

THE BEST ABDOMINAL EXERCISES

You've Never Heard Of

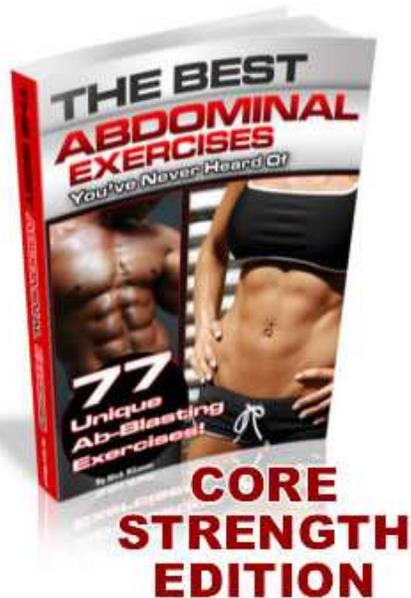
77

Unique Ab-Blasting Exercises!



"The Best Abdominal Exercises You've Never Heard Of!"

By Nick Nilsson



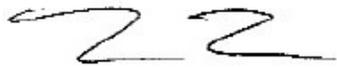
From:
Nick Nilsson

If you want a ROCK-SOLID core...one that can support ANY weight you pile on the bar, load up on your back or throw over your head...THESE are the exercises you need.

These aren't about crunches or six-packs or "fitness model" exercises.

These exercises are designed to turn your core into a BRICK FREAKING WALL of muscle.

Have fun and let's get right into it!



I Want Your Feedback!

I welcome your comments and questions!
Please do not hesitate to contact me via email at BetterU@fitstep.com.

[CLICK HERE](#) to learn more about "The Best Ab Exercises You've Never Heard Of"

WARNING!

Any exercise program contains an element of risk. Be aware that the exercises in the book may not be familiar to you and, even though every attempt has been made to ensure safe instruction, how and if you decide to execute the exercises is ultimately your responsibility. Consult your physician before taking part in any exercise program. By reading the information in this book you hereby agree to the Terms and Conditions of use, found in this book.

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THE BEST ABDOMINAL EXERCISES

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77

Unique Ab-Blasting Exercises!



Barbell Curl Squats

This is one of THE best overall abdominal/core exercises I've EVER found. If you want a stronger core, THIS is the exercise to focus on. It's tough but VERY effective.

To do this exercise, all you need is a barbell, but a squat rack will help a lot. It'll make the exercise better for getting into position with.

Set the squat rack up so that the racks are one notch below where you would normally set them for squats. The reason you want to set it one below is that by the time you're done with the exercise, it may be very hard to get it up to the height where you would normally rack the bar! With the racks a little lower, you'll have an easier time getting the bar back onto them. Set the safety rails just above where you normally set them for regular squats the first time you try this. When you develop a better feel for how it's done, you can lower them a little to get a fuller range of motion.

Step in front of the bar and hold it in the top position of the barbell curl. Now stand up, unracking the bar. Don't allow your elbows to brace against your midsection. This will take away from the supporting tension on the abs. Take a step back and get your feet set. Now, holding the bar in that top curl position through the entire movement, squat down as far as you can then come back up. You don't actually curl the bar while doing the squat, you just hold it in the top curl position.

Hold your breath during the majority of this movement to keep greater stability in your core. Start holding as you start to go below the halfway point and continue to hold it until you're about halfway back up. If you don't want to or are unable to hold your breath, exhale through pursed lips (as though you're blowing up a balloon). Keeping the breath held will maximize core stability and allow your abs to function more effectively during the movement.



Since this exercise uses relatively lighter weight compared to a regular squat, holding your breath is not nearly as potentially dangerous. If you do feel lightheaded, rack the bar and rest.

Holding the resistance in front of your body, as you do in the exercise, takes away the shoulder support that you would normally get with a front squat. All this requirement for supporting tension goes directly onto the muscles of the core, all of which will have to contract hard throughout the entire movement in order to keep the barbell from falling forward.

This exercise helps you to get a feel for using the abs during a squat, which is extremely important for maximizing your squat strength. Using the abs while squatting is something that does not come naturally and is very rarely taught or explained to trainers. It also helps to greatly strengthen the abs for that specific purpose, making this a very powerful core and overall strength building exercise.

When doing the exercise for the first time, start with just the bar, no matter how strong you are. This will help you get a feel for how the movement feels, where to set the safety rails and how far down you can comfortably go. When you're comfortable, work your way up slowly from there as fatigue will come quickly. It's a movement your body will be totally unused to, no matter how many abdominal exercises you've done in your training career before this. The muscles of the core will tire before your legs do. Be sure to keep your lower back arched and tight while performing this movement.

If you're able to, go all the way down until your elbows touch your knees. This will give you the fullest range of motion. Tense the abs hard, especially at the bottom as you're coming back up. For extra resistance, pause at

the bottom for a few seconds. This will give you the best feel for how the abs should be used when squatting.

With this exercise, holding the resistance in front of the body (like in a front squat) allows you to keep a more vertical body position. The tension will go onto the abs, but be aware that there will also be some tension going to the lower back. Because you're holding the weight out in front of you, the lower back must also contract to help stabilize the spine. As you keep up with the exercise, your lower back will get stronger.

Another great benefit to this exercise is that your breathing muscles (the intercostals) never get a chance to relax during this movement. From top to bottom and back up (even while you're "resting" at the top), your breathing muscles are being challenged because of the weight they are being forced to support. This can build up great lung capacity and breathing strength (excellent for athletes who need great cardio capacity) and carries directly over to your work capacity in the regular barbell squat.

