

# CUTTING TO THE CORE

To be the envy of everyone at the beach this summer, you need to put the winter behind you and be prepared to sweat this spring.

By Todd Soura

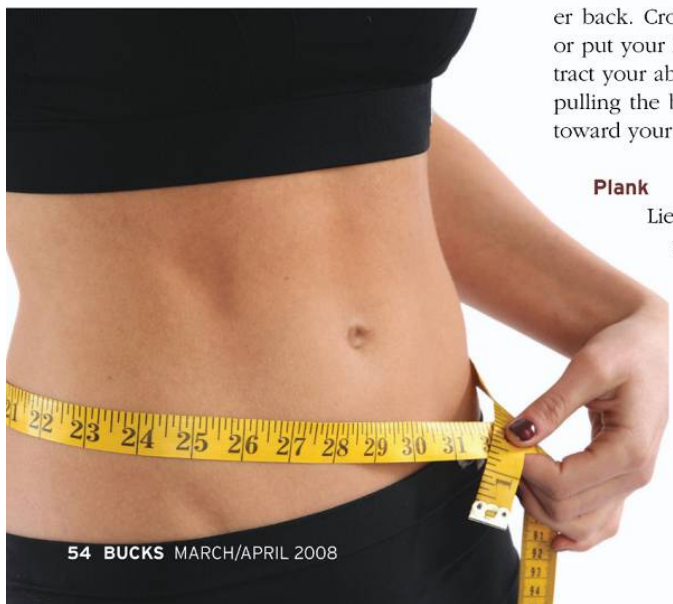
**G**radually, the days are growing longer, the air warmer and the clothing less obtrusive. For many, the arrival of spring is a welcome sight. It can, however, be a harsh wake-up call after several months of denial. Suddenly it becomes very difficult to mask the lack of activity and bad eating habits that were developed over the long winter.

That little bit of flab that you convinced yourself you could handle as long as you kept it hidden under a sweater is now standing between you and the hottest new bathing suits.

A season of hibernating seems to linger longest around our midsections. The fat that develops there is more noticeable than anywhere else on our bodies. Which is why one of the most frequent questions I'm asked is "How exactly do I get a slimmer, firmer stomach?" The answer is a three-pronged approach:

1. Exercise that places increased emphasis on the core
2. Increase your metabolism
3. Proper nutrition

The following regimen will not only help you shed extra weight, it will start you down the path to beautifully toned abs, which, really, is what we're all chasing after, right? Perform two sets of 15 repetitions of each exercise, except for the plank, which is a timed exercise.



## Hand-to-heel touch

Lie on the floor with your arms straight and hands on the floor. Bend your knees at a 45-degree angle and put your feet flat on the floor.

Contract your abs, lifting your upper back and arms off the floor, forming a partial crunch position. From there, lean right and touch your right hand to your right heel. Do not lift your torso further forward. Simply lean right. Return to the starting position, looking straightforward.

Do 15 repetitions on the right side and then 15 on the left for one set.

## Reverse crunch

Lie flat on the floor. You can either keep your arms at your side or put your hands behind your head. Bring your knees toward your chest until they are bent at a 90-degree angle. Keep your feet together or cross them.

Contract your abs, pushing your legs toward the ceiling and lifting your hips off the floor. Lower your legs to their starting, 90-degree position.

## Exercise ball crunch

An exercise ball is a very effective tool for developing a strong core.

For this particular exercise, lie face-up with the ball resting under your mid to lower back. Cross your arms over your chest or put your hands behind your head. Contract your abs to lift your torso off the ball, pulling the bottom of your rib cage down toward your hips.

## Plank

Lie facedown on a mat, resting your head on your forearms. Push off the floor so that you are supporting yourself on your elbows and toes. Keep your back as flat as possible. Tilt your pelvis and contract your abs to prevent your rear from sticking up. Hold for 20 to 60 seconds. Repeat.

## Take it up a notch

Six-pack abs may look great, but they're not always indicative of an optimal physique. Focused exercise alone may not be enough to blast that pesty layer of fat that rippled abs disguise. The surest way to tone the core and chip away at that fat is high intensity interval training, which has been shown to raise metabolism for up to 36 hours.

Simply put, if you normally walk, spend one out of every three minutes jogging. If you jog already, sprint for one minute and jog for two.

Adding muscle to your physique also will raise your metabolism. Follow a weight training routine two to four times per week at 30 to 60 minutes per session.

You can find descriptions of exercises and sample routines on my Web site.

## Fiberrific

The final component to our three-pronged attack is the diet. Eat three meals a day, plus two to three healthy snacks (100 to 300 calories each). Every meal and snack should contain protein. And aim to consume six servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

Incorporate salmon, sardines, herring or trout into your weekly diet at least twice. They contain Omega-3 fatty acids, which are vital to helping your cells burn fat. If you like spicy food, hot peppers have been shown to heighten the metabolic rate.

Drink plenty of water daily — about half your weight in ounces. If you're the type who gets up regularly to enjoy a midnight snack, eat vegetables that are high in fiber for dinner and drink plenty of water. The combination will help you feel fuller longer. You may also want to consider consuming a teaspoon of psyllium husk (Metamucil), a fiber supplement, basically, in some water.

Start now and commit diligently to this approach and you should uncover your trim self by June.

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