



## Sample Class: Extend Yourself!

Get students out of their core rut with a class that takes the spine through all actions.

Here's an idea: Add spinal stabilization (in neutral) and mobilization movement to your core-training repertoire. Students' posture will improve, and the exercises will ensure that daily living activities involving extension and rotation are efficient and pain-free. This workout emphasizes all spinal actions (flexion, extension, lateral flexion and rotation), beginning with standing balance, progressing to prone position on the floor and returning to standing—all without doing a single traditional crunch.

### Extend Yourself! Details

**GOAL/EMPHASIS:** spinal extension with and without rotation to emphasize complete, comprehensive core training

**TOTAL TIME:** approximately 30 minutes

**EQUIPMENT NEEDED:** mats

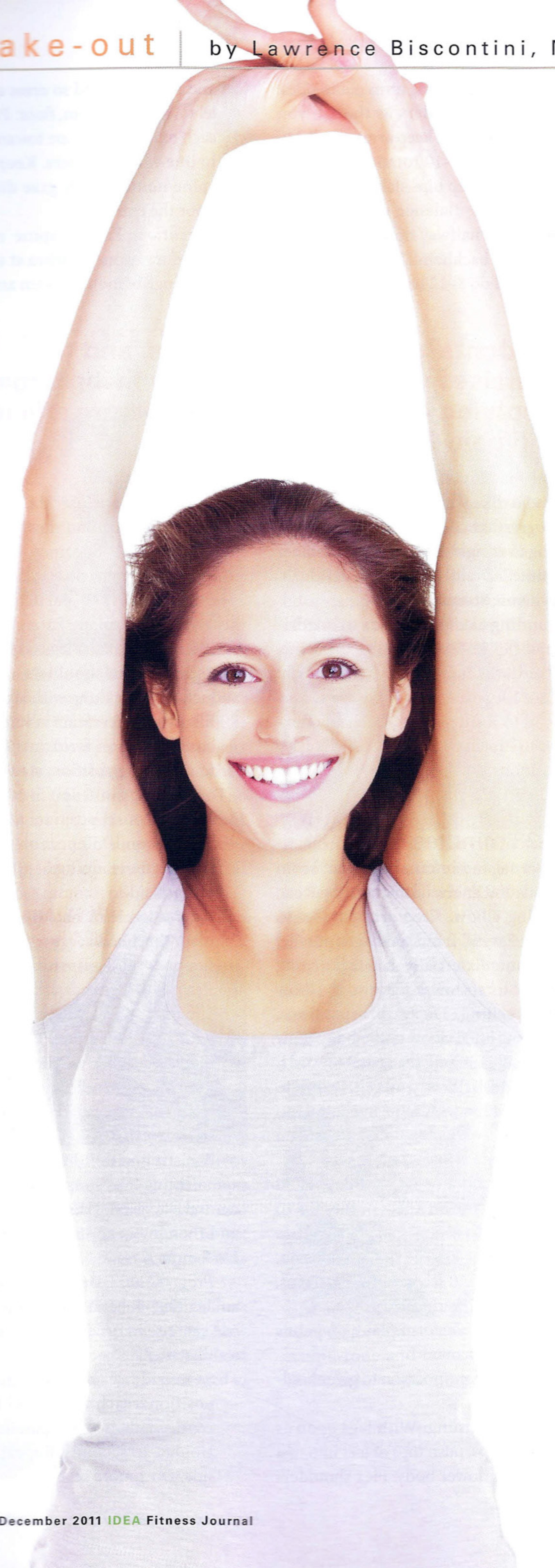
**MUSIC:** instrumental mind-body music with about 100 beats per minute

*Note: For entire workout, activate the deep pelvic-floor muscles and continuously compress the transversus abdominis.*

### Standing Warm-Up (5–7 minutes)

- Standing flexion: Take arms overhead and do 8–12 small-range-of-motion spinal flexions, moving ribs and hips toward each other just enough to feel rectus abdominis and spinal extensors engage.

*Progression:* Balance on single leg, changing legs for each flexion. >>





- Standing twist: Bring arms out to sides, abducting shoulders as though you were an airplane; keep arms parallel to floor and do 8–12 rotations/twists to each side. Keep hips stable.

*Progression:* Balance on single leg, changing legs halfway through reps.

- Standing backbend: Take arms overhead and do 8–12 backbends, moving

and reach forward so arms are parallel to, but away from, floor. Palms face each other; thumbs are toward sky and in line with shoulders. Keep cervical spine neutral, with gaze directed at floor the entire time.

