

## "Can I achieve a "Six Pack" ?

One of the most common questions I am approached with regarding fitness and training is, "How do I get a six pack?"

It makes me smile every time. TV and magazine ads for fitness related products often show buff men and women with these ripped midsections claiming, "You can have this too if you use our product."

I would like to set the record straight concerning the abdominal muscles and how to achieve the best results for your body. The most important thing to realize is that not everybody can have a "six pack" but you can have toned, lean abdominals. Many people believe that if you just do hundreds of crunches a day, you will get great abs. The best way to attain strong, healthy abdominal muscles is through cardiovascular training, balanced nutrition and muscular training. Genetics play a large role in determining your musculature. That, cannot be controlled.

The abdominal cavity is made up of: the upper abs, the obliques, transverse abdominus and the lower back. Here are some effective techniques to get you started:

**Crunches:** Lie on your back with your knees bent and hands behind your head. Lift your chin (like holding a tennis ball between your chin and chest) and slowly curl your body up until your shoulder blades come off the ground then slowly down. Repeat until muscular fatigue. (I prefer to do this on a stability ball).

**Reverse crunch:** Lie flat on the floor with your hands under your lower back, palms down. Bring the legs up perpendicular to your body and slowly raise the hips towards the ceiling. Slowly lower your hips. Be sure not to arch the back and do not use momentum. Repeat until fatigue.

**Obliques:** Standing, hold a dumbbell in one hand, place the other hand behind the head. Pull your navel into your spine and bend (rib to hip) to the opposing side of the dumbbell. Repeat until fatigue.

**Transverse abdominus:** The plank is a terrific core exercise. Laying on your front, raise your body supporting your weight on your toes and forearms, keeping the body straight. I find this is easier when I clasp my hands together and contract my glutes and squeeze the ankles so the body is taut. If you feel stress on your back raise the hips slightly to alleviate pressure and pull your navel into your spine contracting the abdominal muscles. Hold for 30 seconds to 1 minute.

**Lower back:** Lying facedown on a stability ball with your hips pressed against the ball, and your feet on the floor. Shoulder width apart. Place your hands lightly behind your head and slowly extend the back until your chest is lifted off the ball as far as possible. Slowly return to the starting position. Do 12-15 repetitions.

There are different methods you can choose from depending on your fitness level. You can break them up and perform multiple sets or you can do one of each exercise.

I must stress the importance of nutrition. I will talk more about that in the next article. Until then, I wish you health and fitness of body, mind and spirit.