

Ten Steps To Get the Most From Your Exercise Program: Part 4

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Original publish date: April 2004



One of the most frequent questions clients ask, is “What can I do to strengthen my stomach muscles and make them look better.” This is a simple question that has a complex answer, for two basic reasons. Training the abdominal muscles is not just about exercise, it also involves the diet. You can’t achieve six pack abs, if you are drinking a six pack every night. The abdominal muscle group is complex and provides vital functions to the body. They assist in stabilizing the spine, support the organs, lungs and digestive system. The anterior (front) oblique system works synergistically with the legs, torso and shoulders. The posterior (back) oblique contribute to the combined actions of pulling and trunk rotation. The deep abdominal muscles play a vital role in stabilizing the spinal column and pelvis. The goal for training should be first to strengthen and improve abdominal function and performance, and second to work on the aesthetics, or have “ripped abs”.



Step#5: The first step to training the abs should start with your diet. Once again it comes down to calories in, calories out. If you are consuming more calories than you need, and not burning up the excess calories, the body will store those calories, more than likely as fat. And for most humans, that fat is stored in the abdominal area. This fact is especially true for men. Women also store fat in their tummies, and have the added bonus of storing fat on their hips also. If

your diet consists of high fat foods, then most likely your belly will also be high in fat. Another cause of puffy abs is the high consumption of carbonated beverages. Food allergies have also been known to contribute to the feeling of being bloated. Mostly this is common sense, watch what you eat for optimal abdominal training.

The second step is choosing exercises that work the whole abdominal and trunk musculature to maintain balance in the torso. That means that those 50 crunches are not going to produce the desired effect, because this type of isolation move does not train the abs functionally. Doing 50 crunches will only make you strong at doing 50 crunches. A study conducted by Stewart McGill, PhD, found the stresses placed on the lumbar discs doing crunches exceeded the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health

(NIOSH) standards resulting in increased risk for injury. Also, this exercise does not translate into real life movement of the abdominals. If your goal is to be a better golfer, then you need better abdominal training. Examples of functional abdominal training, the kind that gives you a “six pack that works”, are the cable wood chop, single arm cable pull and cable push. These exercises are focused on functionally training the movement of the abdominal muscles not isolation.

Many of the traditional abdominal exercises, such as crunches and leg raises have been scientifically proven to be the least effective forms in abdominal training. Placing your feet under an object to perform sit ups, actually activates the hip flexor muscles more than the rectus abdominis. It is not abdominal strength that allows for 100 crunches in one minute, but simply the momentum of the exercise. If you have ever watched Sunday morning infomercials, then you have seen the “amazing” ab products on the market. Please remember that no single exercise can produce the results you see on the television. The “Ab Roller”, was rated by the IDEA Health and Fitness Association, as one of the least effective methods of training the abdominal muscles. The most recent literature and research supports 3 specific exercises that place less stress on the spine. They are performing abdominal curls on the Swiss ball, Pilates mat exercises, and Side Bridges.

The single most important concept to remember is that the abdominal musculatures are layered on the body in different directions to provide support. Training your abs utilizing both isolation and function will help you to achieve a “functional six pack”. Also avoid any activity that provokes pain, “no pain = no brain” .

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