

Brian Cannone's



**GETTING
SIX
PACK
ABS
FAST**

Getting Six Pack Abs Fast

By Brian Cannone

Introduction to this Course

Dear Fellow Athlete,

The abs muscles are a point focus not only for fitness/figure/bodybuilding competitors, but for the general public as well. People are envious of anyone with six pack abs and a tight, flat, stomach. It is no wonder that personal trainers often hear "get rid of my gut" when they ask a client about their goals. It seems every magazine from *Oxygen* and *Muscle & Fitness* to *GQ* has a monthly column claiming to reveal the secret to attaining a sexy midsection. Our fascination with the sheer aesthetics and natural beauty of the body put a tremendous focus on this particular part.

Over the next several weeks, we will be uncovering the truth about abs. We will examine them for their beauty and their function. We will unveil the abs as something to admire, *something* to help us place better in competition, and something to help us perform better in life and in the gym.

The monthly columns, daily offers for "special burn-fat-in-the-abs" pill, or "sexy-six-pack" product, and popular beliefs about the abs confuse us more than actually help us. We intend to clear the cloudiness with useful information that can be applied to make you a better gym enthusiast, a better competitor, as well as making you look great at the beach. It should come as no surprise though that nothing is going to replace hard work and commitment to eating right. The intent is to provide guidance so that you can target your energy where it will be most effective and have the greatest impact.

The following is a list of topics that you can expect:

- Understanding the anatomy of the abs and core
- Core muscles, what is their function?
- Dangers of abdominal fat
- Best abdominal exercise, does one exist?
- Training the obliques?
- Foods to avoid
- Worst abdominal exercises
- Getting Shredded
- Yoga and Pilates are they for you?
- Quick and Easy notes on Abs
- Some of our favorite abdominal exercises

Sincerely,

Brian Cannone



Lesson 1: Understanding the Anatomy of Your Core

Core strength and core training have been million dollar words for several years now. Though many people claim to do core training, few truly know how and even fewer know why. It seems that competitors train their "core" by doing some variations of a [crunch](#), some variation of a twisting crunch, and some kind of back extension.

The first two exercises are supposed to target the abs & obliques, and back extensions are usually done only because other people do them too. There is very little understanding of what the core is, and how to exercise it effectively. A strong core that is properly engaged helps prevent injury and allows a person to lift harder and perform better. We will look at the anatomy of the core in order to understand what muscles are involved, and what exercises would target these muscles.

Our examination of the core will begin with the most superficial layers (the muscles we can touch) and work our way deep into the muscles we never think about, and much less consider targeting. The core, or trunk, is often given a generic definition consisting of muscles in the front and muscles in the back.

The muscles of the rectus abdominis make up the much-envied six-pack. Note that we are all anatomically built with six-pack; only some of us hide it with a layer of fat. The rectus starts at the bottom of the breast bone as well as the 5th, 6th, and 7th ribs. It connects to the pubic bone and pubic symphysis. For a visual, think of the connection several inches below the belly button.

Next we have the internal and external obliques. The external obliques start on the lower eight ribs (5-12) and attach to the iliac crest, or "hip bone". If you place your right hand over your stomach to touch your left hip and then run your hand towards the center of your stomach you are tracing the path of the external obliques.

The internal obliques run at a 90 degree angle to the external, but have similar anatomical connections. The internal obliques start at the lower ribs (7-12), and connect on the outside part of the iliac crest.

The obliques and rectus share some connections via soft tissue, and act together in some fashion to create movement at the trunk and provide stability.

The transverse abdominus has been considered the moneymaker muscle in terms of core stability. This muscle acts like a corset and is the body's natural weight lifting belt. It creates a circle starting from the back and wrapping around the front to connect with the soft connective tissue shared by the rectus abdominis. It lays deep underneath the other abdominal muscles roughly around of the middle of the abdomen.

Create a "c" shape with both hands and place these around your side so that the thumb is behind and the fingers wrap around the front. This simulates the location and direction of the transverse abdominus. The backside complements to the core include quadratus lumborum, and the erector spinae. The quadratus muscle starts at the posterior iliac crest, which is the bone of your waist on the backside near where a belt would go and connects to the last rib (also on the back side) and the lower vertebrae of the low back. Erector spinae are another group of deep muscle in the back that helps with stability and function.

