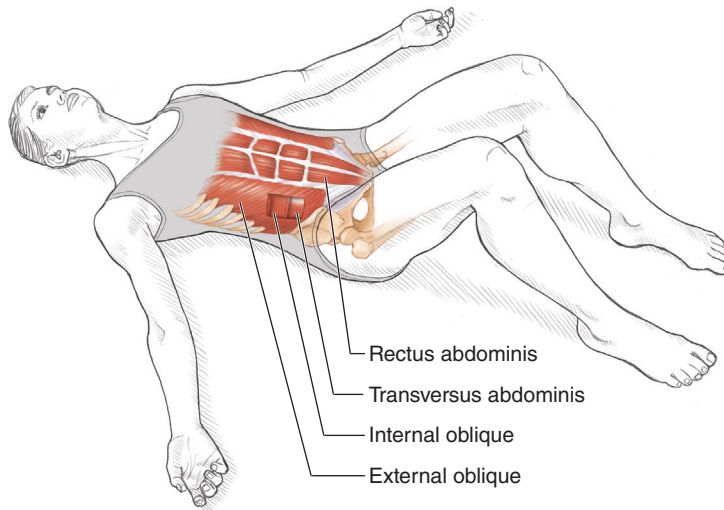


DANCE-FOCUSED EXERCISE

You can perform the following exercises in the progression given. Notice the details in the accompanying anatomical drawings and visualize the muscle fiber arrangements to help you understand the bracing effect that your core provides for your spine. Think about where the muscles attach and how those areas provide steady support for your placement. You want to build up strength to withstand any force that dancing may exert on your spine. Contract your core muscles with deep intensity. Many of the exercises presented in this chapter use other muscles as well, but our focus is on spine stability and helping you learn about and connect with the core muscles that provide that stability.

Abdominal bracing, described in the sidebar, is meant to be used as a deep abdominal warm-up while you visualize the bracing effects of your core. Use this exercise to prepare for the rest of the series presented here.

Abdominal Bracing



1. Lie faceup on the floor with your knees bent and your feet placed comfortably on the floor in parallel position. Your arms can be placed by your sides.
2. Feel lengthening through your spine while relaxing through the base of your neck. Locate your neutral position. Inhale through the nose to prepare while widening through the ribs and lungs.
3. On forced exhalation, begin to contract the deep abdominals flattening your waist as if you were tightening a corset, but maintain neutral position. Gently pull your navel towards your spine without elevating your ribs.

Practice this exercise several times, then repeat it while seated on a ball or other unstable surface and while standing. Remember that the spine and pelvis do not move while you learn to isolate your abdominal muscles. This is a basic isometric contraction of the abdominals; the muscles tighten but do not create any flexion of the spine. Visualize the horizontal fibers tightening as you engage your transversus abdominis (refer back to figure 6.1). Remember to tighten the corset without throwing your ribs and chest up.

Terms such as *stability*, *cocontraction*, and *bracing* can be misleading if you associate them with a stiffening feeling along your spine. The word *stiff* is not one to associate with! Fortunately, this exercise is quite the opposite, because improving your deep core strength will enhance controlled movement of your spine. Because you have more security along your spine, your jumps will improve dramatically. Thus you can use the power in your hips and legs to fly!