

Ways to Tone Your Abs

Many Americans struggle with weight gain, so companies market all kinds of gadgets they say are targeted to tone tummies. The reality, however, is that getting six-pack abs takes time, dedication and the right diet and exercise. Here are some tips to guide you.

Start Simply

One of the easiest ways to look slimmer is to improve your posture. When you stand up straight with your shoulders back and chest up, the abdominal muscles pull themselves in. Establish good posture on a daily basis by keeping your ears over your shoulders, shoulders over hips, hips over knees, and knees over ankles. As you stand and walk, keep your weight even on the balls and heels of your feet.

You can also do simple abdominal strengthening exercises when you are at work, doing chores or participating in other common activities. Just stand up straight and inhale to draw the navel to the spine. Hold it for a few seconds, exhale and repeat.

Ab Exercises Alone Will Not Reduce Belly Fat

Eating a healthy diet and exercising more will help reduce body fat. If you have a desire to sculpt your abdominal muscles, keep your diet lean and limit overly processed foods. Talk with your doctor or medical care provider, and then start and adhere to an exercise routine.

Do Not Overdo Specific Exercises

Doing a thousand stomach crunches will not necessarily give you the six-pack look you are seeking. Experts recommend not training areas of the body in isolation. People should view the abs as part of their "core," which includes the pelvis, lower back and hips.

Experts recommend exercises that address all aspects of their core, not just the abs. Pilates is often recommended because all the abdominal muscles are worked (top, side and deep muscles) as well as the arms, legs, back muscles and glutes.

Exercise Correctly

Experts suggest slow, repetitive exercises and that people concentrate on working targeted muscle groups. Additionally, have variety in your workout so you do not become bored with your routine and stop exercising.

Many exercises target the abdominal muscles:

- **Sit-ups:** Lie on your back with your hands crossed at the chest. Lift your upper body off the floor, keeping your chin up. Never jerk your body upwards as you lift yourself off the floor. As you begin to lie back, concentrate on your breathing and target your stomach muscles.
- **Basic crunch:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your knees bent and hands behind your head. Do not let your chin and chest touch as you lift your upper body off the floor using your upper back and shoulder blades.
- **Leg lift:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your hands flat to the floor, below your lower back. Keep your legs up straight so they are perpendicular to your upper body. Move them up and down, but not beyond a 45-degree angle. Do not lift your lower back off the floor or let your legs go all the way down to the floor.
- **Bicycle pump:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your hands under your head. Lift your upper body while twisting it towards the left and bring your right knee in. Then lift your upper body while twisting it toward the right and bring your left knee in. Remember to keep your lower back flat on the floor and the upper back curved in a C-shape.
- **Rowing:** Lie on your back on an exercise mat with your hands under your lower back. Bend your knees and bring them as close to your chest as possible. Lift your buttocks inward while keeping your back on the floor. Your hips should only reach a couple inches off the ground. Lower your hips until the top of your buttocks touches the floor.
- **Canoe twist:** Stand upright with your feet shoulder-width apart. Interlace your fingers to create a solid grip. Exhale and sweep your interlocked hands, arms, shoulders and chest to the left, as if you are rowing a canoe. Simultaneously lift your left knee up and to the right. Inhale and return to the starting position. Exhale and perform the movement to the right.
- **Front plank:** Start by lying face down. Place your elbows and forearms under your chest. Using your toes and forearms, prop yourself up to form a bridge. Maintain a flat back and do not allow your bottom to stick up into the air or your back to sag. Hold this position for 10 seconds to start and gradually increase the length of the hold.

As with other fitness routines, realize there are no fast fixes for sculpting abdominal muscles. Set reasonable goals for yourself and plan on slow and steady progression.

While it is not necessary to buy fancy equipment or hire a trainer, if you find that certain equipment works better for you, use it. If you think you need the motivation or expertise of a trainer, hire one to help you reach your goals.

Resources

- National Institutes of Health (NIH): www.nih.gov

Here when you need us.

Call: 844-207-5465

Online: guidanceresources.com

App: GuidanceNowSM

Web ID: LivingME

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