[IMAGE]

Top 10 Ab Exercises

By Chelsea Cooper, MPA, CPT

OK, so you want chiseled, toned abs? You're definitely not alone. Millions of people respond to TV and magazine ads promoting the latest, greatest ways to tighten and tone their "core." Unfortunately, most don't know where to start except with a standard sit-up or crunch - until now. Here are 10 easy ways to get those abs in shape fast.

Having a slim, toned midsection seems to be a perpetual fitness goal for many people. What about you? Do you want great abs? I'll bet you do. The good news is you can have the abs you've always desired, no matter what you've been told or how hard you've tried in the past. But before we begin, I want to let you know a few things that will either make or break your dreams of fabulous abs. Abdominal exercises are great for strengthening your abdominal muscles and core muscles. However, just doing ab exercises alone will not get your abs flat or tightened.

Getting a smaller waist and a great-looking midsection will take some time in the gym and/or other physical activities, as well as a game plan. Sorry, there are no shortcuts, at least not ones that produce long-term effects. First and foremost, you must participate in a total-body resistance training program and eat a healthy, calorie-specific diet. It may seem a bit daunting, but you must change your lifestyle habits to promote weight loss, rather than fat storage.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Keeping that in mind, let's get down to business! Without further ado, here are the 10 best exercises to flatten, tighten and sculpt your abdominals.

1. The Crunch

Background

The basic crunch should be a staple of your ab routine. This movement concentrates on your upper abdominals.

Starting Position

Lie on your back on a mat with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Support your head by placing your

hands behind it, and look toward the ceiling throughout the entire movement.

Movement

Exhale as you raise your upper body a few inches off the mat by contracting your abs. Be sure to keep your back straight and avoid pulling yourself up with your hands. Hold yourself in this contracted position for a moment before slowly lowering yourself back down to the starting position.

2. Crunch With Legs Raised

Background

This is a variation on the basic crunch.

Starting Position

Same as basic crunch except the feet are off the ground; knees are bent at 90 degree angle and feet are crossed.

Movement

Same as crunch movement.

3. The Oblique Crunch

Background

The oblique crunch does just what it says - it works on your obliques (the waist). Make sure to do the same amount of crunches on each side for a symmetrical effect.

Starting Position

Lie on an exercise mat with your knees bent and hands behind your head. Lift your left leg so your knee is at a 90 degree angle and the lower part of your leg is parallel with the floor.

Movement

Exhale as you bring your right elbow in toward your left knee while squeezing your abs. Inhale as you slowly extend your leg back to the starting position.

4. The Exercise Ball Crunch

- Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark *Background*

Exercise ball crunches are won-derful for your entire core. All of your abs are used in the stabilization process as you crunch.

Starting Position

Lie with your upper back on an exercise ball and your feet flat on the ground in front of you. Support your head by placing your hands behind it, and look toward the ceiling throughout the entire movement.

Movement

Exhale as you raise your upper body a few inches off of the ball by contracting your abs. Be sure to keep your back straight and avoid pulling yourself up with your hands. Hold yourself in this contracted position for a moment before slowly lowering yourself back down to the starting position.

5. Long-Lever Ball Crunch

Background

This exercise is a variation of the ball crunch.

Starting position

Same as ball crunch, but instead of placing your hands behind your head, keep your arms even (parallel) with your ears and straight out.

Movement

Same as ball crunch - keep the arms straight and next to your ears as you crunch.

6. The Toe Touch

Background

This is another great exercise for your upper abs, and you can easily make it even more challenging by lowering your legs with each repetition. This will recruit your lower abs along with your upper abs.

Starting Position

Lie flat on your back with your legs up in the air and your arms outstretched above your head.

Movement

Exhale as you raise your arms up and reach your toes. Hold yourself in this contracted position for a

moment, and then inhale as you slowly lower your arms back down until they almost touch the mat. Repeat your required repetitions before allowing your legs to touch back down onto the mat.

7. Alternating Toe Touch

Background
This exercise is a variation of the toe touch.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark *Starting Position*
Same as the toe touch.

Movement
Same movement as the toe touch except as you raise your arms up to your feet, reach your left arm to your right foot. Hold yourself in the contracted position for a moment, and then slowly lower your left arm back down. Repeat with right arm to left foot.

8. The Hanging Leg Raise

Background
Although this exercise can be very challenging and is not recommended for beginners, it is very effective. It focuses on your lower abs, tightening up that stubborn area.

Starting Position
Position yourself in a "power tower" (also known as a knee-raise machine or knee-raise station) by placing your elbows against the pads and gripping the lower handles, or gripping the overhead handles and allowing yourself to hang.

Movement
Exhale as you raise your knees toward your chest. Remember to keep your back flat against the back pad, or if hanging, try to keep yourself from swinging. Hold yourself in this contracted position for a moment, and then inhale as you slowly return your legs back down to the starting position.

9. The Alternating Hanging Leg Raise

Background
This exercise is a variation of the hanging leg raise.

Starting Position

Same as hanging leg raise.

Movement

Same movement as hanging leg raise except you raise one knee up toward your chest. As you lower your knee down, the other knee comes up toward your chest. Repeat this alternating movement for 30 seconds.

10. Bicycles

Background

This is perhaps the best exercise to target the rectus abdo-minis (the "six pack") and the obliques, according to a study done by the American Council on Exercise.

Starting Position

Lie face up on the floor and lace your fingers behind your head. Bring the knees in toward the chest and lift the shoulder blades off the ground without pulling on the neck.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark *Movement*

Straighten the left leg out while simultaneously turning the upper body to the right, bringing the left elbow toward the right knee. Switch sides, bringing the right elbow toward the left knee. Continue alternating sides in a "pedaling" motion for at least 12-16 reps.

And there you go: the top 10 abdominal exercises that will take the waste off your waist. These are the same exercises I use with my most successful clients. The reason these exercises are so great is because they recruit the entire abdominal region. Many people do the same basic ab exercise over and over (sit-ups are the classic example), which is a good exercise, but neglects a major part of your midsection.

Of course, these aren’t the only exercises that are effective in tightening and toning your abdominal area. Your doctor can give you a comprehensive overview of how different exercises affect your abs and other muscle groups throughout the body, and get your started on a consistent exercise routine and nutritional program.

Is it really that simple? Yes it is, especially if you follow a structured program and have some guidance. Just commit to success and go for it. Good Luck!

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