



# Get That Washboard Stomach

## The Plank

by **Moira Merrithew**

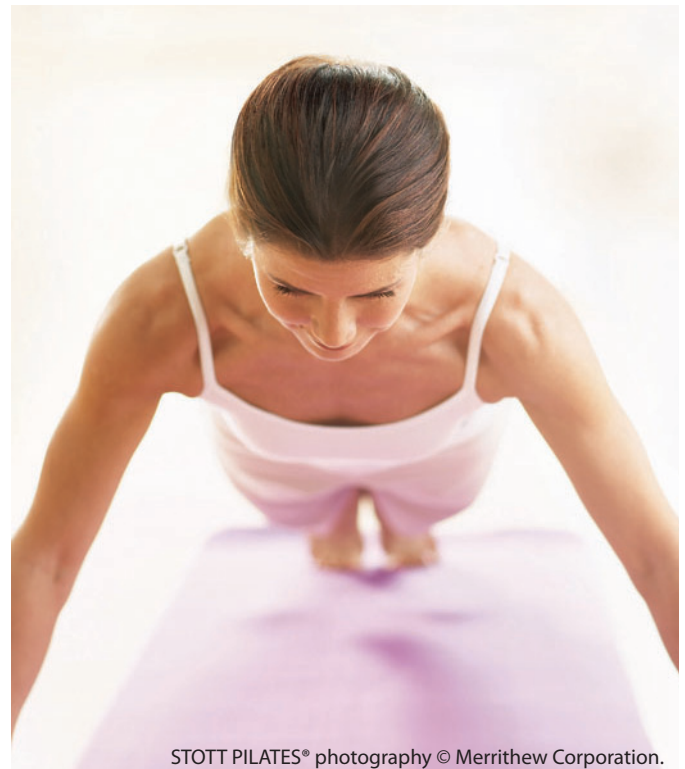
Often referred to as one of the most effective strengthening exercises, the plank position can be used by almost all exercisers at any fitness level. In its most simple version, the torso is held in a neutral position while resting on the hands, arms extended under the shoulders, legs adducted and scapulae stabilized. Maintaining the plank position requires isometric contractions from the core stabilizers including transversus abdominis and multifidus.

Engagement of the internal and external obliques as well as the rectus abdominis is needed to ensure neutral alignment of the spine. Scapular stabilizers including the serratus anterior, middle and lower trapezius and latissimus dorsi are also targeted to hold the shoulder blades in optimal alignment. In the lower body, adductors of the inner thigh help to maintain pelvic position and to activate the muscles of the pelvic floor.

Glutes and hamstrings are also involved in holding the pelvis and femurs stable throughout the duration of the exercise. Successful execution of the plank encourages a full-body connection and optimal strengthening. Modifications of the plank can be performed with either the elbows or knees flexed, reducing the number of joints being stabilized.

Pilates-specific variations of the plank include the “Leg Pull Front Prep” on the mat. The “Leg Pull Front Prep” is an excellent exercise to build up to the full plank while ensuring the best possible alignment. To begin, kneel on hands and knees with the hands right under the shoulders and the knees on the mat. The knees should be slightly behind the pelvis, the hips slightly extended with the legs adducted and the toes tucked under. Most importantly, the lumbar, thoracic and cervical spine should all be in neutral alignment.

On an exhale, extend the knees while maintaining the stable neutral position in the spine and shoulders. On an inhale,



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flex the knees and lower them down to the mat. Gradually extend the length of time in the plank position by adding breaths while there.

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~ is the Executive Director Education at STOTT PILATES®  
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