

The Six Pack

Everyone wants a six pack, but few can actually get one for life. Many think that the only path to a perfect midsection is some kind of secret exercise. The fact is, no abdominal movement alone will deliver the elusive six pack. It takes more than a few crunches. Your best bet is to have the right parents for starters. Some people are genetically gifted in the abdominal region. That is, they may do little in the way of abdominal work and they seem to have that coveted smooth, flat stomach. Since this is one of those factors that you can't change, let's talk about the things you can do to help yourself get that washboard look.

It's not like me to say that exercise is not the answer. It is true that exercise will make a huge difference in the circumference of your waist. First, let's talk anatomy. Basically there are four layers to the abdominal wall and any exercise you do you'll want to engage all four of these muscles. They are: the rectus abdominis, the internal oblique, the external oblique and the transverses abdominis muscle. The secret to utilizing all of these muscles is to think of pulling your belly button through your spine on all your abdominal movements. This helps to engage the deeper obliques and transverse which are often over powered by the rectus abdominis. All these muscles also need to be engaged to maintain a healthy posture.

It's important to work the upper portion of the abdominal wall as well as the lower abdominal region. Any movement that lifts the upper torso towards the mid section, such as in a crunch, will engage the upper abs. Any movement that lifts the lower torso off the floor while maintaining a curved spine, such as a leg lift, will engage the lower abs. The lower back must be pressed into the floor at all times to alleviate any tension on the lower back muscles. To be successful with an abdominal program, you'll need to work a combination of upper, lower abdominal work as well as some twisting and isokinetic movements. You can spice it up with a Swiss ball, medicine ball, cable or dumb bell work too. If you aren't feeling your abs work, they aren't working. If you feel your lower back, you're likely working your spinal erectors. Concentrate your attention on the movement and the muscles that you're working and try to feel them. Change your form if you're not happy with the 'burn' in the right place. Abs can be worked more so than other muscles due to their stabilizing nature.

Keep in mind that no amount of ab work will make up for poor diet choices or a layer of insulation. I can't say it enough that your physique is a result of your eating habits and you'll need to shed some excess body fat in order for your abdominal muscles to be visible. 'Spot reducing' just isn't possible. There are two things you'll need to do. First, along with your abdominal program, add a cardiovascular component to your workout regime to burn some extra calories. This will help your body get rid of the insulating layer around the mid section. Choose something that you enjoy doing and can do it three times per week for a minimum of 30 minutes. It should involve the major muscle groups and get you slightly out of breath for a sustained period. Along with some heart pounding exercise, reducing caloric intake may be necessary. Start simply by eating several smaller meals a day to avoid overeating, increasing vegetable and lean protein

intake and reducing processed food intake. Diet and lifestyle moderation can take years to fine tune, but initially you need to create an awareness.

If you're serious about making a dent in that middle, try these things to define that six pack. Remember that this will take a little time and don't give up; it's only a few months until beach season!

By Shawna Kaminski

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