

## Core Movement

A third SP theme, **core movement**, is at once literal and figurative. Balanced movement initiates from or is supported through the core of a person. Full-body movements that initiate in the core tend to be powerful, stable, and coordinated. For example, a runner crouches to gather potential energy into the core, then springs forward through core movement from flexion into extension. Integrated core movement appears effortless (Figure 3.5). The absence of this integrated core connection shows up in heavy, uncoordinated, or weak movements that lack a stable center.

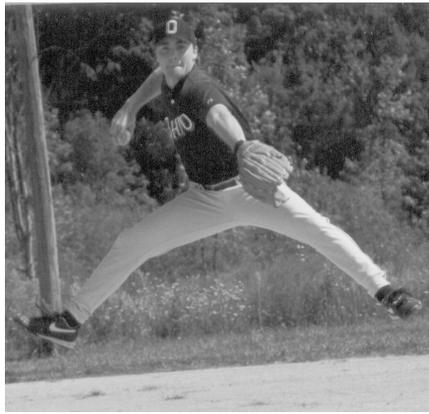
Core integration and movement initiates within the center of the body and is reflected in a postural integrity of the spine. On a figurative level, core movement is behavior that initiates in and is carried out through a person's own volition, or will. This means that the idea or impulse to move arises from within a person, that the person generates the motivation and intention to move and then moves by the force of conscious effort. As a technique, core movement is used to organize movements that either initiate in the center of the body or are stabilized there.

### *Core Movement Patterns*

The human fetus grows into a state of strong fetal flexion centered around the gut. The first patterns of flexion and extension organize the core of the body around the lifeline of the umbilical cord. As the size of the fetus increases, the space inside the womb gradually decreases; growing pressure from the shrinking space compresses the fetus into a deeper and deeper flexion, increasing flexor tone. Thus there is minimal extension in the body until birth. In a normal vaginal delivery, the newborn is pushed and squeezed out by the combined reflexes of both mother and baby into its first action of full-body extension.

The earliest movement patterns actually start at the navel and radiate out of the core of the body. Although an infant may seem to move only an arm or leg, it actually thrusts the limbs out in an action that initiates in the core, at the navel. First introduced in Chapter 1, this basic primitive pattern—expanding out and drawing back in from the center of the body—is called navel radiation. It underlies all subsequent movement patterns and is one of several core patterns. Other patterns organized around the core of the body include pre-spinal movement and mouthing patterns (see Chapter 7 on developmental patterning).

At the beginning of early motor development, core movement patterns initiate within the newborn in the soft tissues of the organs and the nervous system, when the



**Figure 3.5** Core patterns show up in many different sports (photo courtesy of E. Foster).

neuromuscular system is still undeveloped; these earlier intrinsic core patterns underlie and shape subsequent musculoskeletal tone. Extensor tone builds as a newborn undergoes experiences that cause it to reach out, such as reaching out for food, listening to sounds, or visually tracking elements that draw attention. When hunger, thirst, or curiosity arise, the infant naturally extends out for food, drink, or interaction in a relaxed manner. Each one of these patterns develops at the same time that adaptive defense patterns form; therefore, core movement

patterns reflect a person's deepest psychosomatic structure. Core patterns reveal the essence of a person's psychology and reflect a person's most primitive emotional responses. The startle reflex (discussed in Chapter 1) is, for example, a core defense reaction shaped by the development phase that an infant was in when the defenses were first rallied, often when full-body core patterns dominated motor development.

Many somatic methods focus on the center of the body as a place from which to control movement, to improve posture, and to integrate function. The Pilates system of exercise conditions the core with slow, strengthening movements initiated in and controlled by the muscles of the abdomen and waist (see "Pilates" in Chapter 11). Rolwing achieves structural integration by always stretching myofascia in relationship to the core, working to establish dimensional balance between the trunk and limbs (see "Rolwing" in Chapter 12). In Reichian models of body-based psychotherapy, the flow of energy along the core, between the head and the tail, reflects psychological health.