Common Errors

1. Doing this exercise after a bicep workout

As you can imagine, performing this exercise is not going to be as effective if you've just finished a bicep workout. The biceps will already be fatigued and you'll limit the amount of weight you can use and how long you can hold it for. Use this exercise on non-bicep training days, if possible.

2. Going too fast

Dropping down quickly in the squat will put extra stress on the biceps as you come up and reduce the tension on the abs. This exercise should be done very deliberately with no bouncing or fast movements. If you have a tendency to do this, pause at the bottom for a few seconds to stop the bouncing.

3. Using too much weight

Since the legs are so much stronger, it's tempting to use too much weight for this exercise. Remember, our goal here is NOT to work the legs or the biceps but to work the abs. The legs and the biceps are only here to help push the abs. If your biceps fatigue before your abs get a good workout, you need to reduce the weight.

4. Leaning forward

Try to keep your upper body as vertical as possible with this one. It's very similar to a front squat - having the weight in front of you allows you to stay vertical more easily. Leaning forward will cause the barbell to shift forward, which will put more tension on the biceps, causing them to fatigue prematurely. As you start to fatigue, you will notice you have a tendency to lean forward. This is because the supporting abs are weakening. Do your best to keep vertical. Once you start to move too far forward, end the set.

5. Bar too close to chin

If the bar gets too close to the collarbones, you will lose some of the tension in the abs. Keep it at least a few inches away to maximize the supporting tension and torque demanded of the abs. If it comes too close, it may be tempting to rest the bar on your collarbones, which will turn it into an uncomfortable front squat.

6. Letting the elbows brace strongly against the midsection

If you let the elbows press strongly into the midsection, it will take away some of the tension on the abs. A little contact is fine, especially as you get tired, but don't rely on using this technique or it will make the exercise less effective. Letting the elbows sink in like this will also tend to hunch your back over, putting pressure on the lower

back. This will in turn pull your torso and center of balance forward, putting more tension on the biceps, making you dig the elbows in more! Keep the elbows out front, away from your body and you'll keep a better body position and do a more effective set.

Tricks For Making the Exercise More Productive

1. Look forward and slightly up

When you squat, keeping looking forward and slightly up. This will help you to keep an arch in your lower back and keep you from leaning forward. We want to avoid forward lean as it causes the biceps to fatigue prematurely.

2. Don't breathe too deeply in or out as you're coming down or pushing back up

Breathing too much during this exercise reduces core stability and can compromise your form. For best core stabilization, keep your breath carefully controlled. At the bottom, you can hold your breath for a few moments to get the most solid stability. As you come up, you can exhale through pursed lips after you've come about 1/4 to 1/2 of the way. This technique shouldn't be used if you have blood pressure issues, however, as it does cause an increase in blood pressure. Keep a careful eye on how you feel if you do choose to do this - and if you feel any dizziness, end the set and then don't use this technique the next set.

3. Pause at the bottom

To really maximize the tension on the abs, pause for a few seconds at the bottom and focus on really squeezing and tightening your abs hard. As you start to come back up, try to push with your abs as well. This will help you to feel what it's like to use the abs to help push out of the bottom when doing regular barbell squats.

Ball Pullover Crunch Supports

Your abs will be put to the test in a variety of ways through every section of this exercise. By combining resistance from several different directions over the course of a rep, your abs will be challenged to not only pull, but push and support at the same time.

This exercise requires a Swiss ball and two dumbbells to perform (one dumbbell will work but two will be better). The dumbbells should be a moderate weight to start.

Lay back on the ball, holding the dumbbells in your hands. Drop your hips down and set your feet wide apart on the floor (you'll see why). Press the two dumbbells together tightly (this improves their stability during the movement), bend your arms slightly then lower them back and down behind your head in a pullover movement.

Feel for a good stretch on the abs at the bottom. Tighten the abs, then begin pulling the dumbbells back and over your body. Bring the dumbbells all the way to the top then, bending your elbows a little more, lower them forward in front of you. Your upper body will come up and you will be in pretty much a sitting position on the ball while supporting the dumbbells in front of you. Keep your breath held briefly while you hold the dumbbells there or breathe through pursed lips. This maintains stability in the core while it's supporting the weight.

DO NOT let your forearms rest on your thighs at the bottom. That will release the tension on the abs where you want them doing the work of supporting the dumbbells in front of you. This is why your feet are set far apart. You

need room to hold the dumbbells in front.

Support the dumbbells there for a few seconds, squeezing the abs HARD. Now bring them back up to the top, laying back on the ball as you do so. Continue the movement back to the pullover that you started with.



Common Errors

1. Letting the arms rest on the thighs

DON'T let the arms rest on the thighs at the bottom of the support. This will release the tension in the abs when you want the tension to be maximized on the abs. It's okay if your arms brush or lightly touch your thighs - just be sure you're not letting them rest or supporting the weight on them.

2. Locking the arms

It's important to keep your arms slightly bent when performing this exercise to keep the stress off the elbows.

3. Not dropping the hips during the pullover

If you don't drop the hips and round your back over the ball, the weight of the dumbbells will pull you backwards and you may lose your balance and roll over the ball. Keeping your hips down counterbalances this tendency.

4. Not keeping the dumbbells pressed together

If you separate the dumbbells while doing this exercise (especially during the support), you'll lose a great deal of stability in the core. Pressing the dumbbells together increases ab stability and core activation. This is why, in fact, using two dumbbells is actually better than using only one. Using only one dumbbell doesn't result in this extra core activation because you can't achieve the same degree of inward pressure. To demonstrate this, when doing a rep and you're in the support, try separating the two dumbbells. You'll feel an immediate drop in the stability of the core.