*Execution:* Extend spine off floor, “peeling” away one vertebra at a time. At end of range of motion, open arms wider

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head in line with spine.

*Progression:* Add external rotation, looking over right (R) or left (L) shoulder each time.

### Dynamic Stretches:

- Standing cat: Take hands to quadriceps, flex knees and round the spine.
- Quadratus lumborum (QL) stretch: Place L leg over R and reach arms overhead to R side, then L, laterally flexing to stretch QL. Repeat, switching leg positions.

## Work Phase (20–23 minutes)

- External and internal rotation: From hands and knees, take R hand by R ear, flexing elbow. Keep arm parallel to floor. Extend L hip so L leg is parallel to floor. Externally rotate, turning upper torso toward sky so R elbow faces ceiling. Do 8–12 repetitions, bringing lifted elbow under body (now internally rotating the spine) toward L knee, which flexes to meet it. Return to start position with spine in neutral (no part of L leg touches floor). Repeat on other side. Perform 2 more sets.
- Plank to cobra or upward dog: Hold forearm plank on knees or toes for 10 seconds, with neutral spine. Slowly place hips on floor, engage spinal extension, and hold for 10 seconds. Do 8–10 reps, raising and lowering to a slow count.

*Progression:* Perform plank on palms instead of forearms.

Lower to prone position to give shoulders a rest.

- Open swimming: With legs open as wide as hips, push tops of feet into mat to anchor lower body. Flex shoulders

than shoulders, close them again to shoulder distance, and slowly lower vertebrae to floor. Succinct verbal cues include “Lift, open, close and lower.”

*Progression:* For participants with healthy lumbar spines: Extend hips while extending spine. Raise legs off floor, knees extended. When shoulders abduct and adduct, do same thing with legs.

- Elbow transfer: Start in knee- or toe-based plank on forearms. Turn body to side-lying position, stacking knees or ankles. Hold for 5–10 seconds. Return to start position, and hold for 5–10 seconds. Repeat on other side, and continue, doing 5–10 more reps on each side.

*Progression:* While holding side plank, “thread the needle,” moving top arm under body and returning. Spine will rotate and further engage obliques.

- Hip lift: Lie on L side, lining up knees with hips and spine. Flex knees for increased stability. Prop yourself on L forearm, perpendicular to spine, palm down, fingers open to reduce shoulder stress.

Assisting with R hand, laterally flex spine, lifting hips so spine moves toward neutral extension. Hold for 5–10 seconds, and then lower and raise for 8–12 reps. Do 2 more sets.

*Progression:* Extend knees and stack ankles. Keep R hand above body throughout exercise in order to train obliques as stabilizers.

- Same-side reach: From quadruped position, reach R arm and R leg forward simultaneously, parallel to floor. Hold 8–10 seconds. Repeat on other side. Do 2 more sets.

*Progression:* Engage in little spinal extension while holding up same arm and leg, bending spine slightly backward.

- Repeat side-lying hip lifts on R side.
- Reaching bridge: Lie supine, feet hip distance apart, knees flexed so feet are under knees. Extend hips into bridge position. Reach R hand overhead toward floor, past L shoulder. Keeping spine in neutral, do 8–12 reps and then switch sides. Do 2 more sets on each side.

*Progression:* Rotate spine a bit, looking toward side to which arm reaches.

- Twisting thigh stretch: Kneel with knees hip distance apart. Pad knees for more comfort. Keeping spine in neutral, hinge at knees and extend spine, shoulders flexing forward for counterbalance. As you hinge backward, rotate L and return. Repeat to R. Repeat 6–12 reps, and then do 2 more sets. Focus not on how far you can hinge back but how extended and neutral your spine remains.

*Progression:* As you rotate, touch floor with one arm.

- Wide twist: Stand with feet wider than shoulders, thighs externally rotated and arms overhead, hands together. Squat down into wide plié. Lift body onto L leg, bringing R knee toward navel, arms doing diagonal chopping pattern across knee. Return to start position and repeat on other side. Repeat 6–12 repetitions on each side.

## Stretch Phase (2–4 minutes)

Perform these stretches:

- cat/cow
- thread the needle
- child’s pose
- sleeping pigeon pose for each leg
- standing cat, supporting hands on quadriceps with flexed knees ■

*Lawrence Biscontini, MA, has received awards from ACE, IDEA, Inner IDEA, Can-Fit-Pro and ECA. He creates group fitness and personal training programming on an international level for numerous clubs and spas and has been a consultant and trainer for leading spas in Europe, Asia and the United States. Find him at [www.findlawrence.com](http://www.findlawrence.com).*

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