

Abdominals

A FIRM, TIGHT STOMACH IS THE CORNERSTONE

A firm, tight stomach is the cornerstone of a well-built body. Your abdominals are the center of your body and, arguably, no other body part better defines your overall condition.

So what's the secret to getting great abs? The answer, quite simply, is that there is no secret. The only way to get great abs is to follow a training program that includes cardio, proper nutrition and supplementation, in addition to weight training. Of course, you have to train your abs hard, with as much intensity as any other body part.

For a number of people, the abdominal muscles are covered by a layer of fat. And no matter how many crunches they do, they won't see those powerful muscles until that unhealthy roll around the midsection is gone and their bodyfat percentage reaches the single digits for men or the low teens for women. Then, and only then, will they uncover those muscles that they have worked so hard to build.

With all the fancy new gadgets and gizmos that promise the abs of your dreams, it can be confusing to figure

out the best way to train. The reality is that it couldn't be easier. A flat surface, a bench, or a pull-up bar are all the equipment you need.

Remember, to get the maximum intensity from every workout, you must focus on the contraction of the abdominal muscles during each repetition.

1 floor crunches

Nothing beats floor exercises for developing firm, muscular abs. All you need is a little floor space. The key to this exercise, as with all ab exercises, is to pull with your abdominal muscles and not with your shoulders or back.

Starting Position: Lie flat on your back with your feet flat on the ground, or resting on a bench with your knees bent at a 90-degree angle. If you are resting your feet on a bench, place them three to four inches apart and point your toes inward so that they touch. Place your hands lightly on either side of your ears, keeping your elbows in.

The Exercise: Push the small of your back down into the floor to isolate your ab muscles. Begin to roll your shoulders up, keeping your knees and hips stationary and contracting your abs to lift your shoulders off the floor. Continue to push down as hard as you can with your lower back. Your shoulders should come up off the floor only about four inches, and your lower back should remain on the floor. Focus on slow, controlled movement—don't cheat yourself by using momentum.

TIP DON'T LOCK...
your fingers behind your neck and pull. This takes the focus off the abs and also strains the neck. Keep your hands on the sides of your head.



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2 oblique floor crunches

This exercise will help you define the muscles on the side of your abdomen, also known as your obliques.

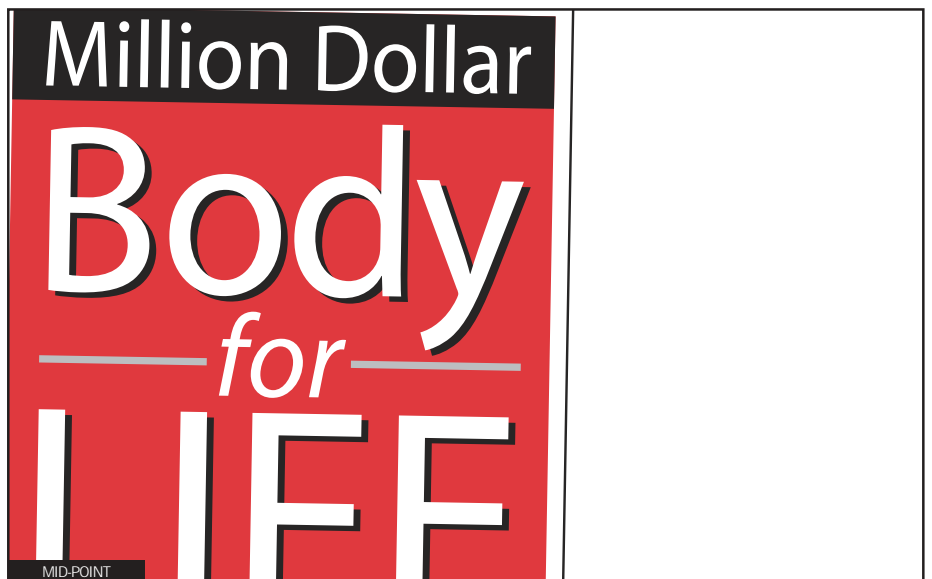
Starting Position: Lie flat on your back with your knees bent (placing your feet flat on the floor or resting on a bench). Place your left hand over your left ear.

The Exercise: Roll your upper body up to the right until your left elbow touches your right knee. Concentrate on tensing the sides of your waist and holding the contraction throughout the movement. Slowly lower to the starting position. After completing a full set of reps on the left side, switch to your right and follow the same instructions.



TIP REMEMBER IT'S QUALITY...

not quantity, that matters. Maintain the tension in your abs and focus on slow, controlled motion.



