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How To Get A Flat, Toned Stomach

By Lynn Bode

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by: **Lynn Bode**

One of the most common fitness questions this time of year is "How can I tone my stomach for swimsuit season"? Typically, people believe that the guaranteed quick route to obtaining a rock-solid six-pack is a path packed with hundreds of sit-ups or abdominal crunches. Wrong!

The reality is that even if you do crunches every day you aren't guaranteed to get the stomach you desire. Getting those highly sought after, toned abs requires more work than just abdominal exercises. Plus, as far as stomach exercises go, sit-ups or crunches alone are not the solution.

We won't go into detail about the muscles that make up the abdominal wall, but it's good to know the basic information. At a high-level the abdominal/trunk area consists of 5 major muscles. It's necessary that all of these muscles be exercised. It's also important to utilize different types of training techniques like concentric, eccentric and isometric.

In addition to training those muscles, it is imperative that you also reduce the fat in your stomach area. If you don't decrease the fat in this area, then you'll never see well-defined abdominal muscles no matter how long and hard you train them.

The key to reducing body fat is a comprehensive workout program that consists of cardiovascular, strength, and flexibility exercises. Plus, don't forget a healthy diet. Good examples of cardio exercises are: walking, swimming, aerobics, and jogging. Strength training can be done with dumbbells, resistance bands and even just your own body weight. Flexibility can be as simple as a few stretches held in place for about 20 seconds.

Now, back to the specifics of abdominal training. Traditional crunches can be a part of your abdominal training, but should be limited and certainly shouldn't be the only part. To most effectively work your stomach area, it's necessary to include about 80% rotational work. Rotational exercises are those that include twisting-type methods. Simple crunches do not fall into the rotational category because you

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simply lift your body straight up and down.

To most effectively train your abs, incorporate a lot of variety, including different positions and equipment. This will allow your muscles to continually be challenged, which is what will help make them stronger and more defined. Remember that you don't have to lie on your back in the supine position to work your stomach area. There are hundreds of different ways to work them, including exercises in a standing position, on your side, raised on a ball, hanging from a bar, etc.

Don't forget the importance of form. If you don't use correct form when performing abdominal exercises, you'll severely limit the effectiveness not to mention possibly cause an injury. Tips for correct form include: Don't ever pull on your neck or head Don't allow your legs to move, they should remain still -- let your abs do all the work Try to keep your belly button pulled in toward the floor throughout the entire move.

To get you started, below are a few sample exercises* with instructions. Start working out today, and you can show-off your toned abs in time for summer.

Basic Crunch: Lie flat on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Place your hands lightly behind your head for support. Using your abdominal muscles lift your shoulders a few inches off the ground, pause briefly and return to start position. Complete at least one set of 10–12 reps.

Standing Towel Circle: Stand tall and hold a small towel (or resistance band) taut overhead. Contract abs and slowly draw a large, wide circle over your head and around your torso with your hands. Keep towel pulled taut throughout. Return to beginning position and reverse the circular direction. Complete at least one set of 8–10 reps in each direction.

Oblique Twist With Ball: Begin by sitting on the ball. Walk feet forward until ball is resting under your back -- body is now parallel to the floor. Place hands lightly behind head for support. Using your abdominal muscles slowly crunch up lifting your shoulder blades off of the ball and rotate left shoulder toward right hip. Return to starting parallel position and repeat then switch sides.

For access to a huge library of exercises demonstrations (including demos for the above exercises), visit:

*You should always consult your physician before trying any new exercise programs.

Lynn Bode, author and certified personal trainer, offers her services online through

. Workouts For You delivers affordable weekly exercise programs to help even

the busiest of people lose weight, tone-up, build muscles, increase stamina and more via the Internet. Let us guide you one-on-one through your fitness journey. Visit:

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Spot Reducing is For The Laundry

By Dianne Villano

- Can you give me an exercise that will get rid of the fat on my stomach ?
- What exercises an I do to tone my thighs ?
- Can you recommend some exercises to make my arms, thighs and stomach smaller and also speed up my weight loss??

I hear questions such as this on a daily basis, both from our clients and from people standing in the grocery line with me who want to know what exercises I do for such "toned" arms. Spot reduction works only in the laundry room, ladies and gentleman – there is simply no such thing as localized fat loss. The reality is – muscles which are stimulated with exercise will increase in size, regardless of what type of exercise gadget is used to "tone" an area. While resistance training is vital to overall fat loss and sculpting the body that you want, "overtraining" an area with the hopes of "toning" it will lead to muscle being added disproportionately and the area getting larger. If you build muscle more quickly that you strip fat in any area , it will get bigger.

Many people focus on exercising a particular body part which is hidden by fatty tissue in an effort to "burn away" the localized fat and expose toned muscles. No amount of dips, lunges or abdominal work will "burn" the fat off in a particular area -. Unfortunately, most people cannot see their beautiful toned muscles because they are covered by a layer of body fat .

That having been said here are the facts regarding "spot reducing, toning and "firming"

- 1.Body areas which are not "toned" simply contain excess body fat.
- 2.Physiologically, muscle is always firm
- 3.Our bodies are genetically preprogrammed to carry a certain amount in a particular body area.
- 4.the area of the body that first notices a decrease in body fat will vary from person to person - it is genetically pre – determined
- 5.In order to lose fat from your body an energy "deficit" must occur (ie" you must burn more calories than you consume
- 6.it is impossible to "firm" fat , nor can you "tone" muscle
- 7.No one can predict which area of their body will lose fat first

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8.Eventually you WILL experience fat loss in the more difficult areas.

Tips for a "toned" , firm you

1.Perform a well rounded resistance program at least 2 days a week to add lean body mass (muscle) to your frame, sculpt and shape your body . This will increase your ability to burn fat and food calories as well as your ability to sculpt your body just as you would like it. (each pound of muscle burns approximately 40 calories metabolically, each pound of fat about 3)

2.Perform a minimum of 3 30 minute sessions of cardiovascular training each week to stimulate fat loss

3.Watch your serving sizes and portions, eat a balanced diet of carbohydrates, fats and proteins (The American Heart Association recommends a general guideline of 60% of your calories from carbohydrates, 20% from fats & 20 % from protein) . Calories DO count, if you eat more than you burn you will add fat regardless of the source.

4.Use common sense and keep refined sugars, sodas and processed foods to a minimum

5.Drink a minimum of 64 ounces of water each day

Dianne Villano is the President of Custom Bodies Personal Training and Weight Loss Programs. Dianne is a personal fitness instructor certified through the National Academy of Sports Medicine with over 16 years experience who specializes in weight loss programs and programs for beginners. For more articles or free fitness tools visit

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