This is a long group of muscles that run along side, and the entire length, of the spine. It has connecting points near the level of the tailbone, and also near the base of the head. Next we will examine the specific movements caused by these muscles and then appropriate exercises for them. This foundation is crucial to gain an understanding of using and creating a strong core and rock hard abs.

**Note that in addition to the aforementioned, diaphragm, pelvic floor, latissimus dorsi, gluteus maximus, and trapezius also contribute to core stability. We acknowledge the importance of these muscles but will not be focusing on them in these articles.*

Lesson 2: Core Muscle Function

In *understanding the anatomy of the core* we looked at the different muscles that are involved with the core. Now we can begin to talk about their function and exercises to target these areas. The determining factor of how a muscle will work is its attachment to either bone or soft tissue, and the alignment of the fibers. Muscles work to bring bones together; to resist/control bones moving away from each other, and to stabilize or neutralize the movement of bones while other muscles work. With this concept in mind, we will examine the muscles involved during some "core exercises".

The rectus abdominus is one muscle and not divided into upper and lower abdominals. It has no direct attachment to the femur (thigh bone) and therefore does not directly control hip motion. The primary function of the rectus is to flex the trunk. This action occurs in the simple crunch where the shoulders barely raise off the ground. The chest moves towards the pelvis.

Since the rectus does not connect to the thigh bone, moving the legs has no direct effect on the abdominals! When the legs are moving (as in a leg raise), the rectus only contracts to stabilize the pelvis and is not being targeted directly. Leg movements primary action is on the hip flexors. Abdominal activity is felt due to the the rectus stabilizing function as well as the fact that one of the hip flexors (psoas) begins on a vertebrae of the back, goes through the abdomen to insert on the femur.

To target the rectus, hip motion should be eliminated. A better way to perform exercises such as leg lifts or hanging ab exercises, is to begin with the legs bent so that the hip forms a 90 degree angle. The starting position should mimic sitting in a chair. Now, the movement focus is to bring the pelvis up towards the chest. This movement will be need to be more controlled, and you will notice a smaller range of motion.

Extreme back hyperextension is not necessary when targeting the back muscles. Often, exercisers will use a weighted hyperextension machine, or a roman chair (pads on thighs, face down, lean over and lift upper body) in an attempt to strengthen the back extensors.

Great care must be taken when performing any exercise with back hyperextension. Better control and muscle targeting can be attained with focused movements that only take the trunk back to neutral. Using the roman chair means that the trunk would be bent towards the ground and then only raised until the spine is straight again.

It is best to not do this with additional weights as the potential for injury greatly increases. Usually, as the resistance increases dramatically, there is a tendency to use assisting muscles of the arms, and hip. Resistance may be added by maintaining the arms overhead (biceps on ears) throughout the movement. Supermans are also great for back extensors. This is done by laying face down on the ground and then raising the quads and upper body off the ground. Hyperextension will be very limited by the ground.

Twist and extend motions greatly involve the obliques. The internal and external obliques work in opposites. The internal obliques rotate and bend the trunk to the same side while the external obliques have similar actions but on the opposite side. Bending or twisting the trunk to the right involves the right internal obliques and the left external obliques.

Again it is important to remember that the abs do not have any connection to the femur, so ab

action should focus challenging the muscle based on its intended action. We will be discussing twisting motions and their effect on performance at a later time.

Lastly, we turn our attention to the transverse abdominus. This muscle is activated when one thinks about drawing the bellybutton towards the spine. Forceful exertion, as occurs when one is having difficulty using the restroom, also activates the TVA. The TVA creates a lot of the stability in exercises such as the plank.

Failure to activate the TVA during heavy lifting can result in injury so it is important to ensure that the TVA is engaged during weight lifting. Popular weight lifting belts perform the function of the TVA by creating increased internal pressure and increasing spinal stability. It is not the thick back part of the belt that causes the stability.

