



LEVEL 1

The Side Plank

If there's one exercise that every single person I've ever worked with loves to hate more than any other, it's this one – the dreaded side plank.

If you've learned how to do this the RIGHT way and have trained it that way, then you know what I mean. If you haven't, then you might be asking, "why?"

The simple answer is because it's very challenging to do well, and extremely hard to progress it.

I'd also argue it's among the most important.

The reason for this goes back to what actually happens TO our body when we run – the forces that are acting on it from the outside world and the effect of those forces on our body.

The simplest way to look at it is this:

When you run, your arms and legs are moving in a forward/backward direction. In clinical circles, it's referred to as the *sagittal plane* of motion. But, and here's a big BUT...*the forces like gravity and ground reaction that are acting ON your body as you move, don't impact our body in quite the same way.*

In reality, the planes of motion that matter the most for us are different than the sagittal plane.

Here's a video that I hope will help explain this phenomenon. Be sure to watch this as many times as it takes to truly understand this concept.

To perform a side plank, lie on your side with legs out straight and keep hip, shoulder and ankle in line. Support your trunk / upper body on your forearm, placing your elbow directly under your shoulder. Raise hip off the floor and hold it! Avoid rotating forward or backward or moving.

Side Plank TIPS:

- Imagine there's a **tug-of-war going on between your head and your feet**. That should result in lengthening your body, just like a taut rope.
- You could also imagine you're "**wringing out**" a towel. Lengthen, lift the chest, push the hips forward and create as much internal tension as you can!

Your long term goal for the side plank, to be able to hold it without moving, is 2.5 minutes! If you believe this will be a challenge to achieve, you are 100% correct.

My recommendation is to look at this long term: build-up to this very gradually, adding only a few seconds each time you practice it.

Speaking of which, how often should you do these?

Training Guidance

The side plank can be a very fatiguing exercise when you do it to the "max." On those days, you'll want to allow some recovery before you attempt to do another maximum effort.

Here's a general 8-day schedule for how you might approach it. The philosophy behind this schedule is simple:

- You'll only attempt to "max out" 1 day per week.
- The other days are either "form focus" days where you zero in on form, or REST days.
- Once you reach level 2, you can begin to incorporate the Continuous Plank series, which is one very effective way to increase the duration of side planking you can do!

Day 1: Perform your best side plank for each side. Record your time and set it aside. You'll do this again soon.

Day 2: REST

Day 3: Today you'll want to ease back into the exercise and focus on FORM today. Get into the position and create good stiffness, alignment, tension. See how you feel. Hold back today. Don't go anywhere near a max. Make your focus strictly on FORM. Keep the time you hold position to only about 25 to 50% of whatever your max was on day 1.

Day 4: Repeat day 3 or REST (your choice, depending upon how you feel).

Day 5: Challenge yourself a bit more today if you are feeling ready to. Your goal is to up the ante from day 3, aiming to go up to 50 to 75% of whatever your max was on day 1. As always, listen to your body as fatigue can linger.

Day 6: REST

Day 7: Repeat day 3

Day 8 (or day 1 of the next week): Perform your best side plank for each side. Record your time and set it aside. You'll do this again soon.

One last reminder: you can't improve if you're very tired and training with less than optimal form. Be kind to yourself and listen to your body. Recovery is under-rated!

And, remember too that your core is busy and very active during your sport specific training sessions. If you don't believe me, try any of this AFTER a run, and then again beforehand. It is much more challenging afterward! Because your trunk is at work even when it seems like it's going along for the ride.

Train smart and keep it fun, my friend!

