Strong Foundations

Core strength, hip and ankle stability & mobility

Move with control.

Build a routine you can repeat.

04 weeks of gradual practice

03 sessions each week

12 sessions to make it a habit

A free Train With CK guide

Start with comfortable movement, short core holds and supported balance. Build consistency before adding difficulty. No login, gym membership or special equipment required.

Time: About 15-20 minutes in week 1; 25-30 minutes thereafter

Equipment: A stable counter, a sturdy chair, a mat or carpet, and an optional light dumbbell or securely closed small bag. No bands required.

Version 1.0 / October 30, 2026. General fitness education, not individualized treatment. Read the start-here page before exercising.

Start here

Generally healthy adults, including adults 40+, who can exercise independently. Use the standing or seated alternatives if floor work is unsuitable.

Train gently. Keep support nearby.

01. Choose a clear, non-slip space. Use a fixed counter for support; a rolling or folding chair is not suitable. Wear secure footwear for standing work.

02. If you have a recent injury or operation, unexplained pain, significant balance problems, or a condition that limits exercise, get guidance from your clinician before using this general program. It is not injury rehabilitation or a fall-risk assessment.

03. Mild muscle effort is expected. Stop an exercise for sharp pain, joint pinching, radiating symptoms, numbness, dizziness or unusual breathlessness. Seek urgent help for chest pain, fainting or sudden weakness.

04. Keep effort around 3-5 out of 10: controlled work while breathing normally. Stop each set before technique deteriorates. Use less range, fewer reps or the easier version when needed.

05. Progress only when the current level is comfortable and symptoms have not worsened later that day or by the next day. If not, repeat the prior week or reduce the dose. Persistent symptoms need individual assessment.

Your working rules

Use the same dose on each side; do not diagnose or force away asymmetry. Short, controlled motion is useful. Bigger motion is not automatically better.

This focused program complements walking and other appropriate activity. It is not a complete whole-body fitness plan or a substitute for individual assessment.

Your four-week roadmap

Train on three nonconsecutive days, such as Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Start each session with one warm-up round, then complete the selected main session in order. Each listed dose is per round; / side means do both sides.

Week	Mon / Wed / Fri	Main rounds
1	A / B / A	1
2	B / A / B	2
3	A / B / A	2
4	B / A / B	2

Week 1 / Learn the positions

Use one round of each main session. Choose the easier versions freely. Learn a calm breathing rhythm and steady movement.

Week 2 / Build consistency

Add a second round only if week 1 feels comfortable and recovery is good. Keep the same repetitions and short holds.

Week 3 / Add a little capacity

Use the small dose increases shown. Keep the same range and load. You may stay at week 2 instead.

Week 4 / Make it repeatable

Repeat week 3. If consistently easy, change just one thing: a slightly fuller comfortable range OR a slightly heavier suitcase hold. Keep counter support. No maximum-effort tests.

Rest: Rest 20-40 seconds between exercises and 60-90 seconds between rounds. Take longer if needed. For repeated holds, relax about 5 seconds between holds.

Optional easy days: Optional easy-day practice: one warm-up round, then one 10-second supported balance hold per side. About 5 minutes. Keep it easy or take a full rest day; do not repeat the full strength session daily.

Session A / Core + hip foundation

Warm up once: 4 relaxed breaths, 6 ankle rocks per side, then 6 supported hip hinges. Instructions are on page 6.

Exercise	Weeks 1-2	Weeks 3-4
Modified curl-up	4 holds x 5 sec	4 holds x 8 sec
Knee-supported side plank	3 holds x 5 sec / side	3 holds x 8 sec / side
Bird dog	4 reps x 5 sec / side	5 reps x 5 sec / side
Glute bridge	8 reps	10 reps
Supported heel raise	8 reps	10 reps
Supported single-leg balance	2 holds x 10 sec / side	2 holds x 15 sec / side

Rounds: Week 1 = one. Weeks 2-4 = two, only when ready. The table gives the dose in each round. Do both sides when listed.

Rest: Rest 20-40 seconds between exercises and 60-90 seconds between rounds. Take longer if needed. For repeated holds, relax about 5 seconds between holds.

Quality over duration

You should finish with enough energy to perform another clean repetition. Reset between holds and keep breathing. Do not turn short core holds into long endurance tests.

Optional finish: one 15-second supported split-stance hip stretch per side, then three gentle 5-second seated cushion squeezes. See page 10.

Session B / Standing control + ankles

Use the same one-round warm-up as Session A. Hold the counter for standing exercises, and keep your balance practice separate from loading.

Exercise	Weeks 1-2	Weeks 3-4
Knee-supported side plank	3 holds x 5 sec / side	3 holds x 8 sec / side
Bird dog	4 reps x 5 sec / side	5 reps x 5 sec / side
Supported hip abduction	8 reps / side	10 reps / side
Seated bent-knee heel raise	10 reps	12 reps
Supported toe raise	8 reps	10 reps
Light suitcase hold	15 sec / side	20 sec / side

Rounds: Week 1 = one. Weeks 2-4 = two, only when ready. The table gives the dose in each round. Do both sides when listed.