The abdominal muscles and organs push against the front of the belt and when resistance meets them they get shoved towards the back. The thick back part provides resistance and the result of these opposing forces creates the spine stability. Although there is debate amongst fitness professionals, it has been stated that a properly engaged TVA provides enough stability to ensure most strength training can be safely done without the use of a weight belt.



Lesson 3: Dangers of Belly Fat

We are aware that it is not possible to just get rid of fat from one particular area, or spot reduce. No matter how many sit ups, or crunches we do, the abs will never show if we have an excess of body fat.

The only way to get visible abs is to decrease overall body fat. Fat distribution, or where our body stores fat, is dependent on several factors. The location of fat is affected by genetics, gender, as well as age and amount of fat that needs to be stored. The majority of fat is stored between the skin and muscle. This is called subcutaneous fat. Visceral fat is stored under the muscle and around the organs.

As we age, there is a shift of fat storage from subcutaneous to more visceral storage. A person with a hard, pronounced "pot-belly" probably has a high amount of visceral fat and stores their subcutaneous fat in this central region.

Typically this higher visceral fat distribution is seen in males, and their shape is considered android, or apple shape. Females hold a higher amount of fat around their hips and waists, which is considered gynoid, or pear shaped.

Scientists have found that greater amounts of body fat in the central region, and those with high amounts of visceral fat, are at greater risk cardiovascular and metabolic problems. Included in these is elevated blood sugars, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. It has been seen that fat cells in various parts of the body (ie: belly vs. hips) respond differently to hormones. For example, females higher estrogen production enhances their storage of gynoid fat while abdominal fat storage is enhanced by testosterone.

Males are at a disadvantage to some degree because they naturally hold more abdominal fat and this fat is more dangerous. They are at an advantage though because this apple shape fat distribution is more easily altered & lost when diet and exercise habits are changed. Thus, they can be at greater risk due to their fat storage, but men can also expect to see quicker changes in their body fat.

Fat cells are made up of fatty acids. These fatty acids can be released (and thus decrease the amount of fat one has), and are affected by chemical receptors. Males and females have different kind of receptors in their fat cells that affect the release of the fatty acids. In the lower body, the man's receptors tend to freely release the fatty acids, but the females receptors resist this release. The result is that females have a harder time losing fat in the hips and waist.

Many methods exist to measure body fat, inclusive of skin-fold measurements and girth measurements. The skin calipers intentionally pinch sites with higher subcutaneous fat distribution. Circumference measurements are usually done to track changes in this fat as well.

Abdominal circumference measurements have proved useful in predicting disease because it shows where fat is likely to be stored. This measurement is taken at the level of the belly button. A male with a measurement above 40 inches, or a female with a measurement above 34.5 inches is at considered to be at high risk for disease.

The take home lesson here is that men do tend to lose body fat quicker than females, men with excess body fat are at greater risk since the fat is centrally located, and everyone can lose body fat by dieting and exercising.

Lesson 4: Training Obliques

The obliques are very important to train for anyone interested in improving their performance and as an injury prevention tool. As we mentioned in an earlier article, the obliques are responsible for rotating and bending the trunk. They add an important component to trunk stability by increasing the tension produced in the abdominal region. They also help with the body's transfer of power with most activities involving the upper and lower body.

Very few activities are performed in a linear fashion involving no rotation. This is the case when performing seated chest press, where the arms move in and out, parallel to the floor, with very little other upper body movement. Contrast this to day-to-day activities such as walking, getting out of bed, and getting things out of the trunk. Most daily activities, and all sport activities involve flexion and rotation of the trunk. It now becomes evident that training the muscles that assist with flexion and rotation are going to help live a more comfortable and agile life. Injuries to the low back happen over time with persistent, repetitive trauma. Often and twist and lift motion is the final straw that causes debilitating injury.

While it is important to use the obliques in a strict fashion (such as angled crunches), it is more important to involve them in a more dynamic action where multiple demands are placed on them. A solid core creates a stable base for other actions to occur. Think about a ball being thrown where the power generated by the lower body is transferred to the throwing arm via the trunk. The trunk is dependent on the obliques and other core muscles to create the stability and to wind and unwind as the transfer of power occurs.