“It’s never too late to be what you might have been.”

3 decline crunches

This is a terrific exercise for developing the lower and middle abdominal muscles. As the name implies, you’ll need a decline bench that allows you to hook your feet.

Starting Position: Position yourself on a decline bench with your feet locked in. Your upper body should be raised off the bench, so you’ll have to contract your abs just to stay in place. Place your hands on each side of your head, over your ears. Don’t lock your fingers.

The Exercise: Raise your upper body slowly while you contract your abs. Crunch up until your elbows are on either side of your thighs. Hold and flex, then lower your body slowly back to the starting position. When your strength increases and you can do more than 12 reps, hold a weight plate against your chest and perform the exercise in the same manner.



TIP DON'T LOWER YOUR BODY ...
all the way down to the bench as you go down.

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4 decline oblique

Slightly more challenging than an oblique crunch on the floor, this exercise requires you to maintain the contraction in your abs throughout each set.

Starting Position: Position yourself on a decline bench with your feet locked in. Your upper body should be raised off the bench. Cup your right hand over your right ear, and place your left hand on your thigh.

The Exercise: Raise your upper body slowly while turning your torso to the left. Focus on keeping your abs tight and keeping the movement slow and controlled. Continue crunching up until your right elbow touches your left knee. Lower your body slowly back down to the starting position. After completing one set on the right, switch to your left side.



TIP TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS...

exercise, focus on really twisting your torso and feeling the contraction when you are in the "up" position.

**“Shoot for the moon.
Even if you miss,
you’ll land among the stars.”**

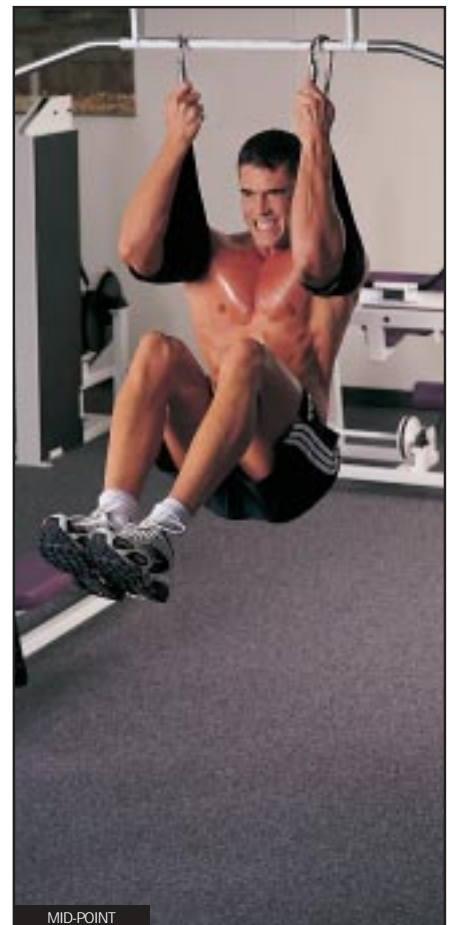
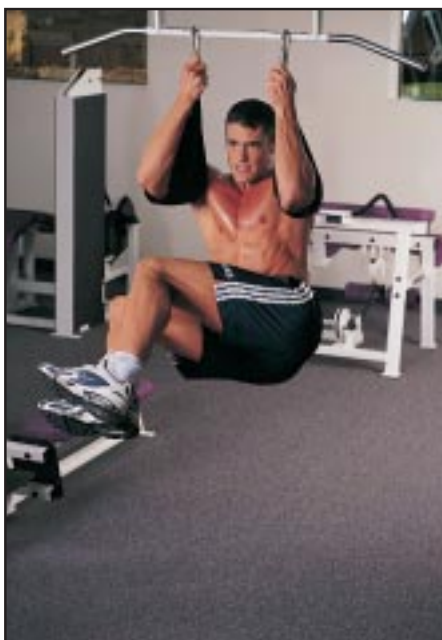
5 hanging knee raises

This is a tough exercise that allows you to work both the lower abs and the serratus muscles on the sides of your torso. Lift your knees straight up, and you hit the lower abs; lift your knees to each side to target the serratus muscles.

Starting Position: Grab a pull-bar with your palms facing forward, with a grip a little wider than shoulder-width apart. (Alternatively, you may use elbow straps that hang from the bar.) You should be hanging with your feet off the ground to start this exercise.

The Exercise: Slowly lift your knees and bring them toward your chest. Concentrate on flexing your abs as hard as you can. Hold, then slowly lower your legs back to the starting position. Perform the entire exercise slowly to avoid “cheating” by swinging your legs up and using your momentum.