As discussed in Chapter 2, most of the muscles that stabilize the spine and ensure an aligned posture lie close to the spine, along the core of the body. Although their contractions are more subtle and difficult to feel, the stabilizers ensure a centered balance in the body in both posture and movement.

The core of the body, particularly the spine, is often associated with the state of being "centered." Many forms of yoga and meditation work on the premise that a centered body cultivates a calm mind (Figure 3.6). Although people usually speak of being centered as a metaphorical experience, it is also a physical experience that can be observed in the alignment of the spine.

### *Psychosomatic Patterns and the Core*

Core movement has a strong psychological component. Many body-centered schools of psychotherapy equate the core of the body with the center of a person's physical and psychological self. As mentioned earlier, being centered is not only a psychological experience of self-control but an

## Patterning Exercise #18: Core Movement and Navel Radiation

1. Lie on your back. Extend both arms and legs along diagonal pathways into a big X position (PE Fig. 18a). Keep your lower back connected to the floor. Avoid arching your lumbar spine or pulling it up from the floor.



PE Fig. 18a

2. Reach out through all your limbs, taking out the slack between your fingers, toes, head, and tail, and your navel. Take a few deep breaths.



PE Fig. 18b

3. As you exhale, allow your abdomen to sink toward your lower back and draw all your limbs toward your navel (PE Fig. 18b). Simultaneously roll to your side, curling into full-body flexion (PE Fig. 18c).



PE Fig. 18c

4. Inhale and extend your limbs back out while rolling onto your back, to your starting position. Extend all your limbs from your navel, keeping your abdominal wall pulled into your lower back.
5. Exhale again and repeat on the other side. Imagine your body like a starfish, extending all the limbs out as you breathe in, and curling to your side as you breathe out. Move slowly, in a relaxed manner, sensing weight sinking on your underside as you move.

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actual physical posture centered around the core of the body. In the process of maturation, a person grows from the core out. Developmental psychologist Daniel Stern discusses the “core self” as the psychic structure from which psychological and emotional expression stem.<sup>68</sup> A psychologically healthy person identifies with an inner locus of experience rooted in the torso. In contrast, a person with narcissistic tendencies denies inner feelings for the sake of an outer image of self, building a sense of self based on what other people see and think rather than on inner feelings. The narcissistic body type is, in a sense, “shallow,” lacking integration between the inner and outer layers, between the core and the periphery. Bioenergetic psychiatrist Alexander Lowen describes the narcissistic body as one with “heavy musculature” on the outside but with reduced spontaneity and aliveness on the inside (see Chapter 15).<sup>69</sup>



Figure 3.6 Yoga and meditation help many people to center themselves.

Conversely, emotions create autonomic responses, which change the visceral sensations that arise from the trunk. Many schools of body-centered psychotherapy cultivate the tracking of physical sensation in the organs as a tool for processing emotions. They are generally described as “knots” or “butterflies” in the stomach, or “gut feelings” or “pains in the heart.” Stanley Keleman, a pioneering somatic psychologist, describes an emotion-based, “pulsatory” continuum that builds an energetic charge (build-up of energy in one place) in the core and finds expression through the limbs (see Chapter 15). Healthy expression occurs when a person can sequence feelings from the trunk through the limbs, bridging the core and the periphery, the inner life with the outer life, and self with other in relationship. The continuity between feelings and expression takes place as movement sequences from the core to the limbs.

In this model, emotional holding patterns are described as emotions that do not fully develop in the core or are unable to sequence between the inner and outer layers. They are either not given the time or attention they need to incubate in the trunk, or a person is unable to allow emotions to sequence between the core and periphery and express them. As an example, a person unable to speak about his feelings might block the energetic flow in a tightly held jaw or pursed lips. Or an angry person might block the full expression of anger midstream in a weak kicking or stamping gesture that does not adequately sequence from the core to the foot.

The spine reflects the “backbone” of personality and is often associated with integrity, strength, and conviction. Wilhelm Reich, who is often referred to as the “grandfather of somatic psychology,” recognized how emotional experiences moved along the core in pulsations between the head