

## Working Your Abdominals

Abdominals. That's the number one area people want to work on when they come into a gym. And that's evident from all the gizmos and gadgets advertised to give you a "six-pack" in only 8 minutes a day. However, there are a few misconceptions when it comes to working out your abs.

**Myth #1** – "You can work your abs out every day."

FALSE!!! The abdominals are like any other muscle group. If you're working out the muscles effectively, meaning you reach muscle failure by your last set, you are getting tiny tears in the muscle fibers. It takes about 48 hours for these tears to heal. When the muscle tears heal, that's when you become stronger, and your abs get tighter. If you do an ab workout on Monday, and then again on Tuesday, you're just re-tearing the muscles. Take a day off in between and give your abdominals time to heal.

**Myth #2** – "There are exercises that work the lower abs."

This is a common myth. The fact is, there are no "lower abs". Your abs are divided into 4 groups: rectus abdominus (the "six-pack" abs), transverse abdominus (lie underneath the rectus, acting like a girdle), and the internal and external obliques (the sides and waist). You can't target just one spot of a muscle, and the abs are no exception. Depending on where the movement is coming from, you may feel the pull from either the lower portion (if you're doing leg lifts or reverse crunches) or the upper portion (crunches), but each of those exercises are working the entire muscle. A few exercises to target the specific abdominal muscles are listed below.

Rectus Abdominus – Crunches, reverse crunches, leg lifts, knee lifts (on Roman Chair)

Transverse Abdominus – Pilates, yoga poses that force you to keep the abdominals pulled in

Obliques – "Bicycle crunches", elbow-to-knee crunches, side crunches, weighted twists

**Myth #3** – "Crunches will get rid of belly fat."

The only way to lose body fat is to burn calories, and you burn the most calories with cardiovascular exercise. That means 500 crunches are not going to get rid of that spare tire. You have to hit the treadmill, or hop on your bike, and burn those calories! You want to aim for 20-60 minutes of cardiovascular exercise 3-5 days a week. (Exactly how long and how many days depends on the intensity levels of your workouts.) What crunches **will** do, however, is tone up the muscles underneath the layer of "insulation", so when the fat comes off, everyone will be able to see your toned abs!

So, now you know what **not** to believe. ..but what are you supposed to do? A good start would be working out the abdominals 3 times a week. With each exercise, the abs should reach muscle failure in 2 or 3 sets. What does this mean? It means do your crunches until you can't possibly do one more, then take a 15-20 second break and do another set. Try to select exercises that target each of the muscles of the abdominal region, for example, crunches for the core, elbow-to-knee for the obliques, and finish off with a plank pose. Mix things up after a while. Get creative...get daring! Use stability balls, bands, dumbbells. Have fun with it!

If you have questions on what exercises you should do, how to do the exercises listed above, or any other questions on working your abdominals, please see the staff at the Medically-Based Wellness or Wellness desks.