Having an understanding of the anatomy and actions of the obliques allow us to create effective exercises for that region. The focus needs to be on flexion and rotation. Because these motions can put the back at risk for injury, care must be taken when performing them. All moves should be under control and performed after a thorough warm up.

1. Single Sided Weighted Exercises: perform various lifts while raising only one weight at a time. This will cause the entire core (and obliques) to fire in order to stabilize the trunk and prevent unwanted movement. Try lifting a barbell overhead by only holding it with the right hand. Hold the barbell in the middle and have it run perpendicular to your chest instead of running parallel to your chest as is normally done. Include a mini squat to overhead press, or lunge to press. This press can also be done while balancing on one foot. Try lifting with the right hand and balancing on the left foot, and then left foot and lift with left side. There are multiple muscles at work here, including very functional ab training.

2. Standing medicine ball twists: stand back-to-back with a partner and rotate as you pass the ball around your body. You will be making a circle around your belly with the ball. This can be varied by incorporating angles. You pass the ball to your partner over your left shoulder, and then get it back from your partner down by your right knee.

3. Rear delt and backward lunge: Set up a cable so it is overhead. Face the cable so that it is outside your left shoulder. Grasp the handle with your right hand (you should have to cross your body to do this). Perform a rear lunge with the left leg as you simultaneously bring the cable back into a rear delt exercise position. Try to twist the body toward the right at the end of the exercise to further engage the obliques. As with the single sided weighted exercises, you are working many muscles here, so be sure to focus on firing the obliques.

4. Wood-choppers: Imagine yourself as a lumberjack wielding a heavy ax that you will be slamming down on a piece of wood. Take both hands up at angle above your right shoulder, ensuring you get a full stretch of the torso. Now bring your ax down towards your left foot. This can be done with the feet shoulder width apart or with the left foot slightly behind you (if you are

starting up and to the right). Again, the focus is to create the movement using the obliques. The difficulty can be increased using resistance from a plate, ball, or cable machine.

Lesson 5: Best Ab Exercises

Let's get one thing straight. The best exercise for abdominal definition is the one that burns the most calories and prevents you from eating more than you need. In other words, without the benefit of a controlled diet and rigorous exercise plan, it will be impossible to get defined six pack abs. Did you ever notice the disclaimer for [diet pills](#) and [home exercise equipment](#)? They state that:

1. Results will vary
2. Results are not typical and
3. The person followed an exercise and diet plan.

Basically, they are selling us a product but are basing the results on things we already know. Eat less, do more, repeat.

Many times, I have been at the gym doing my cardio, and have seen people do ab exercises for the entire time I am there. These people would be much better off with 35 minutes of an aerobic activity vs. 35 minutes of abs! The abs are high resistance muscles that can withstand a lot of punishment. They are not easy to fatigue since they are in constant strain as they stabilize our body in our daily activity.

Due to their fatigue resistant fibers, the abs CAN be trained every day, but do not NEED to be trained everyday. If you are struggling to lose that last bit of fat that is preventing rock hard abs, you do not need more ab work; you need to figure out why that fat has not gone away. Re-evaluate your eating and make sure you are burning enough calories.

Three to 4 days of ab work is usually sufficient, and few people looking to get shredded should be avoiding cardio. So, if you only have 8 minutes before you leave the gym, your best return on investment will probably be on the stair climber, not the *ab gizmo machine*.

Recent experiments looked at the electrical activity produced by the muscles of the rectus abdominis and the obliques. Researchers then determined which were the best ab exercises based on the amount of activity produced. Greater electrical activity meant greater muscle activation, but translates into either muscles that will become stronger, more resistant to fatigue, or even bigger.

All of this is dependent on how many days the muscle is trained, how long a rest period, and how many sets & reps. So depending on your goal, you can train the abs like any other muscle group to achieve the desired result. Most ab routines mimic muscle hypertrophy training (getting the muscle bigger) because there is high volume (lots of sets and reps), high intensity (by adding weight), and about 1 minute rest.

This type of training may actually cause the muscle to get bigger, but it will do very little to decrease the fat covering it. A better alternative is high reps, low to medium intensity with very little rest. This is more likely to increase caloric expenditure and thus help burn fat.

