	your level	3	45s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

DAY 2 · WEDNESDAY WEEK 1 · FOUNDATION

Obliques + Lower + Back

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Oblique crunch	10/side	3	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Leg raise	10	3	45s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Back extension	12	3	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Butterfly + V-Up + Hip Raise

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	12	3	45s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
V-up	8	3	45s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Hip raise	10	3	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Butterfly + Crunch + Plank

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	13	3	40s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Crunch	15	3	25s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Plank hold	+5 sec	3	40s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Obliques + Lower + Back

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Oblique crunch	12/side	3	25s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Leg raise	12	3	40s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Back extension	15	3	25s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Butterfly + V-Up + Hip Raise

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	15	3	40s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
V-up	10	3	40s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Hip raise	12	3	25s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Butterfly + Crunch + Hip Raise

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	15	4	35s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Crunch	18	3	20s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Hip raise	12	4	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Obliques + Lower + Back

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Oblique crunch	14/side	3	20s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Leg raise	14	4	35s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Back extension	18	3	20s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Butterfly + V-Up + Plank

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	18	3	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
V-up	12	4	35s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Plank hold	+10 sec	3	30s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Butterfly + Crunch + Plank

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	Max	3	60s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Crunch	20	3	20s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Plank hold	Max time	3	60s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Obliques + Lower + Back

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Oblique crunch	15/side	4	20s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Leg raise	Max	3	60s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Back extension	20	3	20s	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

Max Effort Benchmark

Exercise	Reps	Sets	Rest	Done
Butterfly sit-up	Max	1	—	<input type="checkbox"/>
V-up	Max	1	—	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plank hold	Max time	1	—	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hip raise	Max	1	—	<input type="checkbox"/>

Notes: _____

TRACKER

4-Week Progress Tracker

Record your Week 1 numbers before you start Day 1. Record your Week 4 numbers after Day 12. The gap between them is your proof.

Benchmark Tests

Test	Week 1 Baseline	Week 4 Result	Improvement
Max butterfly sit-ups (1 set)	-----	-----	-----
Max V-ups (1 set)	-----	-----	-----
Max plank hold (seconds)	-----	-----	-----
Max hip raises (1 set)	-----	-----	-----
Max leg raises (1 set)	-----	-----	-----

Body Measurements (Optional)

Not about aesthetics. These numbers change with training whether you're trying to lose weight or not.

Measurement	Week 1	Week 4	Change
Waist (at navel)	-----	-----	-----
Hips	-----	-----	-----
Bodyweight	-----	-----	-----

How I Feel

Question	Week 1	Week 4
Energy level (1-10)	-----	-----
Core strength confidence (1-10)	-----	-----
Posture awareness (1-10)	-----	-----

BONUS

5 More Ways to Use Your Ab Mat

Things your ab mat can do that have nothing to do with sit-ups.

1

Handstand Push-Up Cushion

Place the ab mat under your head for handstand push-ups or negatives against the wall. It protects your head and gives you a consistent depth target. Stack the mat with the tailbone pad for different heights.

2

Back Extension Pad

Flip the mat and place it under your hips for prone back extensions. The contoured foam cushions your hip bones so you can do high reps without bruising. This is a GHD alternative for home gyms.

3

Lunge Pad

Drop the mat on the floor and place your back knee on it during lunges or Bulgarian split squats. Eliminates knee pain on hard floors instantly.

4

Kneeling Hip Flexor Stretch

Kneel on the mat in a lunge position. Push your hips forward. The cushion makes it comfortable to hold the stretch for 60+ seconds without knee pain. If you sit at a desk all day, this one matters.

5

Wall Handstand Support

Place the mat against the wall at head height. Kick up into a wall handstand. Soft landing target for your head while you build confidence inverted.

REMINDER**One piece of equipment. Way more than one use.**

The ab mat is the most versatile piece of home gym equipment you own. Don't retire it after Day 28.

MONTH 2

Beyond the 28 Days

You just finished 28 days of structured core training. That's more than most people do in a year. Here's how to keep the momentum.

Path 1: Run it again at the next level.

If you did the program at beginner, go through it again at intermediate. Same exercises, different challenge. The progression is built in. You'll be surprised how different the same workout feels a level up.

Path 2: Add weight.

Hold a weight plate, dumbbell, or medicine ball during sit-ups, crunches, and V-ups. Start with 5 pounds. Add 5 more every 2 weeks. Even a light weight changes the entire workout.

Path 3: Mix it into your existing training.

Pick 2-3 exercises from the program and add them to the end of your regular workouts. 10 minutes of focused core work after lifting, running, or class. Maintenance mode.

How to know which path is right for you

Path 1 if you want to keep building core strength and you haven't exhausted the advanced variations yet. This is the most common choice.

Path 2 if you're already doing advanced variations with clean form and want to keep progressing. Weight is the next variable.

Path 3 if your training priorities have shifted and you want to maintain what you built without dedicating 30 minutes three times a week to it.

DON'T DO THIS

- ✗ **Stop training entirely.** The strength you built fades if you stop. Use it or lose it.
- ✗ **Train core daily.** Recovery is where strength is built, not during the workout. Stick to 3 sessions per week.
- ✗ **Chase novelty.** Trendy abs exercises on social media rarely beat progressive overload on proven movements. The basics work.

THAT'S A WRAP

You did the work.

28 days of structured core training. Max-effort benchmark tests. Numbers on paper that prove you got stronger. Most people don't get here. You did.

Stay connected. We send one email per week with new exercises, training tips, and equipment recommendations. If you're on our list, you're already getting them.

ABOUT ATHLOS FITNESS

Athlos Fitness has been building ab mats since 2014. We make one product. We've made it for over a decade. And we've refined it based on feedback from over 1,842 verified customers on Amazon. The tailbone protector isn't a gimmick. We built it because sit-ups on hard floors cause tailbone bruising, and every other ab mat on the market ignored that problem. Ours doesn't.

If you have questions about your ab mat, your training, or this program, email us at support@athlosfitness.com. We read every message.



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