



AB-SOLUTELY FAB

How to Get Flat Abs

by Helen M. Ryan

Before we talk about the best way to get flat abs quickly, we need to clarify one little thing: There is no such thing as spot reducing. If there were I would have the most amazing abdominals ever, because I do a lot of stomach exercises. I plank, pike, lift, crunch, tuck, roll out and kettlebell. However, I have lost 80 pounds and been pregnant twice. So, alas, my muscles are fabulous, but the excess skin covering them are not.

Do I care? Not really. Because my core is strong and my body can do pretty much everything I ask of it. One Christmas I found myself climbing up and down a ladder, hoisting decoration-filled boxes in and out of my tiny attic. Reaching overhead while balancing on a rung, lifting the boxes, rotating them across my body and lowering down (sounds like the “wood chop” exercise, doesn’t it?). All stomach muscles engaged, back taught, stabilizers engaged. *That* is why I work my abs...to be able to live my life without ending up in traction.

THE BEST WAY TO YOUR BEST ABS

Creating good, strong abs requires a one-two punch: 1) Strengthen the underlying muscle and 2) burn off the overlying fat.

Exercising your stomach muscles provides other benefits than just making you look good. Strong abdominals help support your back, causing less pain, and assists with your posture, resulting in less slouching and strain. It’s not all about how we look, but how we feel and how pain-free we are on a daily basis.

HOW TO DO IT

Move through these exercises one at a time, back-to-back, with no rest in between, circuit-style. Start with one set, three times per week. After a couple of weeks, move to two sets, then on to three. When these exercises get too easy, switch to the more advanced moves. Stay with it and work slowly through each exercise. Exhale on the effort and work until your muscles are tired or you start to lose form.

See complete exercise instructions and photos on the American Council on Exercise web site (it’s totally free, too!). www.acefitness.org/exerciselibrary

As with everything, be consistent. No one got better at anything by not practicing.

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THE BEST ABDOMINAL EXERCISES

1) Plank. Works back, main abs in front, deep abdominals that support spine from inside and keep your stomach sucked in. Beginner through intermediate: On elbows. Hold as long as you can. Advanced: Elbows on swiss ball (up to 30% more effective). Even more advanced? Gently draw circles on the floor with the ball. Ouch.

• Learn how to plank: <http://goo.gl/fet2p>



PHOTOS: ©ACE

2) Stability Ball Knee Tucks. Works main abs in front, deep abdominals, fronts of thighs, sides of abdominals. Contract your abs and really focus on pulling with your stomach, not with your knees. You can also do these with the TRX system, Gravity Bar, or even paper plates (putting your feet on plates/Gliding Discs instead of a ball).

• Learn how to tuck w/ball: <http://goo.gl/igO64>

• Learn how to tuck with TRX Suspension Trainer: <http://goo.gl/Xgo51>



3) Cross body mountain climber. Works main abs in front, deep abdominals, front of thighs, sides of abdominals. On hand and feet in push up position, body in a straight line, abs engaged. Pull right knee under body towards opposite shoulder, keeping hips in a straight line. Return to starting position. 10-12 repetitions. Switch sides. Make sure to keep your body straight, hips in line (don't lift when crossing under body), stomach engaged.

4) Roll Out. Swiss ball (or TRX/Gravity Bar). Works main abs in front, deep abdominals, front of thighs, sides of abdominals. Advanced: On paper plates/ Gliding Discs, push/pull with your hands along floor.

• Learn how to roll out. Exercise shown is with TRX.

Substitute or swiss ball where elbows are on ball. <http://goo.gl/oPr4k>



5) Side Plank. Works sides of abdominals (waist). Lie on side, body straight. Gently push up onto elbow and feet, body in a straight line. Hold as long as you can, gently lower. Try not to slouch head into shoulder (think tall and long). Advanced: While body is suspended, reach top arm down and sweep under body (keeping body from rotating), then return, reaching arm up directly above shoulder and towards ceiling, hold. Repeat, switch sides.



6) Stability Ball Crunches. Works main abs in front. Position yourself comfortably, work slowly and deliberately. The more of your upper body is on the ball is easier, the more that is off the ball is harder. These can also be performed on the floor. Advanced: Hold a weight or barbel plate a chest level.

• *Learn how to crunch:* <http://goo.gl/Q2tHm>



7) Pike. (Very advanced.) Works shoulders, deltoids, main abs in front, deep abdominals, front of thighs, sides of abdominals. Pike can be done either on a stability ball, on paper plates/glide discs, or with the TRX. Keep stomach tight and imagine using your abs to pull feet towards hands.

- *Learn how to pike on ball:* <http://goo.gl/FUbuUQ>
- *Learn how to pike with TRX/Gravity Bar:* <http://goo.gl/Rx0NJ>



Resources:

Swiss ball: Sporting goods or major retailers

Paper plates: Anywhere

Glide disks: Sporting goods, major retailers, online

TRX: www.trxtraining.com