The bicycle maneuver, and the captain's chair ranked in the top of the list for both rectus abdominis and oblique activity. We have previously discussed the action of these muscles, so a shift of focus needs to occur for these exercises to be truly effective. There should be limited activity of the hip flexors. For the captain's chair, start with the knees bent at 90 degrees, not with

straight legs.

Then, move the pelvis towards the chest, not so much the hips bending and straightening. The bicycle maneuver is effective, not because the legs are moving, but because the legs moving cause the abs to stabilize and also extend the lever arm making pelvic motion more difficult. This exercise should be done slow and controlled with a focus on using the abs, not moving quickly and letting the majority of the movement occur from the legs.

Any other crunch, or crunch variation (ie reverse crunches typically done for the 'lower' abs) should have minimal movement except for the spine either flexion, side bending, or rotating. There is no need to do crunches with lots of weight or to do them quickly. It is ok to do variations, but remember that the rectus abdominis is only one muscle and there is not exercise that does lower and upper.

Ab training can be done on a regular basis, but the goal is to help overall performance and decrease injury. Even the best ab exercise will not be enough to get you ripped and sexy.



Lesson 6: Foods to Avoid

A general rule for weight loss is to always avoid fried foods, limit liquid calories, eliminate sweets and simple sugars, lift weights, and perform intervals for cardio training. All of these are done in order to decrease body fat which is the main culprit hiding our coveted abs.

The body needs a supply of good fats, but fried foods and saturated fats do not provide these. The good fats found in salmon, and nuts are what the body needs. Aside from a protein shake, liquid calories are usually not nutritious. Liquid calories include regular soda, juices, and alcoholic beverages. Again, these are calories that your body can do without.

Carbohydrates are important for muscle growth and general function, but not all carbs are created equal. Brown rice is a good carb, but a jelly donut is not. Cookies, cakes, and desserts are full of simple sugars, which wreak havoc on your metabolism and negatively affect your ability to lean out.

Strength training maintains, or increases muscle mass and thus increases the amount of calories the body burns while performing any activity, including rest. Interval training is (ie 5 minute warm up, then 45 seconds hard, 1 minute easy for 20 minutes, and 5 minute cool down) is much better for burning calories than the standard 30 minutes of cardio at the same pace. In addition to this, the following tips will help you be show (or even beach) ready.

- Broccoli and beans tend to increase the amount of gas production and fill the belly thus preventing a nice defined look. Try to decrease the consumption of these items as your special day comes near.
- Milk products can also increase bloating and cause stomach discomfort in some people and should thus be avoided. The sugar from milk tends to negatively affect the body's ability to get really lean and minimize body fat.
- Eating fast can cause an increase in air consumption, which may give the belly a little bulge. Remember to take small, slow bites in order to minimize the amount of air that ends up in your gut.
- Spicy foods can cause an upset stomach and with that usually comes bloating and general ill feelings that do not allow one to maintain hard, flexed abs.
- Water consumption is important, but in order to maintain the shredded look, you need to be dehydrated so that the skin will really shrink wrap around the muscles and show clean definition. Care must be taken when consuming foods with high carbohydrate content. For example, fruit is very high in water content and thus will not allow the body to be dehydrated enough to show the necessary definition.

The above hints are useful for the competition, a [photo shoot](#), or any other [special event](#). They are not practical to follow everyday, nor is it necessary. By continually training, having a good nutritional plan, and keeping the body fat as low as possible, it is easy to get shredded quickly. Do not beat your self up if you are not always ready to be on stage. The body needs to be fully fueled and properly hydrated in order to continue to perform the things you ask it to do. Normal everyday function as well as optimum training and recovery cannot be done following the rules of getting shredded. Pick what phase you want your body to be (off season, building mass, leaning out) and follow the appropriate guidelines to success.

Lesson 7: Worst Ab Exercises

A great lesson for any exerciser is to know how to cheat or how to perform exercises improperly. By having this knowledge, they know when they are doing things wrong and it is much easier to have an understanding of what not to do. We have discussed the ab and back muscles and their primary actions.

We also know how to be most efficient at working these muscles, so let's review some ways to cheat as well as some inefficient or dangerous ab activities.

