

for ACROBATS

By Sally Anderson

Modeled by professional performer Lorry D'Ercole

Photos by Mim Maree

These moves are tailored to help acrobats build a good balance of internal stabilization and strength, along with efficient global muscle strength, resulting in greater control, power and precision in every movement. Pilates is brilliant for finding the smaller muscles to support powerful moves and offers a unique environment for training acrobat-specific skills. I find that acrobats tend to be very compliant clients—they know their bodies and welcome anything that will help their physical performance and offer risk reduction.

But even if you're nowhere near being able to walk a tightrope or contort your body into a pretzel, these exercises are fantastic for challenging your strength and control. Try to do this routine two to three times per week for a boost in your overall strength and core power.

HOLLOW ROCK

Lorry, the model here, named this exercise Hollow Rock, since it feels like you need to create a hollow "as strong as a rock" to do it. It is a "pick up" from an extended supine position into a lengthened, scooped one that activates every fiber of the body.

PROP: none

PURPOSE: develops abdominal strength and whole-body engagement

SETUP: Lie on your back, contracting your abdominal wall and spinal muscles toward each other, while reaching your arms and legs in opposite directions.

1. Exhale, reaching your arms and legs away, so far in either direction that you lift up into a long, scooped position.

2. Inhale, lengthening back down. Start with 4–6 reps and build up to 10.



VARIATION: From the Single-Leg Stretch starting position, extend out to Hollow Rock.

ROLL-DOWN RIGHT AGAINST THE WALL

PROP: wall

PURPOSE: increases abdominal control in full forward flexion, a movement that is integrated extensively by acrobats; forces you to work the deep abdominals

SETUP: Stand tall against a wall, making sure that your heels and body are pressing into it, and your legs are straight.

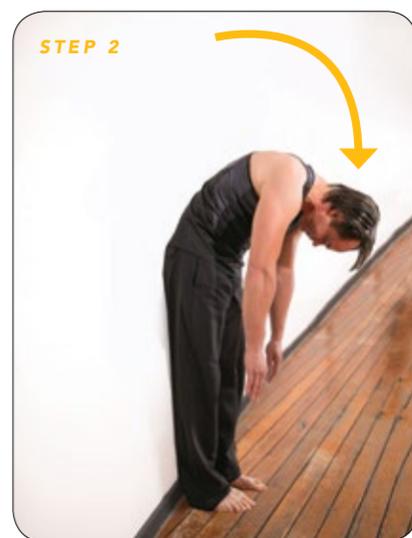
1. Inhale, lengthening your spine and engaging all your muscles to grow taller up the wall.

2. Exhale, rolling down from the crown of your head to full forward flexion, peeling sequentially away from the wall.

3. Hold the forward position, deepening your abdominals as you inhale, relaxing your head and allowing your shoulders to hang.

4. Exhale, articulating back to standing, heels anchoring into the floor as you progressively stack your body against the wall to return to standing. Do 4–6 reps.

MODIFICATION: This is harder than it looks—build up to this move over time by starting with your heels a little away from the wall where you can manage the Roll-Down, and then over time, progressively bring them back to completely against it.



MAGIC CIRCLE HULA

PROP: Magic Circle

PURPOSE: trains the anterior oblique muscular sling (back of the waist); works the essential combination of the obliques with the adductors (inner thighs) to increase pelvic stability and control

SETUP: Lie on your back, with your knees bent hip-width apart and feet flat on the floor. Place the Magic Circle in between your knees, and your hands behind your head. Lift your head, neck and tips of your shoulder blades.

1. Exhale, squeezing both legs into the Circle as you rotate your torso to the right, bringing your left shoulder toward your right knee.

2. Inhale, returning to the starting position, releasing the squeeze on the Circle.

3. Repeat the sequence on your other side. Do 4–6 sets.



TIPS: Make sure to maintain a neutral pelvis, so your hips disassociate effectively and allow for correct muscle patterning. Aim for a smaller, more precise movement, rather than a forceful abdominal lift.

MODIFICATION: Start with Chest Lifts as you squeeze the Circle.

ADVANCED: Do the same movement with your legs in tabletop and the Circle between your knees, or with extended legs and the Circle between your ankles.

GLIDING SUPPORT SERIES

PROPS: push-up handles; small towels (or gliding discs)

PURPOSE: facilitates integrated whole-body control and strengthening

SETUP: Holding the push-up handles, place your feet on the towels, and get into a Plank position, with your shoulders directly over your wrists.

1. Exhale, pulling up into a Pike position, bringing your straight legs underneath you and in line with your hips; inhale, returning to Plank.

2. Exhale, pulling up into a Straddle Pike position, widening your legs; inhale, returning to Plank.

3. Exhale, scooping your abdominals and bending your knees under your torso, between your arms and then forward into a Back Support position.

4. Do 3–6 sets of the entire sequence.

MODIFICATIONS: Do one step at a time. Decrease the range of motion.

VARIATION: Add Leg-Pulls to the Front Support and Back Support positions, and Oblique Pull-Ups after the Straddle Pike.



STEP 2

STEP 3

SALLY ANDERSON has trained performers on two tours of Cirque du Soleil, as well as ongoing training for theater acrobatic dancers. She has also taught Australian Olympic Swim team members, dancers and elite-level athletes. She is the director of PilatesITC, a government-registered training organization, and PilatesInt Studios in Australia.