Wrong



Right

Tricks For Making the Exercise More Productive

1. Imagine the "caber" toss

If you've ever seen the Highland Games in Scotland where they support a large log (a caber) by holding it under one end then toss it as far as they can by powerfully lifting up, then you know what to imagine when coming up out of the support. Basically, when you start to bring the dumbbells up out of the bottom position, imagine as though you're forcefully throwing the weight back behind you. Naturally, you don't want to actually do that but that's the movement to imagine.

2. Crunch up as you're doing the pullover

To really give the abs a hard workout, try to combine a crunch movement with the pullover phase of the exercise. Basically, as you're pulling the dumbbell up and over, try to push yourself up towards the ceiling in a crunch type movement. This will dramatically increase the tension on the abs and keep it on the abs for more time during the exercise.

The "Ab Ripper"

There are several reasons why this exercise is extremely effective, not to mention challenging.

- **It works all the major muscle groups in your upper body** in one movement. The bench press half of the exercise works the chest, anterior delts and triceps. The pulldown half works the back, biceps, and posterior delts. The combination of the two movements works the entire abdominal region. It is extremely demanding to perform.
- This exercise takes advantage of a concept that can best be described as **contralateral antagonistic muscle activation**. In layman's terms, this means that when you work a certain muscle, e.g. the chest, the antagonistic or opposing muscle on the other side of your body (i.e. the back) will be a little stronger. This increase in strength can be as much as 5% or more.
- It also places a **tremendous stabilizing requirement on the abs** during the movement due to the directly opposing forces placed on the body during the rep. One side of your body is pushing while one side is pulling. All the stress of these two opposing movements must be transferred through the core muscles of your abdominal region. In order to not let yourself get wrung out like a wet towel, you've got to squeeze your abs for all you're worth.

This movement is incredibly effective for martial artists, boxers and baseball players for developing explosive rotational power. In fact, it is effective for essentially any sport that has a rotational power component, which is most sports.

Essentially, this exercise is half flat dumbbell bench press and half one-arm pulldown. You will be pressing the dumbbell at the same time as you are doing a one-arm pulldown. The technique is fairly straightforward but the effects are amazing.



Start by setting a flat bench perpendicular to and directly underneath a high pulley. You will be lying on the bench with only your upper back on the bench, e.g. if you were to stretch your arms out to the sides, they would be resting mostly on the bench to either side of you.

This orientation of the bench is very important for stability. If you set the bench normally and lie on it lengthwise, you're going to have a much harder time stabilizing your lower body when doing the exercise. Also, keeping your lower body off the bench will allow you the necessary freedom of movement to shift your legs and adjust your bodyweight positioning to perform the exercise most effectively.

- Attach a single handle to the high pulley and get yourself one moderate weight dumbbell. Start with a dumbbell that is about half of what you would use for a regular set of 8 reps on the flat dumbbell bench press. Set the pulldown weight to about 20 to 30 pounds more than this. You can adjust your weights upward as you become more familiar with and stronger at the exercise. Your first set will be a learning

experience!

- Start by sitting on the bench with the dumbbell on end on your thigh, grasped in your left hand. Reach up and grasp the handle with your right hand. Make sure your right shoulder is directly under the pulley for the best line of pull. Here's how to get into position to start...
- Drop your rear end forward off the bench. At the same time move your left arm back to rest on the bench (you can kick the dumbbell up and back by raising your left thigh if you're using a heavier dumbbell).
- When you've done this movement, your upper back and upper left arm should be resting on the bench and the dumbbell should be balanced as though you were in the bottom position of the dumbbell bench press. You should have the handle in your right hand with your arm fully extended and stretched directly up.

Now it's time to rip those abs!

- Tighten your abs up and do a rowing/pulldown movement with your right arm while simultaneously doing a bench press rep with your left arm. No secrets to this part! Just push hard and pull hard. Be absolutely sure to clench those abs as hard as you can at the start and all the way through to the negative (lowering) phase of the movement.
- You may find it necessary to shift your feet around in order to stay balanced in the movement. This is normal. Your body will find the proper placement for balance if you let it do its thing naturally. Occasionally, I've even found it necessary to kick one leg up in the air in order to stay balanced (this normally occurs at the start of the rep when you are about to push up/pull down).
- At the bottom of the movement, don't allow your upper arm to rest on the bench. We want to keep maximum tension on the abs throughout the exercise.

Be aware that it will take a few reps to become coordinated with this movement. It's not very common to be pulling and pushing forcefully at the same time, and it can feel awkward at first! You will feel tremendous tension across your entire abdominal region, unlike anything that you've ever experienced before. It will feel as though someone is trying to wring you like a wet towel.

Do a full set of 6 to 8 reps with your arms in this position then do one of two things...either immediately switch sides and do the pulldown with your left and press with your right, or take a rest and do the opposite sides as a separate set. Either way will work. Taking a brief rest between sets will allow your abdominal region a little time to recover from the stress of the movement.

To complete the set, set the dumbbell on end on your thigh, then use your legs to push yourself back up as you pull on the handle to help pull yourself back up to the sitting position on the bench.

Once you've got a handle on how to do the movement, you can start increasing the weights you're using to really push your core strength. As long as you keep the proper ratio of weight between the pulldown and the press (the pulldown weight a little more than the press weight), you can work up to some pretty big weights. As an example, I've gone as high as a 120 lb. dumbbell on the press and 150 lbs. on the pulldown.

My recommendation...don't increase the weight the first time you do this exercise. Stick with your starting weight and do it for 4 sets (2 sets on each side). This is a dimension of tension that your body will most likely NEVER have experienced before and I can promise that you WILL feel this the next day (and probably for several days after!), no matter how much abdominal training you've done in your life.