TIP IF YOU FOCUS ON QUALITY REPS...
during this exercise, your wrists may fail before your abs do. Consider using elbow straps, which attach to the bar, so you can take your abs to failure.



TIP TARGET THE SERRATUS MUSCLES...
on the sides of your torso by lifting your knees to each side.

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6 reverse crunches

This is a great exercise for the lower abs. As with all ab exercises, keep the movement slow. Excess momentum can cause you to lose proper form and may lead to lower back injury.

Starting Position: Lie on your back on a decline bench, holding onto the top of the bench. Don't let your body slip downward because this will stress your shoulders. Hold your legs parallel to the floor. Keep your knees and your feet together to reduce unnecessary motion.

The Exercise: Slowly contract your abdominals, focusing on bringing your pelvis up and in toward your rib cage as you bend your knees up to your chest. Let your abs do the work. Lower your pelvis to the starting position, maintaining constant tension in your abs.



TIP BE CAREFUL NOT TO ARCH...

your back; this takes the focus off your abs and can lead to lower back injury.

TIP EXHALE WHEN YOU CONTRACT...

the abs, so your rib cage will drop and allow for a more complete motion.



“In life, what sometimes appears to be the end is really a new beginning.”

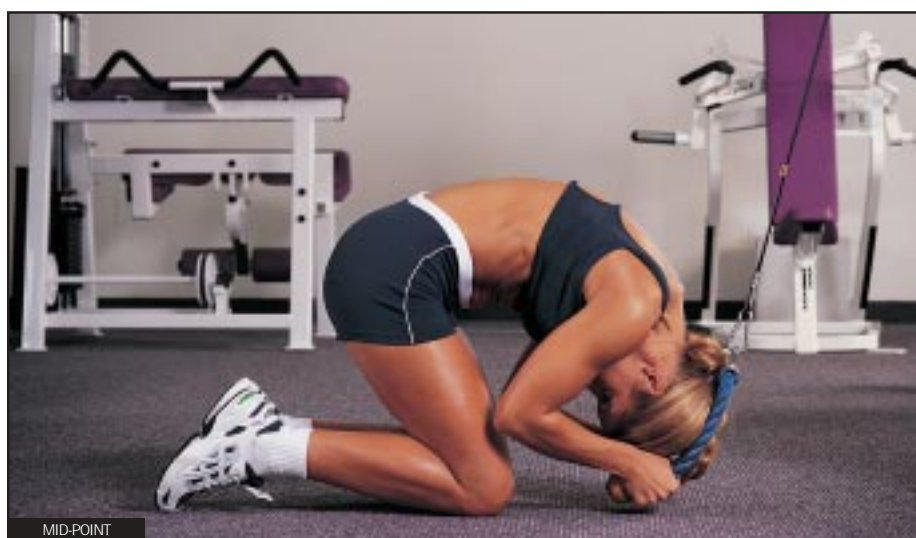
7 cable crunches

Unlike most ab exercises, this one allows you to increase the amount of weight you use incrementally. But keep the weight moderate and go for the burn—if you use too much weight, you’ll be tempted to start using your body weight to pull the weight down instead of just your abs.

Starting Position: Attach the rope handles to the high-cable pulley of a Universal machine. Grasp the rope in both hands and kneel about three feet away from the weight stack. The cable should be above and in front of you. Slowly bring your wrists down toward your head. Your back should be straight with your torso at a slightly forward angle.

The Exercise: Slowly contract the abdominals, focusing on the area from the rib cage down to the pelvis. Hold the contraction at the bottom. Straighten back up very slowly, keeping constant tension on the abdominals.

TIP DON'T HYPEREXTEND...
your lower back at the top. Try to keep all the tension on the abs.



Abdomen

8 cable oblique crunches

This exercise really enables you to hit your obliques hard. As with regular cable crunches, focus on slow, controlled movement and avoid using your bodyweight.

Starting Position: Attach the rope handles to the high-cable pulley of a Universal machine. Grasp the rope in your left hand and kneel about three feet away from the weight stack. The cable should be above and in front of you. Slowly bring your wrist down toward your head. Your back should be straight with your torso at a slightly forward angle. Rest your right hand on the outside of your right thigh.

The Exercise: Slowly contract the abdominals while bringing your left elbow down at an angle until it just touches the outside of your right thigh. Hold the contraction at the bottom. Straighten back up very slowly, keeping constant tension on the abdominals. Complete a full set, then switch to the other side.

