

ROCK AND ICE

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Gutbusters

Training core strength is a template for improving your climbing — By Michelle Hurni

Kim Posati reaches with her toe and sets the tip of her climbing shoe on an edge. She pulls right, shifting her weight through the hips and locking off on a crimper. Her technique is good. She's fit. This problem is going down.

The rock juts out above and behind her. Hips up. She pushes, trying to keep her toe on the hold while extending full length to a sloper. Then her feet cut loose, and her entire lower body swings away from the rock. She struggles to kick back on, but falls.

She has been training for months for this boulder problem. The missing link is body tension.

The body tension she needs can be supplied by Pilates. Nearly every move a climber makes is based around the center of the body, the core. The stronger the core, the easier climbing becomes. The exercises in Pilates can strengthen the abs, back and glutes, compensating for weaknesses in other parts of your climbing, or taking your climbing to the next level by rounding out your strengths. Pilates helps you develop strength, and teaches control and breathing, key elements of climbing.

Once you learn how to use the principles in a Pilates workout, you can incorporate those basics while you climb.

To get the most out of training your core using Pilates, focus on quality, not quantity. It's not necessary to do hundreds of sit-ups, or spend half an hour doing ab work. With Pilates, core strength is built through slow, controlled movement, so fewer exercises are needed for results.

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PILATES TIPS

- In Pilates, exercises are based around breathing. Exhale when the body is moving, inhale and elongate the spine when not.
- Inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth.
- Scoop your abs in when exhaling. Most people tend to push their abs out when doing crunches, but in Pilates, the goal is to pull the belly button and lower abs in, as if hollowing the area out with an ice cream scoop.
- Move at the rate of your exhalation. It's better to exhale slowly and move at the same pace than jerk through a move.

ROCK RING EXERCISES

Rock Rings are a great training tool for climbers. They can simulate climbing movement in a controlled environment. Rock Rings are available at www.metoliusclimbing.com. In lieu of Rock Rings, a pull-up bar, fingerboard, or even the underside of unfinished stairs will work. Use Pilates movement and breathing techniques with these exercises.

Double Straight Leg Lifts

- 1 Start from the dead-hang position on any rung (the lower rungs are more challenging).
- 2 Exhale and lift both legs straight in front of you from the hips while scooping the abs so the back doesn't arch.
- 3 Hold the legs straight out and inhale.
- 4 Exhale, scoop the abs, and slowly lower the legs back to the start position.

Tip: If your back arches when you lower your legs, focus on scooping the lower abs and don't lift the legs as high.

Reps: Up to 12.



Straight Leg Lifts

- 1 Hang from the Rock Rings with the arms straight.
- 2 Exhale and extend the left leg straight out from the hips, but angled to the right.
- 3 Inhale and hold. The right leg is straight toward the floor. The left leg stretches forward across the body.
- 4 Exhale, scoop the abs, and return the left leg to center.
- 5 Inhale and relax through the shoulders.
- 6 Exhale, scoop the abs and lift the right leg level with the hips, aiming left.
- 7 Inhale and hold.
- 8 Exhale, scoop the abs, and return the right leg to center.

Tip: Keep the abs scooped through the entire exercise so the back doesn't arch.

Reps: Alternate legs and repeat up to 12 with each leg.



Oblique Curls

- 1 Start from the dead-hang position.
- 2 Exhale and draw the knees to hip level, scooping out your abs and letting your lower back curve outward.
- 3 Inhale deeply through the nose.
- 4 Exhale and continue to scoop the belly in, raising the right hip up and drawing your feet as close to waist level as you can.
- 5 Hold with an inhalation and relax the shoulders.
- 6 Exhale and bring the left hip up, lifting your feet to the left. Hold with an inhalation.

Tip: Keep the abs scooped to protect your lower back. As you get stronger, strap weights to your ankles for more core work.



Reps: Alternate up to 12 each side. Exhale each time you switch sides.

The perfect mat exercises

A few Pilates exercises work all areas of the core (abs, obliques, back, glutes).

The Plank

- 1 Start face down on the mat. Place the elbows under the shoulders and curl the toes under.
- 2 Scoop the abs and lift the entire body up, raising the torso and hips off the floor without arching the back.
- 3 The body forms a straight line, from the shoulders to the hips, knees and heels.
- 4 Focus on inhaling and stretching the body long. Pull the shoulders away from the neck and squeeze the shoulder blades together.
- 5 With every exhalation, pull the belly button to the spine and maintain a straight line with the body.

Tip: For more of a challenge, while holding the plank, extend one leg straight, hovering just off the floor, stretching the leg long. Inhale and hold, then exhale and return the foot to the floor. Alternate leg lifts.

Tip: Another step up is to place the hands under the shoulders, arms nearly straight, with only a slight bend in the elbows.

Reps: Most climbers can hold the plank for up to three minutes. Take a 30-second break, and then hold the plank again for up to three minutes.



Corkscrew

- 1 Start flat on your back, legs extended straight to the ceiling. Rest the arms beside the hips, palms down.
- 2 Inhale and stretch the spine long.
- 3 Exhale and press the lower back to the floor. Circle the legs away from the body to the right, extending them as long as possible. Continue to circle the legs to the left until they are back in the start position, directly above the hips.
- 4 Inhale and relax the shoulders.
- 5 Stretch the legs out, making them as long as you can, then exhale and

circle in the opposite direction.

Tip: Think of a clock face on the ceiling and stretch the legs up to reach each number on the clock with your toes.

Tip: Make the circle as big as you can with your lower back pressed into the mat. Hips remain level to work the obliques.

Tip: For more of a challenge, raise the arms straight to the ceiling, directly above the shoulders. Keep the shoulders pressed against the floor and continue the exercise.

Reps: Continue to make up to 12 circles in each direction.



Leg Sway

- 1 Start flat on your back, legs extended straight to the ceiling. Extend arms out to the side, palms down.
- 2 Exhale, scoop the abs and keep the legs zippered together. Lower them toward the floor to the right side.
- 3 Inhale and hold the legs as close to the floor as possible without the lower back arching.
- 4 Exhale and move the legs to the opposite side of the body, directly above the hips at the center point.
- 5 Inhale, and hold the legs to the left.
- 6 Exhale and repeat the exercise.

Tip: The back tends to arch when you move the legs, so keep the belly scooped. Only lower the legs as close to the floor as you can without the back arching.

Tip: For more of a challenge, raise the arms straight to the ceiling, directly above the shoulders. Keep the shoulders pressed against the floor and continue the exercise.

Reps: Repeat up to 12 times on each side.



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A good way to improve in Pilates and climbing is to attend a Pilates ball or mat class, where the instructor can offer feedback on your technique. A class environment offers a variety of exercises and levels so you can advance as your core strength increases.

When Kim gets back on her problem a month later, she inhales, pushes for the sloper, moves with control while exhaling. Her feet cut loose, but she's ready. Belly button to the spine, she curves through the lower back and lifts her feet easily to the holds. Kim reaches out with her right foot, using her obliques to pull her hip up and reach the crimp. Kim doesn't usually celebrate, but this time she lets out a scream that makes everyone in the gym turn and watch her finish.

Michelle Hurni is a certified Pilates instructor and has taught for over 10 years. Her book Core Climbing is available at sharpendbooks.com or michellehurni.com.