



EMPHATIC ABS

Correct the mistakes you're making with your abs to see the results you're after.

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THE ABDOMINALS (OR 'ABS' FOR SHORT) ARE PROBABLY THE MOST POPULARISED AND TALKED-ABOUT MUSCLE GROUP IN THE HUMAN BODY.

Many see developed and defined abs as the sign of a fit and strong body. For many years, overwhelming interest in regards to the abs has been generated by the media, trainers, avid gym-goers and the general public alike. However, it seems alarming that with the amount of interest propagated for this body part that emphasis on training this muscle group properly seems to go by the wayside.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the 21st-century gym. Not only do most gym folk fail to train the abdominals with enough effort and priority, but when they do they don't actually emphasise the abdominals when performing the specific exercises themselves. We will seek to solve both of these shortcomings and give your abs the emphasis and attention they deserve. The workout that follows will correct the first issue by supplying enough training volume and intensity to develop your midsection. The routine will correct the second issue by emphasising constant tension on your abdominals and avoiding common exercise-technique errors.

THE WORKOUT

Alternate between 'A' exercises (while adhering to the rest period) until all sets are completed. Move on to the 'B' exercises and execute in a similar manner (set of B:1, then B:2, then B:3). Loading will be required for all 'B' exercises and should be proportionate to the reps required without technique breakdown. Exercise A:1 may require load as well (see below). Once you have selected the correct weight for your first set of each exercise, use this same weight for all subsequent sets.

Exercise	Sets	Reps	Rest between sets
A:1 - Decline sit-up & twist*	2	10	60 secs
A:2 - Hanging knee raise	2	20	60 secs
B:1 - Cable crunch	3	12	0 secs
B:2 - Cable woodchop	3	12 (each side)	0 secs
B:3 - Straight-arm rope pulldown	3	12	60 secs

* Hold a medicine ball or another load behind the head if you can perform more than 15 reps of this exercise with good technique. External loading should be added in the smallest possible increments, and there should never be too much weight that you cannot complete your target rep range with proper form.

Decline sit-up & twist

SET-UP: Set up a decline bench on an angle of roughly 20 degrees and assume a seated position at the top of the bench, with feet positioned under rolls.

ACTION: Starting from the top position, place hands behind head with elbows as far apart as possible. To place more tension on the abdominals during the movement, squeeze your glutes hard to take the emphasis off the hip flexor and quadriceps muscles. Inhale and slowly curl your spine down the bench until the shoulder blades are almost touching the bench surface (keeping the shoulders off the bench will keep greater tension in the abdominals throughout the set). Raise the torso while slightly rounding the back to emphasise the abdominals contraction — do not use momentum with the shoulders to generate movement. As your trunk begins to approach vertical, proceed to twist through the abdomen and bring one elbow to the opposing knee while maintaining the elbow's original position (not demonstrated). Lower yourself back down in the same way you came up and alternate your twist to the opposing side on each repetition.



Hanging knee raise

SET-UP: Hang from a chin-up bar with a shoulder-width grip and palms facing forward.

ACTION: Inhale and raise the knees as high as possible by curling up the spine. Focus on the abdominals contracting hard to bring your pelvis toward the sternum. Lower your legs under control back to the starting position by gradually uncurling your spine. Avoid swaying and cheating by using the lats to generate the movement.

Cable crunch

SET-UP: While grasping a rope attachment behind your neck, kneel down in front of a high cable machine. Face away from the apparatus, with your trunk in an extended position.

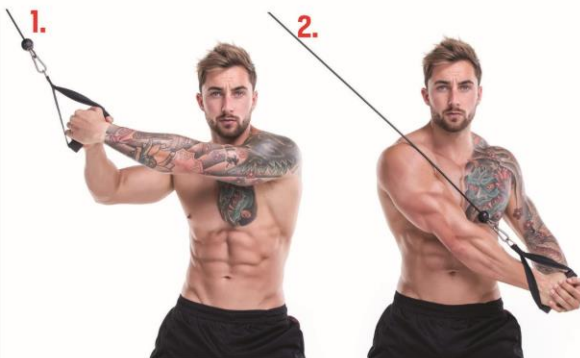
ACTION: Keeping your shoulders and arms fixed throughout the entire movement, proceed to exhale and flex through the abdominals to bring your sternum toward your pelvis. Contract hard through the abdominals to execute the movement, and do not cheat by pulling yourself down using your shoulders and arms. Uncurl your spine and return to the starting position and repeat.



Cable woodchop

SET-UP: Position a D-handle from a high cable position. Stand side-on to a cable apparatus and grasp the handle with your inside hand followed by your outside hand over the top. Take a step away from the apparatus so that the weight is off the stack and there is tension on the cable. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart and perpendicular to cable apparatus.

ACTION: Keeping both arms straight, exhale while you take the cable from the high diagonal position (in vertical alignment with inside knee) toward a low diagonal position in alignment with your outside knee, using your obliques to generate the movement. Inhale and control the cable back toward the starting position to repeat. Make sure the rotation and movement is produced by the obliques and not by rotating the hips excessively.



Straight-arm rope pulldown

SET-UP: Facing toward a cable station, grasp a rope attachment from a high cable position with straight arms. Step away from the apparatus so that the weight is off the stack and tension is on the cable. Before beginning the movement, slightly crunch your ribcage toward your pelvis so that there is tension in the abdominals.

ACTION: While keeping the arms fixed and abs contracted, inhale and proceed to drive the rope toward the thighs in a controlled manner. Keep the torso upright and use the abdominals to resist the trunk from buckling forward with the cable's resistance throughout the movement. Return the cable back to the starting position under control and repeat. **MMH**



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Michael is the founder and director of Performance Revolution, a results-guaranteed company specialising in strength training, athletic performance enhancement and nutrition. Michael began his career as a trainer and strength and conditioning coach, accruing more than 10,000 hours of practical experience. His clientele ranges from everyday people with health and body-composition goals to national-level athletes looking to enhance performance. In addition to his hands-on experience, Michael is an author and contributing writer for popular fitness magazines and blogs. He also uses his skills and experience to mentor and lecture other aspiring trainers at various Australian colleges and institutions. For more training programs and resources to help you get closer to your goals, visit www.performancerevolution.com.au