

# Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

## CRUNCH YOUR WAY TO A STRONGER, TIGHTER MIDSECTION

Turn on the TV and you're likely to come across an infomercial trying to sell you the latest product or video guaranteed to flatten and tone your stomach. For just \$29.95 (and up), you too can have a washboard stomach or "abs of steel."

While there is nothing inherently wrong with most of these products, they are not the panacea manufacturers claim them to be. Recognizing that not everyone can achieve a chiseled midsection, it is possible to develop strong abdominal muscles, thereby strengthening the back, without spending a lot of money. In fact, you can start doing the following exercises right now, free of charge!

### **CLEARING UP MISCONCEPTIONS**

First of all, let's get something perfectly clear. No amount of crunches or torso twists will get rid of the excess fat that many of us carry around our middles. Regular cardiovascular exercise, on the other hand, will do the trick. And more important than just making us look better, losing fat around the middle is important for keeping the heart healthy.

### **TECHNIQUE IS EVERYTHING**

The single most important thing you can do to correctly train your abdominals is to use proper form. There are many myths and misconceptions when it comes to abdominal training. Here are some points to remember when performing abdominal exercises.

- 1** Don't pull on the neck during the movement. Keep the chin a fist's distance from your chest.
- 2** Start with the arms across the chest; as your abdominals become stronger, extend the arms behind the head.
- 3** Don't throw the body, or use jerking motions to complete the movement. Keep it slow and controlled.



- 4** Keep the abdominals pulled in by visualizing your naval pressing down toward the floor. Keep your back flat against the floor.
- 5** Always exhale as you contract and inhale as you release.

### **VARIATIONS OF THE CRUNCH**

The best exercise to tone and strengthen the upper abdominals is also the easiest: the basic crunch. This exercise is performed with knees bent, and back flat on the floor. Raise the chest and shoulders several inches from the ground, exhaling as you come up and inhaling as you release.

To work the obliques, the muscles on the sides of the stomach, perform the crunch at alternating angles, reaching with the shoulder (not the elbow) across the body to the opposite knee. Repeat on the other side.

Finally, to work the lower abdominals, bring the knees up toward the chest, forming a 90-degree angle with the body. Using only the lower abdominals and not the legs or hips, bring the knees slightly toward the chest as you exhale. Return to the starting position. Remember, this is a very small movement. Don't try to bring the knees up to the face.

There are no hard and fast rules as to the number of repetitions you should do of these abdominal exercises. Start with 10 repetitions of each and increase as your abdominals become more conditioned. Twenty-five repetitions of each exercise is a good goal to keep in mind as you train your abdominals. And, with 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise, three times per week, you'll be on your way to a leaner and healthier midsection.

### **Compliments of:**

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