Rest: Rest 20-40 seconds between exercises and 60-90 seconds between rounds. Take longer if needed. For repeated holds, relax about 5 seconds between holds.

A steady stance comes first

The suitcase hold is deliberately light and supported. It should not pull you off balance. Use the unloaded alternative whenever needed.

Optional finish: use the same gentle options as Session A. The optional work is not required for progress.

Warm-up / Breathe, rock, hinge

Supported breathing

1. Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat. Use a small head cushion if needed. Rest hands around your lower ribs.

2. Inhale gently through your nose. Exhale comfortably through your mouth and let the ribs settle. Keep the jaw and shoulders relaxed.

3. Keep your natural back position; do not force your spine flat. Resume ordinary breathing between breaths if needed.

Make it easier: Sit upright in a supported chair and use the same easy breathing.

Avoid: Forceful exhales, breath-holding or trying to force a posture correction. Stop if lightheaded.

Supported ankle rock

1. Face a wall with both hands supported. Place one foot forward, close enough to the wall for a comfortable movement.

2. Keep that heel down and gently move the front knee forward in line with the middle toes. Return slowly.

3. Use a small, comfortable range; the foot stays grounded. Repeat on the other side.

Make it easier: Sit in a chair and gently move the knee forward over the foot while keeping the heel down.

Avoid: Forcing through front-of-ankle pinching, bouncing, or lifting the heel to reach farther.

Supported hip hinge

1. Stand facing a sturdy counter with feet about hip-width apart and hands supported. Soften the knees.

2. Move your hips backward as the torso inclines from the hips. Keep your back in a comfortable, steady position.

3. Return to standing by bringing the hips forward. Start with a short range.

Make it easier: Stand closer to the counter and make the movement smaller.

Avoid: Rounding deeply, throwing the head back, or forcing a hamstring stretch.

Exercise library / Core

Modified curl-up

1. Lie on your back with one knee bent and the other leg straight. Support the natural low-back curve with your hands.

2. Gently firm the abdomen. Lift the head and upper shoulders a small amount as one unit without tucking the chin or flattening the low back.

3. Keep breathing during the short hold, then lower fully and relax for about 5 seconds. Switch the bent leg halfway through the holds.

Make it easier: Keep head and shoulders down; practice a gentle abdominal brace while breathing for the same short holds.

Avoid: Neck strain, pulling the head forward, a sit-up motion, or bearing down.

Knee-supported side plank

1. Lie on your side with knees bent and elbow under shoulder. Pad the knees and forearm if needed.

2. Lift the hips a little, supporting yourself on the forearm and bent knees. Keep shoulders and hips facing the same direction.

3. Breathe throughout each hold. Lower fully for about 5 seconds between holds, then change sides.

Make it easier: Standing side-wall press: place a bent forearm on the wall, feet close to the wall, and lean very slightly into it while keeping the body straight.

Avoid: Shoulder pain, twisting, sagging, or holding your breath. A floor side plank is optional, not a requirement.

Bird dog

1. Start on hands and knees with hands below shoulders and knees below hips. Gently brace while breathing.

2. Slide one leg back; if steady, lift it only to about hip height and reach the opposite arm forward. Keep the pelvis level.

3. Hold briefly, return slowly and alternate sides. Reset fully between repetitions.

Make it easier: Move one limb at a time, or stand with hands on a counter and slide one foot back without arching.

Avoid: Reaching so high that the back arches, twisting the hips, or pressing through wrist pain.

Exercise library / Hips + balance

Glute bridge

1. Lie on your back with knees bent, feet flat and arms resting beside you.

2. Press through both feet and lift the hips until the trunk and thighs are comfortably aligned. Keep ribs from flaring.

3. Pause for 1 second, then lower slowly. Stop the lift before the back begins to arch.

Make it easier: Use a smaller lift. If floor access is difficult, use the supported hip hinge for 8 slow repetitions instead.

Avoid: Pushing through back pain or hamstring cramping. Reset foot position or use the easier option.

Supported hip abduction

1. Hold a counter with both hands. Stand tall with knees soft and weight evenly grounded through the standing foot.

2. Move the other leg a short distance to the side with toes mostly forward and pelvis level.

3. Return slowly without leaning the trunk. Complete the repetitions, then switch sides.

Make it easier: Slide the moving foot sideways along the floor instead of lifting it.

Avoid: Swinging the leg, leaning sideways or hiking the hip to gain range.

Supported single-leg balance

1. Stand next to a sturdy counter with a hand on it and eyes open. Find contact through the heel and bases of the big and little toes.

2. Shift weight to one leg. Lift the other foot slightly only if steady; keep the standing knee soft.

3. Keep the pelvis level and breathe. Put the foot down between holds and repeat both sides.

Make it easier: Leave the other toes lightly on the floor as a kickstand. Keep firm hand support.

Avoid: Closing the eyes, standing on unstable cushions or letting go of support to chase a longer time.