As with any muscle group, we need to ask ourselves about our goal. For the most part, people want a strong core so that they prevent injury and have a solid base of support for their other exercises. The majority of us do not want bulging abs the way some people want bigger biceps or a tighter tush.

The sets, reps, and number of days we train the abs need to meet these demands. So, our first bad ab exercise is anyone that involves daily use of the abs with high volume and high intensity because this training dose is done for muscle growth.

Next let's examine muscle efficiency. Push ups are a predominant chest exercise, but also works the triceps. If the main goal is to work triceps, push ups alone will not suffice so you need to do triceps specific exercises. The abs need to be worked in a similar focused fashion.

Full sit ups win the nomination for another bad ab exercise. After about 30 degrees (think shoulders a few inches off the ground), the movement of the upper body is mostly done by the hip flexors, so full sit ups are inefficient for abdominal targeting.

Most people use the decline ab bench improperly because they allow too much range of motion and heavily involve the hip flexors. This bench can be used by locking in the feet, laying down completely and then only going up a few inches. Another method is to lock the feet in, keep the upper body tall and then only go down less than half way towards the bench.

The exercise again limits the range of motion but puts more of a focus on the abs. The best way to use the decline ab bench is to lay on it with the head near where the butt usually goes and then grasping the bench overhead. Now the movement will occur from the pelvis as it moves towards the chest with minimal hip flexion and extension. The short range of motion really fires the abs and the body has to work to resist the pull of gravity.

I am always amazed at the get-fit quick schemes, but the machines that electrically stimulate the abs are over the top ridiculous. These machines are used in rehabilitation and post surgery settings. They do make the muscle contract, but it will not make the abs stronger nor will it make the abdominal fat disappear. Research shows that in order to get any benefit, the machine would have to be turned up so much that it would be excruciatingly painful. There is no substitute for exercise and a good nutritional plan.

Lastly, a routine that always involves full support of the body is not contributing to improved ab and back strength and function. It is important to do single leg movements, single arm overhead exercise, and incorporate physio balls into the routine. It is also ok to remove the weight belt and ask the body to maintain stability.

Lesson 8: Getting Shredded Abs

While it is possible to maintain a flat midsection with some ab definition on a consistent basis, it is extremely difficult-and often unhealthy-to stay really shredded for an extended period of time. Those who have competed can attest to the physical and mental hardships of that day.

Granted you looked your absolute best, but you were at your worst from a health stand point. That level of dehydration and unnatural eating is not something that can be maintained. Let us not forget that the people we admire in magazines were aware they were had a photo shoot to do, so they got themselves shredded. Also, we cannot forget that pictures can be touched up by anyone with computer access.

One final note before we discuss getting shredded will be the mention of genetics. We are predisposed with a general outline of physique, metabolism, and fat distribution. I am sure we all know the person who looks great and they are not careful about what they eat and they hardly exercise; and I am sure we hate them too.

A common mistake many competitors make is to go overboard in the off season. Many stop doing cardio, and become extremely lax about their eating. They justify this by looking back at the months of hardship before going on stage.

It is much easier to get ready [for the next show](#), the beach, or the photo shoot when you are relatively lean. Be good most of the time so you be great the rest of the time.

Muscle definition and striation are dependant on having muscle cells full of glycogen, small fat cells, and dehydrated skin that can cling closely to these tissues. These are very basic principles that need to be understood as you journey to be being shredded.

If any of these factors are missing, you will look soft. Decrease overall body fat should be no surprise, and this needs to be done by decreasing caloric intake and increasing activity. Cardio is a must for people looking to get shredded, and the cardio needs to be focused since you should be going at a pace that is difficult.

A quality cardio session does not allow you to read, chat with your buddy, or send text messages. Interval training is the best method of cardio training because it makes your body inefficient and therefore it has to burn more calories to keep up with the demand. Think about how much gasoline a car uses in cruise control vs when it is in stop and go traffic.

Gas gets eaten up by the stop and go. Your body responds the same way with interval training. Since it goes hard, then easy, much more "gas" (calories) is used. Additionally, a harder more intense cardio session burns more calories. It is difficult to maintain this high intensity, but interval training allows you to spend a large part of your workout here.

