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All You Can Eat Snacks



6 Crunch-Free Ab Moves

## SET-UP

To get the most from these exercises (and your workout in general), follow these simple pointers from LaRue:

### Check your posture

Whether standing, lying or sitting, align your ears with shoulders and hips. Next, pull shoulders down and slightly lift breastbone. Feel for equal muscle balance between your front and back.

### Contract your pelvic floor

To help activate the TA, do a soft "Kegel" during each move by gently pulling your pelvic floor muscles—the ones you use to hold back urine when you need the bathroom—upward. Bonus: Kegels help prevent or lessen incontinence.

## GET STARTED

**Equipment** A mat or bath towel, a hand towel and a one- to two-kilogram (three- to five-pound) dumbbell (optional).

**Warm-up** March in place or walk briskly for about three minutes.

**Repetitions** Begin with two sets of each exercise, working up to three sets as your abs get stronger. Perform each for the suggested reps or time (or less if you can't hold good form). You should be able to do two sets of three moves in about six minutes (about eight to 10 minutes including warm-up).

**How often** Do this routine three times a week. For a well-rounded program, add cardio and weights, and stretch after every workout.

## 1. STANDING CROSS CORE

*Works: deep abs, sides of abs, back, thighs and butt, as well as shoulders when done with dumbbell*

**A.** Hold a dumbbell in your right hand, arm slightly bent and held straight out to your right side. (This exercise can also be done without the dumbbell.) Place left hand on left hip and stand with feet hip width apart, shoulders relaxed, abs tight and pelvic floor pulled upward. Do a squat (as if you are about to sit into a low chair) and at the same time cross your right arm diagonally across your body until your right hand is in front of your left knee.

**B.** (Shown) As you return to standing, raise your right arm back across your body until you are reaching your right arm to your right side and up, with hand just above ear level and elbow slightly bent. With right arm still extended to your right side, also twist your torso right, looking slightly upward and to the right. Keep your feet flat on floor and pointing straight ahead.

**C.** Return to starting position; repeat. Do 10 reps; switch sides.



## 2. CROUCHING TIGER

*Works: deep abs, inner thighs and arms*

**A.** Get onto your hands and knees with your knees aligned under hips and hands in line with your shoulders. Place a small rolled-up towel between your knees; squeeze the towel to hold it in place. Curl your toes under.

**B.** (Shown) Maintaining a long spine, draw your abs up and in, and pull up your pelvic floor. Avoid holding your breath. With elbows slightly bent and still squeezing the towel between your knees, lift your knees about two inches off the floor.

**C.** Hold for 15 to 20 seconds. Return your knees to the floor. Repeat.



## 3. CORE CLOCK

*Works: deep abs and back*

**A.** Lie face up with legs bent, feet on floor but heels lifted, and arms stretching to ceiling. Hold each end of a hand towel, pulling it taut.

**B.** Slowly rotate your torso so that both knees point toward your right side (with toes still on floor) as your extended arms reach just slightly toward your left side. Then move knees to left, with arms slightly right. Alternate 10 times total, then follow the instructions below if you feel strong enough (otherwise, repeat this move for another 10 reps).

**C.** (Shown) Continue same sequence as above but with feet off the floor, legs bent to 90 degrees and knees over hips. Alternate sides 10 times total. If you feel as if you're falling toward the side, you are twisting too much; lessen your range of motion. →



## Bonus: Crunch-free ab moves for new moms

Try these abdominal-targeting exercises if you've had a baby recently (at least four weeks postpartum), or are just starting ab exercises

**"The most common** mistake women make when getting back to abdominal training or any other exercise in the postpartum period is that they wait too long before starting," says Dr. Gregory Davies, professor and chair of maternal-fetal medicine at Queen's University. You should start four to six weeks after delivery, and do these moves in addition to the post-delivery ones from your doctor or midwife, as long as you progress gradually and don't feel pain (especially after a

C-section). If you've been diagnosed with *diastasis recti*—a separation of the front abdominals—check with your doctor before doing these moves. (Also do this less-strenuous routine if you're just starting abdominal exercises and want to work up to the more difficult ones.)