Exercise library / Ankles

Supported heel raise

1. Stand with both hands on a stable counter, feet hip-width apart and knees comfortably straight, not locked.

2. Rise onto the balls of both feet for about 2 seconds, keeping pressure through the bases of the big and little toes.

3. Lower the heels for about 2 seconds. Use a range you control without rolling outward.

Make it easier: Sit in a chair and raise both heels while the balls of the feet stay on the floor.

Avoid: Bouncing, rolling the ankles outward or pushing through Achilles or foot pain.

Seated bent-knee heel raise

1. Sit in a sturdy chair with knees bent about 90 degrees and feet flat below the knees.

2. Keep the balls of both feet on the floor and lift the heels slowly.

3. Lower slowly. Keep the ankles from rolling and the toes relaxed.

Make it easier: Use a smaller range and fewer repetitions.

Avoid: Pressing hard on the knees, curling the toes or bouncing.

Supported toe raise

1. Stand holding a counter with both heels on the floor. Keep your body nearly upright.

2. Lift the forefoot and toes a small amount while the heels remain grounded.

3. Lower gently and repeat without rocking your trunk backward.

Make it easier: Sit with heels on the floor and lift the forefeet in the same way.

Avoid: Leaning backward, losing balance or forcing a painful range.

Hold + optional mobility

Light suitcase hold

1. Stand beside a counter with feet hip-width apart. Hold a light dumbbell or a small, securely closed bag in one hand; rest the other hand on the counter.

2. Choose a load that lets you stay upright, keep shoulders level and breathe normally.

3. Hold without leaning or shrugging. Set the object down safely, change sides, and repeat.

Make it easier: Use no load and practice a comfortable upright stance with counter support.

Avoid: Heavy loading, breath-holding or gripping through pain. This is a hold, not a balance challenge.

Supported split-stance hip stretch

1. Stand facing a counter with both hands supported and one foot a short step behind the other. Keep both feet stable.

2. Gently tighten the back-leg buttock and move the pelvis slightly forward without arching the low back.

3. Feel only a mild stretch near the front of the back hip. Breathe, release, and change sides.

Make it easier: Use a shorter stance or skip it if there is pinching or difficulty balancing.

Avoid: Deep lunging, forcing the pelvis forward, or stretching through joint pain.

Seated cushion squeeze

1. Sit tall in a stable chair with feet flat. Place a small cushion or rolled towel between your knees.

2. Gently squeeze the cushion without holding your breath or moving your trunk.

3. Relax fully between short holds. Use light effort, not a maximal squeeze.

Make it easier: Use less pressure or omit if it produces groin discomfort.

Avoid: A hard maximal squeeze or pain. Use this beginner option before considering demanding Copenhagen variations with a coach.

Your 12-session tracker

Mark a session when completed. Repeating a week is allowed. There is no deadline to earn the next level.

Week	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3
1	[ ] A Date: _____	[ ] B Date: _____	[ ] A Date: _____
2	[ ] B Date: _____	[ ] A Date: _____	[ ] B Date: _____
3	[ ] A Date: _____	[ ] B Date: _____	[ ] A Date: _____
4	[ ] B Date: _____	[ ] A Date: _____	[ ] B Date: _____

Check in at the start and after week 4

Use the same chair, support, footwear and comfortable effort. These observations are personal comparisons, not diagnostic tests or pass/fail standards.

What to notice	Start	After week 4
Ankle rocks: comfortable range with heel down	_____	_____
Balance: hand support needed for a 10-sec hold	_____	_____
Core: easier option or standard option used	_____	_____
Consistency: sessions completed	_____	_____

After the four weeks

Repeat the comfortable level, continue an appropriate broader fitness routine, or ask CK for an individualized plan. More difficulty is not required simply because the calendar changed.

Free program: trainwithck.com/foundations
Personalized coaching: trainwithck.com/start?program=online
Meal-prep guide: trainwithck.com/meal-prep

Learning influences + references

This guide draws on broad educational principles while using its own beginner-friendly sequence and dosage. It makes no promise to fix posture, cure pain or prevent every injury.

Dr. Stuart McGill

Short trunk-endurance holds and the curl-up, side-bridge and bird-dog exercise family.

Read the educator's public article

Conor Harris

Attention to relaxed breathing and comfortable ribcage-pelvis positioning during movement.

Read the educator's public article

Dr. Aaron Horschig / Squat University

Grounded foot contact, controlled hip motion, and supported lower-limb stability.

Read the educator's public article

Additional exercise and safety reading

AAOS: Foot and Ankle Conditioning Program

National Institute on Aging: Exercise types and gradual progression

MedlinePlus: Exercises to help prevent falls

An original Train With CK educational program assembled with AI assistance. The educators above are learning influences, not authors, collaborators or endorsers. This is not a reproduction of their branded programs. Exercise selections, doses and progression are specific to this guide; they have not been clinically validated as a combined protocol.

The sources support general educational principles; none has reviewed or approved this exact four-week plan. The exercise instructions and schedule here are original wording, not copied course material.

Prepared for Train With CK / Carroll Chrisman
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