

Fitness Tip: Incorporate Unilateral Exercises for Greater Strength!

by Jen Smirl

Unilateral refers to using only one arm or leg during an exercise. Bilateral refers to using both arms or legs at the same time; common bilateral exercises include the bench press, squat, shoulder press, and leg press, just to name a few. Unilateral movements engage the core muscles more and help the 'weaker' limb get stronger. These are important for injury prevention in addition to overall strength benefits and efficiency of movement. Some unilateral moves you can do at home are the side plank, single leg squat and single leg deadlift.

Side Plank: Start on your side with your feet together and your hand directly below your shoulder. Contract your core and raise your hips until your body is in a straight line from head to feet. Hold the position without letting your hips drop for 15-30 seconds, then repeat on the other side. 5 reps on each side. Modify by being on forearm instead of hand.



Single Leg Squat: Find a flat surface, like a stable chair or couch. Stand 2 feet in front of it, facing away. Lift one foot and put it on the couch or chair. You can dig your toes in or let the foot lie flat. Lower your back knee down toward the floor. Try to stay tall throughout movement. Then, come back up to complete one rep. Do 10 reps on one leg, then switch to the other leg.



Single Leg Deadlift: Start in a standing position with the feet about hip-width apart, the back tall and straight, and the knees slightly bent. Push the hips backwards and start to lift the left foot off the ground. Keep the back straight while straightening the leg directly behind the body. Continue leaning forward to a comfortable distance, and then stand up by squeezing the right glute. Complete 10 reps on the left leg before switching to the right. Hands can be held out for balance or for an added challenge, hold weight in one or both hands.

