Your core is too tight... What?!

You're probably wondering how that is even possible - I'm here to tell you that it is!
There are some foundational misunderstandings about what healthy abs are, and more importantly, what they are not.
Core stability and core strength are different. To generate power and strength you need mobility. To have mobility, you need stability. Traditional core stability exercises are described as spinal tracks which include a progression of similar movement of various levels of difficulty. And they all have one thing in common; your core remains still, and in a neutral position and your extremities move around this stable foundation.

All tracks start with easier spinal challenges and sequentially increase their difficulty. Take the dead bug track for example; once you have passed the first level which is raising your arms individually overhead, and you have performed it perfectly by maintaining a neutral pelvis throughout the movement, you progress to the next level. It is only once you have performed each level in sequence correctly that you eventually get to the actual dead bug exercise. In all spinal stability tracks, your core does not move but your extremities do.

Core strengthening exercises are the more traditional core exercises you do when your core moves. Some examples include crunches, seated twist, ab pull-ins and bicycles. Many of these exercises are performed in a state of instability, an approach that is much like putting the roof on a house before the foundation has been poured. Not a good idea.
Tighter does not equal stronger.
'Keep your core tight'. We have all heard it. We hold our breath and suck it in, in hopes it will help. It doesn't. The destructive cycle continues as the tightness builds, creating more tightness and more dysfunction.

Gray Cook, one of my favorite physiotherapists, describes muscles tightness as the "parking brake". This is brilliant! He says "Tightness is often a way that the body uses parking brakes in absence of real, authentic braking system: motor control". Our body's motor control, when used properly, is finely tuned to input and process appropriate output. When we don't move properly and our bodies need to use our "parking brakes", we slow down and are constantly engaged to compensate, causing us to exhibit tightness. The tightness we experience in our bodies is serving a purpose and to correct it is not simply attempting to get rid of the tightness. Proper movement and stability must be achieved so the tightness has no need to return.

Train the movement not the muscle.
Proper core stability is patterned. Spending too much time without adequate mobility and stability often results in a faulty core stabilization pattern. Adding core strength to a bad pattern will only make things worse. Holding a plank for 5 minutes, while impressive, has nothing to do with proper core function. It's how you move that will dictate a functional core. Possessing that core strength in a stationary position doesn't mean you can stabilize yourself during movement. Muscles get their commands from the nervous system. It's doesn't matter how strong the muscle is, if the nervous system - supported proper spinal joint motion - is not ideal, you are wasting your time. This is where chiropractic fits in. Chiropractic adjustments restore proper spinal joint movement, allowing the nervous system to communicate properly to the rest of the body. This includes muscles and patterning the way you move.

Healthy core exercises focus on our alignment, promote stability and improve our body awareness. Core stability is a part of all movement, whether it's moving your big toe, walking briskly, or carrying groceries. For example, say I want to wiggle my big toe. My brain decides to do it, my nervous system engages my core in anticipation/preparation of the movement to stabilize my low back and pelvis; then I wiggle my big toe. Give it a try. What did your core do? Anything? If not, we may have a problem.

Once we understand how we are designed to move it's easier to take that movement into our everyday lives, turning all our movements into proper, core stability activity. Our core requires functional movement to be healthy.
So please, stop saving the last 15 minutes of your workout for core exercises!

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