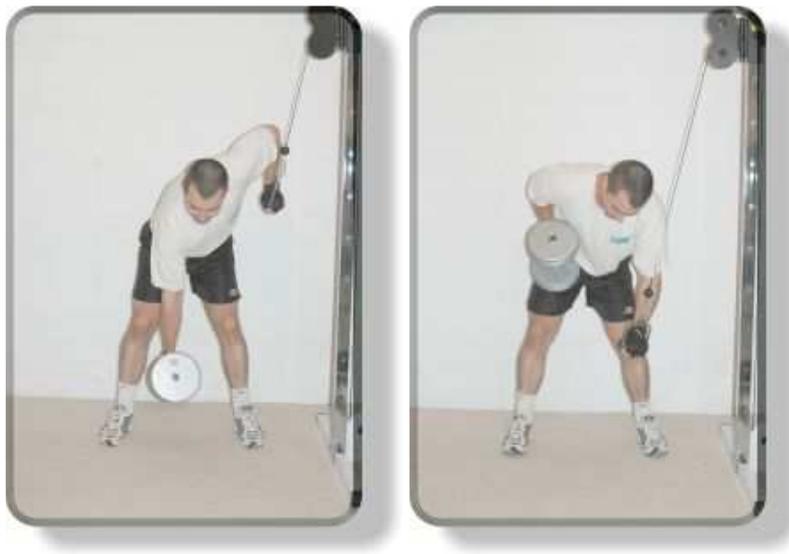
Inverse "Ab Rippers"

You've done the exercise lying down...now it's time to reverse the roles. This unique variation is exactly the same in concept -- push with one side and pull with the other. The only difference is the orientation of your body.

Instead of lying flat on a bench and pressing and pulling down, you're going to be doing a standing one-arm dumbbell row for your back and a one-arm cable-crossover/pressdown movement for your chest. This puts a whole new type of stress on the body - I would suggest working with the lying version first before attempting this one. This is a more advanced variation of the exercise.

I would suggest trying a standing one-arm dumbbell row just by itself so that you have an idea of the mechanics and body position of the exercise. It's **CRITICAL** that you maintain a tight lower back with an arch throughout this exercise. Rounding the back over puts a lot of stress on the lower back area and, combined with the stress on the core when doing the full exercise, it could lead to injury if you're not careful or comfortable with the movement.

- You will need a dumbbell that is about 20 pounds heavier than the weight you have on the pulley. Use a single handle attached to the high pulley for this exercise.
- Stand sideways to the high pulley, grasp the handle then get it into position as though you were about to do a downward press with it (similar to a starting position for a cable cross-over).
- Now bend down and pick up the dumbbell in the other hand. Use your knees and keep your back tight and arched.
- You will be doing the row in between your legs for best stability.
- Row the dumbbell up while at the same time, pushing/pressing the cable handle down towards the floor.
- You will feel a **STRONG** twisting sensation through your entire abdominal area. Keep your abs tight, lower the weights and repeat!



This exercise puts your abs in a more strongly contracted position than when lying flat, giving the exercise a very different feel. Also, since your core is now also responsible for stabilizing and supporting the body in a bent-over position, it's going to be very strongly challenged. Keep a strict eye on your form for both halves of the exercise.

Common Errors

1. Improper bench placement

Be sure that you place the bench perpendicular underneath the handle so that you keep your lower body free to move. If you place the bench lengthwise, you're going to have a hard time stabilizing yourself.

2. Using too much weight too soon

Start with a light to moderate weight until you get an idea of what your abdominals are capable of. This exercise places a tremendous shearing force on the midsection and your abs must be strong enough to hold tight and prevent the stress from going to the lower back.

3. Not squeezing the abs hard enough

It is essential that you squeeze the abs hard from the moment you start the rep. Pulling and pushing with force at the same time sends a lot of stress through your abdominal area. You must be ready for it or you won't even be able to start the weight moving! Be sure to keep your abs as tight as you can on the negative as well. If you lose tension on the negative, the weights are going to come crashing down.

Tricks For Making the Exercise More Productive

1. Explode

You can develop tremendous explosive power through your abdominal core muscles by starting each rep with a powerful thrust. Start by clenching your abs as hard as you can. Think about exploding up with one arm and down with the other then do it! The explosion should start with a sharp abdominal contraction and follow through to your limbs.

2. Squeeze your chest and back muscles hard at the top of the movement

Don't hit the top and take a rest. Squeeze everything hard. If you need to, you can take a rest at the bottom of the movement.

3. Pause between reps

You can make your explosion even more effective by releasing the tension in your upper body between reps. Rest your upper arm on the bench, let your pulldown arm hang and stretch, and let your abs unclench. This releases all the elastic tension in your muscles forcing your body to start from scratch between reps.

4. Don't pause between reps

Doing the reps in a continuous fashion places a tremendous amount of tension on the abs at the turnaround point at the bottom of the rep. Changing the direction of the pull/push must be done starting from the abs. Clench them hard!

Wall Walker Sissy Squats

This exercise appears to be, at first glance, a quadricep exercise. Don't let that fool you, though. The support and stabilizing tension that is put through the abs with this exercise is phenomenal. You also get the ability to add a tremendous amount of weight to the exercise, which makes it ideal for building core strength.

If you're interested in building incredible core stabilizing strength that's going to help you not only in any sport you do but in all your lifts in the gym as well, this exercise should be near the top of your list. To perform this exercise, you should have a strong midsection and lower back. This exercise does put tension on the area and if you have a weak or problematic lower back, it may lead to injury. If your lower back is strong and has no problems, you should be just fine with the exercise.

Start by setting one of the safety rails in the power rack very close to the bottom (the bottom hole or one up will work best). This is the rail your feet are going to be standing on. Set the other safety rail at about chest height. This is the rail that your hands will be pushing on.

Try this exercise without any extra weight the first time you do it, just to get an idea of how the exercise is performed.