Intervals can be done on any piece of cardio equipment and even outside. You can modify the speed and/or the incline to make the exercise more difficult. After 5-10 minutes warm up, perform hard intervals (you should be breathless, but not gasping) and then easy intervals (you should be able to talk, but feel like you would rather not), and then cool down for 5 minutes.

Start with 30 seconds hard and 1 minute easy for about 15 minutes. Increase your overall time, your intensity, or the amount of time you spend at the higher intensity.

Milk, and milk products (excluding protein powders) should be eliminated about 6 weeks out from your event. Fruits should be eliminated about 2 weeks before the event, and the final week should have no fats. These means that the last few weeks will be very restrictive with your meals.

This will mainly consist of oatmeal, brown rice, veggies, protein powder, and chicken/fish.

Some competitors even change their main protein to white fish (orange roughy, halibut, tilapia) only during the last week because it has less fat than chicken.

Green leafy veggies (broccoli, spinach) are ok to keep in the diet, but the final week should have a lot of asparagus. Asparagus is a natural diuretic, so it will help the body rid excess water. Eliminate sodium, and any foods or condiments that contain sodium since water will bind to this mineral and not allow you to get rid of it.

Water consumption should be increased to about 2 gallons for when you are 7 days out. This needs to be done for about 2-3 days. As you get closer to goal date decrease the amount of water (to 1 gallon, then 1/2 gallon, and about 16 oz the day before) so that the skin becomes dehydrated and thus sticks closely to the muscle. On your event day you will only be able to consume a small amount of ice chips.

About 7 days before, dramatically decrease carb intake. This will flatten your cells out as they lose glycogen which will prep them to get full once you re introduce carbs about 2 days before and all the way through the competition. Slowing increase intake of carbs to refill the cells.

Be careful to not over do it and because cell will fill up too much and "spill over" causing a flat look that is not well defined.

Please note that the above guidelines are very general, but they do work. [Many competitors and fitness enthusiasts](#) have used them to look their best at their event. Everybody responds differently, so it make take some experimentation to find what truly works for you.

Talk to other [competitors](#) and [fitness professionals](#), but ultimately you have to make an educated decision for yourself.



Lesson 9: Quick and Easy Notes on Abs

The wonderful thing about washboard abs is that we all have the correct anatomical placement of the muscles that will allow us to have them. Washboard abs are not really created, they are merely allowed to show or unfortunately covered by a layer of fat.

The key to displaying the washboard look is to decrease the amount of fat directly over this area. Intentionally decreasing body fat in only one area is not possible and thus neither endless crunches, the latest whiz bang gizmo, nor the newest pill alone will accomplish this feat.

There needs to be a focus on decreasing OVERALL body fat. This can easily be accomplished by having a consistent cardio routine (such as running, bike riding), incorporating several days of weight lifting, and most importantly following a nutrition plan full of *clean* foods.

Both discipline and planning are needed to attain washboard abs. The discipline is needed to prepare the food and bring it with you where ever you go. It also takes discipline to stick to an exercise program. Planning is also required for proper food consumption and taking time out to cook. Planning also means making time in the busy schedule to get a minimum amount of exercise.

From a nutrition standpoint it is imperative to find out how many calories the body needs to stay at its current shape. There then needs to be a negative caloric balance so that the body is forced to tap into its stored fat for energy. Under eating without regard to the body's minimum requirements, or overdoing cardio exercise often leads to the body using [protein](#) (taken from the muscles) for energy.

A person on an extreme diet may also see weight lost either in the form of water which they excrete or the foods they have eliminated also contained water. Once the calorie requirement is found, the person should decrease their intake by 250-500 calories per day. This, in addition to burning between 250-500 calories per day will lead to a deficit of around 3500 calories per week. One pound of fat is eliminated for every 3500 calorie deficit.

After having the number of calories figured out, the next step is to be particular about the types of foods that are consumed and exactly when they are consumed. Carbohydrates are not bad. In fact, they play a vital role in the body's ability to burn fat and in helping muscle-building protein reach the appropriate areas. Ideally, the carbohydrates are consumed earlier in the day when the body will have the rest of the day to use this energy source.

