

Get a Flatter Belly for Good

The secret to a flat stomach is an abs workout that includes cardiovascular exercise.

No one likes belly fat, especially your doctor, who understands that excess abdominal fat increases your risk of heart disease, diabetes, stroke, metabolic syndrome and even some cancers.

“Many people with a normal body mass index (BMI) are at a higher risk for disease than they realize because they carry so much of their weight around the middle,” says Nicole Schaldone, MS, RD, CSO, of Advanced Gastroenterology and Nutrition.

These individuals are likely to have large amounts of deep belly fat around their organs. This fat is called visceral or intra-abdominal fat and is linked to high cholesterol, high insulin, high triglycerides and high blood pressure.

Do you measure up?

“Your waist-to-hip ratio may be more important than your BMI in determining your health risks,” says Ms. Schaldone. Men whose waists are wider than 40 inches and women whose waists are wider than 35 inches are at the greatest risk for developing health problems.

You Got to Move It to Lose It

Belly fat accumulates for a variety of reasons, from age to stress to a poor diet, explains Amy Lara-Lowrey, LPN, a fitness professional at Hunterdon Health and Wellness Centers in Whitehouse Station and Clinton. Identify the cause of yours, then work with a trainer and a dietitian to develop a plan for you.

The key to losing belly fat starts with the basics of weight loss: Eat the right foods, stay hydrated, watch your portions and increase your physical activity.

“You may want to start with a walking program to help rev up your metabolism, then add planks, crunches and other core exercises,” Ms. Lara-Lowrey suggests.

“Exercise is crucial, but you also have to take a hard look at what you are eating—not just how much, but also what kinds of foods,” adds Ms. Schaldone.

“You may be eating too many simple carbohydrates, such as processed, sugary foods. A switch from refined flour to whole wheat can make a huge difference,” she says.

“Eat foods that are filling, and drink a lot of water every day to reduce belly bloat and fluid retention. Make sure to gradually add fiber to your diet, until you reach about 25 to 30 grams a day.”

Foods to Eat

- Oatmeal
- High-fiber cereals
- Nuts and beans
- Lean protein
- Fruits and vegetables

Foods to Avoid

- Trans fats & saturated fats
- Highly processed foods
- Simple carbohydrates, like sugar and white flour

ASK THE TRAINER

What’s the secret to flat abs?

Exercise is essential to losing belly fat. Our fitness professional Amy Lara-Lowrey offers these suggestions.

Q. Can I target my abs with certain exercises?

A. You can’t rely solely on kinetic core exercises, such as crunches, Pilates and sit-ups, to achieve a flatter belly. Specific exercises known to “target” abs won’t work unless they are combined with proper nutrition and cardiovascular exercises.

Q. What are some of the best exercises to firm abs?



A. According to the American Council on Exercise, the following are some of the most effective exercises. (Remember to combine them with a cardiovascular workout.)

- Bicycle
- Plank with Knee Bends
- Pelvic Tilts on a Ball
- Ball Crunch with Stability Ball

Q. What is the secret to a successful abs workout?

A. You have to enjoy your workout, and it has to include cardiovascular exercise, whether it's running, walking, swimming, dancing, kickboxing or aerobics.

For more information, call the Hunterdon Health and Wellness Centers at **908-534-7600** (Whitehouse Station) or **908-735-6884** (Clinton).