Stand in the center of the rack, facing the higher safety rail. Set your hands on the rail about shoulder width apart. Step one of your feet on the lower rail behind you then the other foot. Your body should be straight and stiff, very much like the push-up position, only your body is at an angle.

Tighten your abs strongly before starting. Now, bending only at the knees (like when doing a Sissy Squat), lower yourself down towards the floor. Imagine that you are trying to touch your knees to the floor without bending any other part of your body. Breathe in as you start lowering yourself. As you get near the bottom, you should hold your breath, especially during the time when you're changing directions at the bottom to maximize core stability. As you come up, breathe out through pursed lips.

While doing this movement, you should be pushing hard with your hands against the top rail and pushing hard with your feet on the bottom rail. These opposing forces work to keep you on the rails. Your abs will take up the majority of the stabilizing force of the exercise, with the tension moving progressively over the abs as you lower yourself down. As a bonus, the strong pushing you're doing with your arms also activates the Serratus Anterior muscles, building those up as well.

Don't go down very far with this movement - it only requires about 6 to 8 inches range of motion. This will be very apparent when you start adding weight.

To come back up, squeeze your quads as though pushing up from a sissy squat. Remember to keep your midsection rock-solid when doing this exercise, from start to finish.

Using Weight

This exercise is good without weight but the real power of it comes shining through when you start adding weight to it. For this, you will need a hip belt and some weight plates. Be conservative when you start adding weight - experiment with what your body can take. The good thing is, if it starts to get to be too much, all you need to do is take a short step down off the safety rail.

The easiest way I've found to get the hip belt into position with weight is to first lean the weight up against the upright of the rack. Kneel down in front of it, put the belt around your lower back, loop the chain through the hole of the plate, then attach it to the other clip of the belt. Now stand up and you're ready to go. When you start using more and more plates, this technique makes it much easier. Plus, you can grip the upright to help get to the standing position.



Once you've got the weight set and are standing up with it, maneuver yourself to the same position as you were in without weight. Keep your abs tight from the moment you set your first foot up on the rail.

Lower yourself down slowly, clenching your abs as hard as you can. You will feel a tremendous amount of tension going through the abs when you add weight. As you get stronger, you can build up to some very heavy weights. I've gone as high as using four 45-lb plates with this exercise.

When you've completed your set, step down then kneel down beside the upright, leaning the weight plate(s) against it. Unclip the belt and you're done!



Common Errors

1. Not keeping the body stiff

It's extremely critical to keep the entire body stiff and straight when performing this exercise. Bend ONLY at the knees. If you allow the back to hunch or arch, it will put stress on the lower back.

2. Moving too quickly

This should be a slow, deliberate movement. If you move up and down quickly, the momentum will put a lot of stress on the lower back at the bottom of the exercise.

3. Not pushing hard with the arms or legs

Pushing with the arms and legs is what keeps the tension on your abs and keeps your body in position during the exercise. If you lose the pushing, your body position will fall apart and you won't be able to perform the exercise.

Tricks For Making the Exercise More Productive

1. How to arrange the plates when using very heavy weight

When you use the hip belt with one or two plates, you can comfortably do the exercise with the plates in between your thighs. As you start using more weight, you may find that you need to have your thighs too far apart to keep the most solid body position on the exercise. When you get to this point, keep your thighs close together and let the plates rest on the FRONT of your thighs. As you drop down, this will push them forward so that they're not in between your thighs, making your body more solid during the exercise.

Two Dumbbell Ball Twists

Using only a Swiss Ball and two dumbbells, you can achieve an extraordinary ab-tightening contraction around the entire midsection musculature. This exercise places a great stretch on the obliques along with great tension, forcing quick abdominal development.

For this exercise, you will need two dumbbells and a Swiss Ball (I will also tell you how to do the exercise on a regular flat bench in the Tricks section below). A smaller-size ball is better for this exercise though any ball will work.

Lay on your back with your knees bent and your feet fairly wide apart - you'll need a good base of support for this exercise so that you don't roll off to the side of the ball. Hold two equal-weight dumbbells at arms-length directly above you. Press them together while doing this exercise (if they're separated, they'll move around more, making the exercise less efficient). Start with fairly light dumbbells the first time you try this movement.



Now, keeping your head facing directly up/forwards and your hips horizontal, lower both of the dumbbells slowly and under complete control down to the left. Hold your breath and tighten up your midsection as you come down to the fully-twisted position. Prepare to push hard against the ground with your left foot to maintain your balance.



Your left arm is going to bend to about 90 degrees at the elbow as you lower the dumbbells to the side while your right arm should stay perfectly straight. Your upper body should stay in the same position on the ball - no rolling to the opposite side to compensate for the weight to the side. This torque is what makes the exercise so valuable. Bending your lower arm is critical to keeping your torso in the same position on the ball.



Note the bend in the left arm at the bottom

Since you're using two separate dumbbells, it's going to create a very different stress on the entire abdominal area than anything you've experienced before.

When you're at the bottom, your upper left arm will be contacting the surface of the ball (don't let it rest or lose tension at this point!). Reverse the direction by simultaneously pulling with your right side abs and pushing with your left side abs. The right arm movement is similar to a rear delt lateral while the left arm movement is similar to a dumbbell press.



Remember to keep the dumbbells pressed together tightly! The opposing tension in the abs really puts a lot of torque across the whole area. Be very sure you're not just pushing with the bottom arm but also pulling with the top arm.

Be sure not to bounce out of the bottom, but try to feel a stretch in the right side as you start the change of direction.

If you have any lower back pain issues, this exercise does put some stress on the lower back. If you do try it, go very light and take it very slowly.

Common Errors

1. Separating the dumbbells

Keep them pressed together throughout the movement. If they separate, they're harder to control and it disperses the tension on the abs.

