



FIT FOR LIFE

You planker

Queen of planking Carol Westmorland says the technique is quick and incredibly effective

Should I want to, I could spend an entire day performing the plank.

Equally, if the plank were to become an Olympic sport, I would win gold. The plank and I have been acquainted now for some 18 years. My Olympic Performance Plan would probably have seen me through one gold, with the possibility of a second, followed by retirement. I would now be training future Olympian plankers.

The appeal of the plank is that it creates abdominals of steel. Excluding injury, there has only been one occasion that I could not perform; the day following the Cycling Time Trials National Championship 24 hour when I cycled 445 miles. Unsurprisingly.

A study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research showed that we use 100 per cent of our abdominal muscles when we plank. It is a challenge. Dormant abdominals struggle.

To plank, you lie flat on the floor face down and raise yourself to balance on your toes and elbows, keeping your back long - pushing back through your heels to lengthen. Try to breathe. Get it right and you can't fail but to engage those abdominal muscles.

Once engaged those deep abdominal muscles create a stabilising corset protecting your back. Get it wrong and your back is under pressure. First time you may barely get lift off but those abdominal muscles get the message and it becomes easier.

Perfect timing? 10 seconds. You can increase the number of times you perform a 10-second plank.



'IF I DIDN'T PLANK EVERYDAY I MAY ONLY JUST BE VERGING ON EXISTENCE'

You do not need to hold a plank for any longer and if you can then it has been proven that those extra seconds are of no use. You have adapted. Move on.

Feel you may pop? You could be right. Blood pressure is raised if you force a plank. You could very well explode. Instead, rest on your knees with your bottom tucked under if at first you are struggling. My blood pressure is 90/60.

If I didn't plank everyday I may only just be verging on existence, and if that is not reason enough to continue my planking habit, what is?



Carol Westmorland lives in the Eden Valley. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates. www.pilates-cumbria.uk