This routine for new mothers has been designed especially for Best Health by Vancouver-based fitness writer Amanda Vogel, co-author of *Baby Boot Camp: The New Mom's 9-Minute Fitness Solution*. (Before getting started, read the "Set-Up" on page 41.)

### 1. PELVIC TUCK

Works: deep abs and lower abs



- Lie face up with legs bent, feet on floor, abs tight and doing a gentle Kegel. Rest your hands on your hip bones.
- Use your abs to tilt your pelvis so your hip bones are pulling slightly up and in. Your tailbone should raise just a bit, so the small of your back presses into the floor. Focus on using your abs to tilt your pelvis; avoid squeezing your butt muscles.
- Use your abs to return your pelvis to the starting position. Repeat. Do eight to 10 reps total.

### GET STARTED

**Equipment** A mat or towel.

**Warm up** March in place or walk briskly for three minutes.

**Repetitions** Begin with two sets per exercise, working up to three sets as your abs get stronger. Perform each for the suggested reps or time (or less if you can't hold good form). You should be able to do two sets of three moves in about six minutes (about eight to 10 minutes for total workout). When the postnatal moves no longer feel challenging, try the more strenuous workout on page 41—with your doctor's or midwife's approval.

**How often** Do this routine three times a week. In the early postpartum months, ease back into exercise with gentle walking and stretching.

### 2. THREE-POINT KNEEL

Works: deep and outer abs, back and butt



- Kneel with your knees, shins and forearms on the floor, spine straight, and with your shoulder blades squeezing slightly toward each other. Pull in your abs while pulling your pelvic floor gently in and upward.
- (Shown) Raise your right leg off the floor, straightening it behind you, so you are balancing on your forearms and on your left knee and shin. Squeeze your butt as you hold your straight leg parallel to the floor for three to five seconds, keeping abs tight.
- Do squeeze three times; rest 10 seconds between each. Switch sides.

### 3. BENT-LEG SIDE PLANK

Works: deep abs, sides of abs, back and shoulders



- Lie on your right side with your bottom (right) leg bent and your top (left) leg straight. Your left hand is on your left hip. Raise your upper body and support yourself on your right forearm, with elbow aligned under your shoulder. Both of your hips and your shoulders should be in line vertically.
- (Shown) Draw your abs in and pelvic floor up. Slowly lift your bottom (right) hip off the floor so you're balancing on your right forearm, right knee and shin and the inside of the left foot.
- Hold for three to five seconds; return to starting position. Repeat sequence two more times before switching sides. □

#### BONUS

For more tips on how to slim your waist and tone your core, you can visit [besthealthmag.ca/fatstomach](http://besthealthmag.ca/fatstomach).



# 6 WEEKS TO SUMMER ABS

Start now on these crunch-free moves designed to tone your midriff. (Bonus: 3 are perfect for new moms!) **By Amanda Vogel**

**The fastest way to a flatter belly** isn't doing hundreds of crunches. Rather, the key is to train a deep abdominal muscle that wraps around your midsection called the *transversus abdominis* (TA). Think of it as a sort of internal Spanx shapewear, smoothing your belly from the inside out.

Your TA acts as a natural girdle, and it needs proper training to make your lower abs in particular look and feel flatter and sleeker. Plus, a strong, stable TA helps to support your back, making it less likely you'll be bothered by back pain. "However you train your ab muscles is how they develop," explains Linda LaRue, creator of the *Crunchless Abs* DVD series and a celebrity trainer in Los Angeles. LaRue says that doing standard crunches incorrectly can cause you to build your ab muscles outward. The trick to a flatter belly—getting rid of a post-pregnancy or age-related pot, if you have one—is "pulling your abs *up and in* as you work them from all angles."

For a trimmer tummy and stronger back, try LaRue's crunchless ab workout, starting at right. (It helps tone the arms and legs, too.) Or, if you're at least four weeks postpartum—or a beginner wanting to work up to a more intense routine—turn the page and start with our "Crunch-free Ab Moves for New Moms."