2. Rolling around on the ball

For best results, be sure to keep yourself as stationary as possible on the ball. If you roll to the side, it takes some of the torque off the abs and it won't hit the abs as strongly.

3. Moving too quickly

This is NOT a ballistic exercise - there should be no bouncing or fast movements involved. Lower the dumbbells slowly to the sides and change direction very deliberately by using muscle power, not bouncing.

Tricks For Making the Exercise More Productive

1. Changing the arc

You can bring the dumbbells down at various angles to the torso to change where the exercise hits your abs. By bringing it down higher up beside your head, you'll hit the upper areas of your obliques. By bringing it down towards your hip, you'll hit the lower areas of your obliques. Just remember to always keep your head looking straight up and set your feet wide apart for the best base of support.

2. How to use a flat bench instead

You can also do this exercise on a flat bench instead of a ball, if you don't have access to a ball or prefer a more solid surface to work on. Instead of lying flat on the bench as you normally would for a bench press, you'll be resting only your upper back on the end of the bench.

To get into this position, sit on the very end of the bench. Now move your butt off the bench and squat down in front of it. Lean back and place your upper back on the bench end. Keep your hips down and set your feet fairly wide apart.

This is the position you should maintain while doing the exercise. The bench is a more solid surface but it is just as effective for the exercise. One major difference is that there won't be any surface to contact the upper arm of the bottom arm as you lower the weight down. Keep an eye on how far down you go to the side. All the other techniques still apply.





3. When using heavier weight...

- You can shift your upper body somewhat to the other side of the ball. If you're using a heavy weight, you'll need to do that in order to stay on the ball. The increased resistance will make up for it.
- Be extra careful the dumbbells don't separate. It'll be much harder to control heavier dumbbells if they do.
- As you rotate back up, exhale through pursed lips to keep stability in your abs as you let air out and so that you don't pass out.
- Push VERY hard with the same side leg as the weight is on. You'll need all the help you can get.

Double Dumbbell Swings For Abs

Imagine a cross-country skier. Now focus on the alternating action of the arms. When the left one goes forward, the right one goes back. Then the right goes forward and the left goes back, all in a very rhythmic movement.

Plant that image of the skier in your head. Now put a couple of dumbbells in that skier's hands instead of poles!

In a nutshell, with this exercise you're going to be doing cross-country skiing with your arms while holding dumbbells in your hands. Sounds easy, right? On paper, sure. In reality, you're going to be in for a shock!

So why is this weighted skiing movement good for the abs?

Well, first think about where the tension (from the dueling momentum of the dumbbells moving in opposite directions) is going through: the core. As one dumbbell is swinging down, the other is swinging up and it falls to the deep muscles of the core to not only stabilize the spine and body but to also provide muscular force to help keep those dumbbells swinging.

This opposing torque on the abs results in a TREMENDOUS tightening of the deep muscles of the core, especially when both dumbbells are at the bottom of their swings and heading back up. All the momentum in those dumbbells is now going to go directly through your core.

The bonus: when you do the exercise, it will affect your ENTIRE body (I can promise you that!), giving you the benefits of interval training in addition to the direct effects on the abs.

How To Do It:

First, pick up two dumbbells, one in each hand, and stand up straight. Start fairly light (use approximately what you can do for 10 to 12 reps on the dumbbell curl) - you will be working your way up to heavier weights as you get stronger and more experienced with the exercise.

Keep your feet close together (a few inches apart at the most). If your feet are set too wide, the dumbbells will contact your thighs at the bottom of the movement. Keeping the feet closer together also forces the abs to do more of the stabilizing as your body can't rely on the legs to absorb as much of the momentum of the swinging dumbbells.

This exercise, in order to get a good swing going (especially with heavier dumbbells), will require a carefully timed dip in the knees.

So on your very first rep, start by dipping slightly in the knees then popping back up. As you pop back up, use this momentum to start your right dumbbell swinging forward and up and your left dumbbell swinging back and up.



As the dumbbells start to come back down, dip your knees down again. As your left hand swings forward and your right hand swings back, pop back up strongly again.



You are using your legs to add momentum to the dumbbell swings, getting them up higher and giving you the ability to use heavier dumbbells.



Repeat this dip and pop up EVERY time the dumbbells come down to the bottom and start to come back up.



As you do this exercise, try not to let your torso twist back and forth much. Do your best to keep your shoulders and hips square and unmoving so that all the torque goes through the core and you don't get any sharp twisting movements in the spine. Your shoulders WILL move somewhat (there is no getting around it) but by trying to keep still, you will minimize the movement.

Keep your arms rigid and locked into position as you swing the dumbbells up and down. For height, you want to aim for about shoulder height in front of you (similar to a front delt raise) and a little lower behind you (the mass the triceps will stop the range of motion behind you). Keep control of the weight and your torso throughout the movement - no wild swinging. Exhale forcefully each time you pop up (imagine as though you're trying to blow the dumbbell forward).

If the dumbbells are too light and you find the exercise is not challenging your abs after a few reps, increase the weight.

Keep going for as long as you can with good form. When you can't swing the dumbbells very high or you feel your core strength starting to give out (i.e. your shoulders and hips start twisting too much for your core to control), stop the swinging and set the dumbbells down.

At this point, you're going to be huffing and puffing like crazy - this exercise works not only your entire upper body, but also involves your lower body strongly each time you use your legs to pop up. Cross-Country Skiing is

one of the most demanding total-body cardio exercises you can do...now you're doing it with weights!

So how heavy should you go with this exercise? That will depend on how strong your core is (work up to it - don't start heavy!) and how heavy your dumbbells go! You can build up to some very good weights with this exercise - I've personally gone up to a pair of 85 lb dumbbells.

