

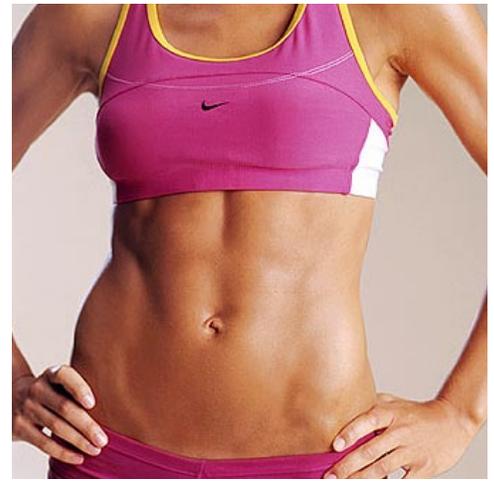
Strong, Sexy Abs

6 moves that trim, tighten, and tone your abs. The best part: You already own the only equipment required!

By Elena Rover; Photos by Chris Fanning

You don't require a lot of fancy gear to get the abs you've always dreamed of. A simple scarf will provide all you need to sculpt a sexy, strong midsection, says Leisa Hart, creator of the *Sexy Abs* workout DVD. "It tones your abs in all the right places by adding resistance to even basic exercises."

Hart's workout fuses elements of yoga, ballet, and Pilates to target the deep (transverse abdominis) and the "six-pack" (rectus abdominis) abdominal muscles, as well as the obliques. You can use any long (about 3 feet) scarf, necktie, or towel folded lengthwise. Try these moves three times a week and you'll see a flatter, firmer middle in one month!



1. Figure Eights

Target: Warms Up Core Muscles; Works Obliques

- Sit tall on a chair, feet on floor.
- Place your right hand on the seat behind you.
- Hold one end of the scarf in your left hand, letting it hang down by your side.
- Make a figure eight over your head and down your left side as you lean forward and whip the scarf energetically as far as you can in each direction.
- Repeat 8 to 10 times.
- Switch sides and repeat.



2. Climb Up

Target: Works Rectus Abdominis and Transverse Abdominis

- Lie faceup on the floor with scarf wrapped around the ball of your left foot, knees bent with right foot on floor.
- Hold both ends of the scarf in your left hand.
- Extend left leg, keeping foot flexed.
- Slowly walk both hands up the scarf, lifting head and shoulders off the floor—keep your head neutral; don't tuck your chin or tilt back.
- Lower back to starting position, walking hands down scarf.
- Do 8 to 10 reps; switch sides.
- Do 2 sets per side.



3. Side-Crunch

Target: Works Obliques, Lower Back, Glutes, Thighs

- Kneel on the floor and lean all the way over to your left side, bringing the palm of your left hand to the floor.
- Keeping your weight balanced, slowly extend your right leg, pointing toes.
- Place your right hand behind your head with your elbow pointing toward ceiling.



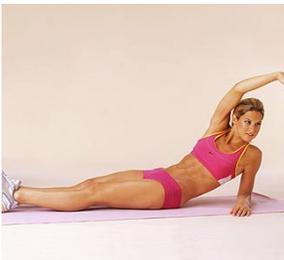
- Slowly lift your right leg to hip height while extending your right arm above your leg, palm facing forward.
- Look out over your right hand while bringing the right side of your rib cage toward your right hip.
- Lower to starting position and repeat 6 to 8 times; switch sides.
- Do 2 sets per side.



4. Bow

Target: Works Obliques and Rectus Abdominis

- Sit on the floor with scarf wrapped around right foot, holding both ends in right hand, left foot on the floor with knee bent.
- Lean back while extending right leg, keeping foot about 12 inches off the floor.
- At the same time, twist torso to the left while reaching back with your left arm at shoulder height.
- Pull scarf to draw right knee toward your chest while turning torso back to center, tapping right foot with left hand.
- Reverse the move, bringing right leg back to front while twisting upper body to left; repeat.
- Do 6 to 8 reps; switch sides.
- Do 2 sets per side.



5. Ballet Twist

Target: Works Obliques, Rectus Abdominis and Transverse Abdominis

- Start by sitting on the floor and extending your legs, keeping them pressed firmly together.
- Lean back 45 degrees from the hips.
- Keep your abs engaged as you bring both of your arms overhead like a ballerina.
- Slowly twist your torso to the left, placing your left arm on the floor; keep right arm reaching overhead.
- Continue to twist to your left for a slow count of 3, keeping your butt and both heels on the floor.
- Contract your abs to support your spine as you return to center, bringing both of your arms overhead.
- Repeat by twisting to your right side and placing right arm on floor.
- Continue alternating for 6 to 8 reps per side.
- Complete 2 sets.



6. Leg Pulse

Target: Works Rectus Abdominis and Transverse Abdominis; Stretches Hamstrings

- Lie faceup on the floor with your knees bent and the scarf wrapped around left foot, holding both ends of the scarf in your left hand.
- Straighten left leg, gently pulling it close to your head with the scarf for a hamstring stretch.
- Lift your head and shoulders slightly off the floor, lifting right leg to meet left.
- Slowly lower right leg as far as you can without arching your back.
- Repeat, pulsing leg 8 to 10 times.
- Switch sides.
- Do 2 sets per side.

Best and Worst Belly-Busting Tools

Late-night TV, home gyms, and health clubs are filled with gadgets meant to sculpt your abs in no time. Here's what gets our approval (or scorn).

Thumbs up: Stability ball

"It's a great way to challenge your core and can be adapted for any fitness level," says Peter Francis, PhD, of San Diego State University. For beginners, keep your feet wide for support. As you get stronger, bring your feet closer together to challenge the obliques. Advanced exercisers can lift one foot off the floor.

Thumbs up: The "captain's chair"

This machine is the most effective ab-toning machine at the gym, according to research done by Francis. Lean against it with your forearms and upper body supported. Let your legs hang below you. Pull your knees toward your chest to challenge all of your abdominal muscles as you work against gravity.

Thumbs down: Wheel-based rollers

Wheel gadgets that have you rolling from kneeling to an extended position and back again are a big no-no, cautions Francis. "This type of movement is just not safe for your back, which is already prone to injury," he notes.

Q&A

What's better for flattening my abs, sit-ups or crunches?

It depends on your fitness level. Full horizontal-to-vertical sit-ups engage more of the abdominals, but they can cause back strain, making them more appropriate for advanced exercisers who already have a firm core. They also tighten the already overworked hip flexors, which can cause additional back pain. Crunches are a safer choice for most of us. "They provide plenty of ab-toning benefits while keeping the back supported," explains Peter Francis, PhD, a professor emeritus at San Diego State University who specializes in exercise biomechanics.

Our Favorite AB DVDs

Sexy Abs with Leisa Hart

You'll get innovative ab-toning moves that you can do with a scarf as well as a chair. (33 minutes; \$14.95)

Crunch: Fat-Burning Ab Attack

Catherine Chiarelli uses standing and floor exercises to attack your abs from multiple directions while toning your legs and raising your heart rate. (30 minutes; \$14.95)

Core Secrets: Upper Body Challenge

Celeb trainer Gunnar Peterson works your back, arms and abs with the help of a stability ball and dumbbells. He places an emphasis on everyday moves to keep you strong and injury-free. (29 minutes; \$19.95)

Tom Holland's Total Ab Workouts

This longer, nonstop workout from an exercise physiologist varies between cardio intervals and upper-body, lower-body, and core exercises to blast calories and sculpt more than just your abs. The basic choreography and fast pacing keep you motivated from start to finish. (43 minutes; \$14.95)