

Three Ways to Tone Your Stomach



Speaking of ways to gauge fitness, medical experts say that carrying as little as 5 to 10 pounds of excess fat around the torso may be related to health risk factors like elevated cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar levels. So a potbelly may be an obvious sign that you're out of shape, outside and in. The following exercises, when combined with a weight-control diet and calorie-burning exercise, can help you tone your abdominal muscles. Select the exercise that's right for you. (Anyone with lower back problems shouldn't do the intermediate and advanced exercises.)

Head and shoulder curls (beginning exercise): Lie on your back with your legs bent. Touch your fingertips together behind your head at the base of your skull. Keeping your lower back pressed against the floor and using your abdominal muscles, raise your head and shoulders off the floor at a 30-degree angle. Important: Keep your spine, neck, and head in a straight line, and don't jerk up and forward. Breathe in as you raise your torso. Hold this position for a count of five, then exhale as you return to the starting position. Repeat this 10 to 15 times.

Sit-ups with arms crossed (intermediate exercise):

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your arms crossed over your chest, each hand grasping the opposite shoulder. Curl up to a sitting position, then down to the starting position. Repeat 10 to 15 times.

Sit-ups with fingers laced behind your neck (advanced exercise):

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet placed one foot apart. Clasp your hands together behind your neck, with your fingers interlaced. Curl up to a sitting position and touch your right elbow to your left knee. (Be careful not to pull your head up with your hands, to avoid strain or injury.) Return to the starting position. Curl up to a sitting position and touch your left elbow to your right knee. Then return to the starting position. Repeat 15 to 25 times.