The more weight you can safely use with this exercise, the stronger and more powerful your entire core area is going to get.

Single-Arm Variation

Looking for another unique challenge? Try the Dumbbell Swing exercise holding only one dumbbell to one side. Hold your other arm wide to the other side (to help counterbalance) and use it to add momentum to swinging the dumbbell up. Do not dip your knees with this variation - you should use trunk rotation and help from swinging your free arm to get the dumbbell moving.





Here's a trick you can try with it: when you swing the dumbbell to the top of the arc, try and hold it there for a second. That brief effort to stop the dumbbell at the top will hit the obliques HARD simply because, more than likely, you won't be able to overcome the inertia of the dumbbell and actually hold it up. But at that moment when you try and stop it, the obliques are going to be hit with a VERY strong eccentric contraction in their effort to try and stop the dumbbell.

With the one-arm variation, shoulder and hip rotation is desirable. Since you don't have the opposing force on the other side (or the dipping of the legs), use rotation in your waist to help accelerate the dumbbell forward and up.

Conclusion:

The Double Dumbbell Swing is one of the powerful core-power exercises you can do. It's extremely practical and VERY functional, especially for improving sports performance. If you've got lower back issues, I wouldn't recommend these exercises, however, as there will be a lot of torque going through the entire core area.

Dumbbell Crawling

I have to say, this is one of THE strangest abdominal exercises you'll ever see...but also one of THE most effective!

You're not going to be doing any crunching or twisting or squeezing. There are no machines involved...no need to even focus on contracting the core muscles.

Because once you start doing this exercise, your body will have NO CHOICE but to fire the abs HARD in order to do it!

For this exercise, all you need is a pair of dumbbells and a floor. That's it!

The dumbbells should be a moderate weight - something you'd use for sets of 5 reps on dumbbell curls, perhaps. In the demo, I'm using 65 lb dumbbells and those were a good weight for me.

This exercise is going to teach you what core strength and stability are REALLY all about! First, I'm going to explain how to do it, then I'll give you the full rundown on why it's so good.

How To Do It:

You'll need some open floor space for this exercise - preferably where you have about 10 to 15 feet of unobstructed space to move. Set the dumbbells on the floor then get down in what looks like the top of a close-grip push-up position. Your hands will be on the handles of the dumbbells and you'll be up on your toes (not kneeling). Try to visualize the "start" position that sprinters are in when they're about to take off out of the blocks - THIS is what the position looks like.



Now you're going to CRAWL forward in that position...move the LEFT dumbbell forward a few inches and step your RIGHT foot forward a few inches.





Basically, you're going to be crawling on the floor with your hands weighted by the dumbbells. Crawl forward about 10 feet like this then stop and crawl BACKWARDS.

Sound easy? Think again...

Why This Exercise Is So Effective:

Dumbbell crawling is a VERY effective core exercise because of the uneven tension you get through your core with every step forward you take.

Think of it this way...when you're lifting up your left hand (with the dumbbell) and the right foot, what is supporting your body? The support is coming from your OTHER hand and foot. Your core is, in an instant, going from 4-point support to 2-point support and all the tension is going diagonally through your core. It doesn't seem like much when you're crawling without weight, but add a dumbbell to the mix? You'll be singing a different tune...

In addition, while crawling, you're also supporting your bodyweight in a pike position, working the entire abdominal area isometrically (which means without movement - just acting to stabilize and brace your body position). It's a two-pronged attack on your core that will pay off BIG.

One of the great things about this exercise is that the strength you develop is EXTREMELY functional. Forget standing on a BOSU ball on one leg and catching a beanbag...THIS exercise will build functional power through

the core.

The diagonal tension of crawling exactly mimics the natural diagonal tension that goes through the core when walking, running and jumping. Think of it as "force transfer" strength, meaning you'll be better able to transfer force through your core when moving (i.e. running, jumping, etc.).

Increasing strength in this very targeted way will have an IMMEDIATE and powerful carryover to sports performance.

And when you start moving BACKWARDS...you'll be in for a shock! It's actually quite a bit tougher moving backwards. The co-ordination can be a bit tricky but with practice, you should do fine.

When you're doing this exercise, start with a light to moderate weight but don't be afraid to increase the weight here. You may not feel it so much in the abs until you move up in weight. THAT is where the real benefits of the exercise will be felt.

Conclusion:

If core strength and performance are important goals in your training, DEFINITELY give this exercise a try. As strange as it may look, it's actually EXTREMELY effective for working the core. In a nutshell, it's going to TRASH your abs!

Zercherish Front Squats

This exercise is not quite a Zercher squat (where you hold the barbell cradled in the crooks of your elbows, down my your stomach) and not quite a front squat.

It's basically a combination of both, where you're supporting in the crooks of your elbows but at shoulder height like a front squat.

This hits the abdominal wall HARD - very similar to a curl squat but without the tension on the biceps and without the possibility of resting your arms on your abs as you come up.

Holding your arms at shoulder level really puts tension on the core. It's a great way to build up the core to improve it for front squatting.

Here's the cross-arm position of a front squat - the bar is supported on your shoulder girdle.



Here's the "Zercherish" position...get the bar right in the bend of your elbows.



Now clasp your hands over the top of the bar to lock them in.



The bar is now not being supported on the shoulder girdle but being held up solely with muscle support from the

shoulders and frontal core muscles.

Set the bar up at regular squat height - you won't need much weight for this one. Hook your elbows under.



Step out of the rack.



Then squat!



Not a hard concept in general - it's the bar placement that makes this one different. Give it a shot - I promise your core will be screaming at the end of the set!