Another important time to have the carbohydrates is after a workout, and especially after a weight lifting session. The post workout meal must contain a carbohydrate and a protein (think rice and chicken, or protein powder with banana). This mix will be taken up more rapidly into the system and thus give the body nutrients to replenish. Food quality cannot be under-emphasized. The person looking for the washboard abs needs to stay away from fried foods, from simple sugars (such as those found in processed foods, candy, and typical junk food), and from unhealthy sources of fat (such as cheese, or certain cuts of meat).

The cardio routine must be done consistently to help burn to stored fat. [Bodybuilders](#) near their competition date will often do cardio on an empty stomach (ie: first thing in the morning) to give the body a greater chance at tapping into fat as an energy source. The effort should be enough to

make you winded and to make conversation possible, but difficult. This routine should be done 4-5 times per week and last from 25-45 minutes. Higher frequency and greater length of time may be needed for the individual who has a lot of fat to loose.

Lastly, a solid weight lifting routine needs to be implemented. This will help keep a higher muscle mass which forces the body to burn more calories during the day in order to maintain the mass. This plan can be done at home with a few dumbbells, bodyweight, and household items (milk jugs, bags of dog food, spare tires).

Washboard abs can be attained, but it takes hard work done consistently and smart decisions made daily.



Lesson 10: Pilates and Yoga - Are They for You?

We know that there is a big rage for nice abs and core training, but there is little effort to train these parts properly. A lot of competitors are willing to try various supplements in order to achieve their goals. Many have made purchases of the perfect push and the ab lounge. Nearly everyone tries the latest exercises published in [magazines](#), even though very few of these are new or innovative.

How many people have ventured into the group exercise room to try a Pilate's or yoga class? They are similar, but have different focuses in practice (Pilate's: core strength and translating that movement into daily life; yoga: more stretch and flexibility oriented). Either one of these activities will help any athlete perform better and helps them raise self-awareness through movement.

They will increase awareness of the body, increase flexibility, and improve ab/core strength. Increased body awareness will be beneficial when posing and holding poses for judges to review. Flexibility is going to help prevent injury so you can continue to train, and it will help you lift better and thus make the gains you desire. the majority of Pilate's and many yoga poses involve engaging the core. Forget your ab workout, take one of these classes to truly test your limits of ab strength.

Think of other athletes who are Pilate's/yoga practitioners or whose events make them use the same muscles. Most of us are envious of the flat stomach that male and female dancers have. Look at the physique of a Cirque du Soleil performer and you can see elegant muscle definition and striations. Contrary to popular belief, these classes are not only for women.

It is recommended that you take a class so you can get feedback from an instructor, but a [dvd](#) may be useful so you can become familiar with terms and movements.

Pilates traditionally has included equipment to help facilitate as well as challenge movements. Springs are placed on different parts of the equipment and then attached to arms, legs, hands, or feet. The equipment may resemble a bed, a chair, or a modification of these.

The person doing the exercise engages the core while going through specific movement patterns. Another option, and the most popular in health clubs, is to take Pilates mat classes. This usually involves no equipment, except one's body weight and maybe a mat. Sometimes, the instructor will incorporate a ring, or similar training aid for these classes.

The movements vary since no equipment is used, but they keep the challenge that is beneficial. All of the moves have modifications and progressions so that even a novice can have success and see positive results. There are various forms of yoga, including the popular hatha yoga, More recently, there has been an increase in Bikram (hot room yoga) participation. These forms of yoga can vary from gentle, soothing, classes, to more intense classes where people feel like they have gone through a workout.

As with Pilates, modifications and training tools are available to help get into proper position. Most people who do not practice yoga often, will have a difficult time since these classes require sustained poses in a stretch. Make sure you talk to the instructor before class, and stick with it. The benefits are tremendous and the results fantastic.

Visit the Fitness Atlantic Forum to discuss this lesson and find out how others use yoga and pilates to further develop their abdominals: <http://www.fitnessatlantic.com/Muscle-Fitness/>

Joseph Pilates, founded his training methods around 1912. He trained daily until his death in 1967 at 87 years old.

Want to find out how other Fitness Atlantic superstars train their abs?
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Stay Fit,

Brian Cannone

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