One Side Loaded Barbell Squats

This exercise is a very simple but VERY effective way to really hit your core strongly. It looks like squat, stands like a squat, and IS a squat but it doesn't work the legs!

Pretty simply, you're going to just load ONE side of the bar with 25 to 45 lbs or so. Start towards the lighter end until you get an idea of how the balance on this exercise works.

It's best to do this exercise in a squat rack. Load the bar up, set it across your upper back/traps as you normally would for squats. Hold on TIGHT then step back.



The first thing you'll notice, of course, is the weight pulling down on the right side. Pull hard with your left arm to keep the bar locked in place on your back - the goal is to keep the bar horizontal while you're squatting.



From there, it's basically a matter of squatting! Go down as far as you can the push back up. The uneven load on the bar will force your side core area to really contract strongly.

It's a great way to build side core strength and power.

Do all your reps one way then set the weight up on the other side of the bar and go again:





This one will really challenge your core strength!

One Shoulder Barbell Squats

Here's another entry into my long list of exercises that work the abs while not looking at all like an ab exercise!

This one is basically a squat...so how does it work the abs? Very well, thanks!

Seriously, though, this exercise is EXTREMELY effective at targeting the stabilizing and core strength aspects of the abs. You'll be doing a barbell squat but instead of supporting the bar across your back in a "normal" fashion, you will instead be resting it on one shoulder, standing perpendicular to the bar.

It's going to primarily hit one side of the abdominal wall and hit it in conjunction with a squatting movement, which means this is a VERY functional exercise. More so than most abdominal exercises, in fact!

Here's a snapshot of what it looks like in the start position.



As you can see, I'm facing sideways in the rack. The safety rails are set at a moderate position (not a full depth squat). You'll be starting off from the bottom of the movement with the bar resting on the rails and, for best results, you don't want to be starting at the bottom of a full squat - it's low, but not too low.

I would recommend using a bar pad for cushioning or a rolled-up towel.

Your shoulder is set as dead-center on the bar as you can manage (you'll be able to feel the balance point on the first rep and adjust from there).

You want to have your hands out in front of you and locked onto the bar to help control it. You can use upwards or downwards pressure to adjust the balance as you stand up.

Here's the halfway point.



Come all the way up to the standing position.



Here's a direct side view of the exercise. You'll notice that my working-side arm's elbow is point directly out to the side and my arm is held up. Holding the arm up like this helps keep the bar from rolling out to the side



A few other views...





It's a very straightforward exercise that will have a HUGE impact on not only your entire abdominal area but your entire BODY as well. Supporting the weight in this off-center fashion challenges not only the abs but the shoulder girdle and legs as well.

It's truly a total-body ab exercise!

When you've done one side, you can either turn around and go immediately to working the other side or take a rest in between - whichever way you prefer. If you go directly from one side to the other, on your next set, start with the different side so you give it balanced workload.

The first time you do the exercise, start fairly light to get an idea for how it works. When doing the exercise, don't set the bar down on the rack in between reps - keep it a little off. You may bang the bar on the rails by accident - just don't set it down.

Rack-Rail Leg Raises

This one is a variation on the classic "leg raise" exercise...the key difference here lies on WHERE you're doing the exercise.

It's not a hanging version - it's actually a fair bit harder than that!

With this version, you're going to be supporting yourself on the safety rails of the power rack - it almost looks a bit like the Iron Cross position a gymnast gets into on the rings.

So first, set the safety rails on the rack to about the level of the bottom of your rib cage - you can adjust height any time.

I like to set the height so that I can set my hands on the rails while in a standing position, then bend my knees to get my feet off the ground. I find this to be easier than trying to jump up in order to have straight legs at the bottom.

The arms should be about 45 degrees at the shoulder.

Set your hands on the rails and hold on! Bend your knees and get your feet off the ground. You will instantly feel big-time tension in the abs and torso because of how you're supporting your body in this position.



Now we add in the leg raise...



You can also do it as a knee raise...



I like to start with the straight(ish) leg raise then as I get tired, switch to the knee raise in order to keep going.

This one is BRUTAL because not only are you raising the legs (which involves the abs in a movement capacity), you're also involving the abs very strongly in a supporting capacity by holding yourself up like this.

Give this one a try in your next ab-training session (do it first, before any other ab exercises - trust me on this - you probably won't need to do any more abs after a few sets of this).

Heavy Dumbbell Side-to-Sides In The Rack

This is a GREAT core-strengthening exercise that hits the rotational and support functions of the abdominal area.

To perform this exercise, you'll need a rack and a single heavy dumbbell. This one will really build tremendous abdominal strength. To give you an idea, I'm using a 125 lb dumbbell in the demo - obviously, you want to start lighter than that the first time you try this exercise!

So first, set the safety rails of the rack to just a little below waist level. Set your heavy dumbbell on the floor in the middle. When you're ready to start, bend over and pick up the dumbbell, wrapping both hands around the handle (overlap your hands however you feel most comfortable).



Pick up the dumbbell and hold it into your abs with your arms bent 90 degrees.



Now turn and set it on end on the left safety rail. Let it rest COMPLETELY on the rail - you want to totally relax the tension in your core.



Now, keep your body rotated, clench your abs and pick up the dumbbell, rotating your body around to the front. Make sure to keep the dumbbell held at ab level.



Step laterally until you get close to the RIGHT safety rail.



Turn and set it on the right safety rail.



RELAX the abs, setting the dumbbell completely on the rail - no tension in the abs. Then re-clench, rotate in the other direction and step to the left.

Repeat until your abs are completely wrung out!

If you want functional core training, this is it. Remember, when doing this exercise, you are ROTATING your upper body around to set it on the rails and pick it up off the rails.

So...How Did You Like The Exercises?

If you can't get out of bed without doubling over tomorrow, you can blame me for that :)

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