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"1,000 Sit-Ups And Crunches A Day and Still No Abs!"

One question I received recently REALLY got my attention because a young guy told me he was doing 1,000 crunches and sit ups a day and said he still couldn't see his abdominals. He wrote:

Tom:
I have been working out for around a year now and I cannot get my lower abs into any type of shape. I'm starting to see my upper abs a little bit, which is great, but despite doing 900 various crunches, ab roller, and 100 sit-ups four days a week, along with my regular workout on the weights, I still have a tire around my waist. What else can I do?"

What did I tell him? Well, I gave him the same answer I've given thousands of people over the years, which is the only true "Secret" to great abs...

It takes training to increase strength, build endurance and DEVELOP the abdominals, but to SEE the definition in your abdominals - or any other muscle group for that matter - is almost entirely the result of low body fat levels.

This may sound counter-intuitive, but if you can't see your abs, it's not an issue of "muscle development" at all. You simply have too much body fat covering up the ab muscles. The lower abdominal area also happens to be the one place that most people - especially men - store the body fat first.

There's a Scientific Reason Why Your

Lower Ab Flab Is The Last Place To Go: Belly Fat - A Big Problem

Most people don't have their fat distributed evenly throughout their bodies. Each of us inherits a genetically determined and hormonally-influenced pattern of fat storage just as we inherit our eye or hair color. In other words, the fat seems to "stick" to certain areas more than others.

There's a scientific reason for this. Your fat cells are not just inert "storage tanks" for excess fuel. They are actually endocrine glands which send and receive signals from the rest of the body. You could say that your fat cells "talk to your body" and your body "talks to your fat cells." This occurs through a hormone and receptor system.

For body fat loss to occur, you must first get the fat cell (adipocyte) to release the fat into the bloodstream. THEN, the free fatty acids must be delivered to the working muscles where they are burned for energy.

For fat to be released, the hormone adrenaline (epinephrine) must be secreted and send a signal to your fat cells. Your fat cells receive this hormonal signal via adrenaline receptors called adrenoreceptors.

Fat cells have Beta 1 (B1) and Alpha 2 (A2) receptors. B1 receptors are the good guys. They activate hormone sensitive lipase, the enzyme that breaks down the fat and allows it to be released into the bloodstream to be burned. A2 receptors are the bad guys. They block the fat-releasing enzymes in the fat cell and encourage body fat formation.

How Body Fat Storage Patterns Affect You

And Keep Your Abs From Showing

What's the point

of all the physiology? Well, it turns out that in men, the lower abdominal region has a higher concentration of A2 receptors, so this gives us one possible explanation of why the lower abdominal region is often the first place the fat goes when you gain it, and the last place it comes off when you're losing it. (Incidentally, the fat in women's hips and thighs is also higher in A2 receptors). This situation is dictated by genetics and by the hormonal and enzymatic pathways we discussed.

Think of ab fat like the deep end of the swimming pool. No matter how much you protest, there is no way you can drain the deep end before the shallow end. However, don't let this discourage you. Lower ab fat WILL come off, it will simply be the last place to come off. First place on - Last place off.

This helps to explain why abdominal exercises have little impact on body fat loss. It's a huge mistake to think that hundreds or thousands of reps of ab exercises will remove lower abdominal fat, except to the degree that it burns calories and contributes to the calorie deficit. What removes the fat - all over your body - is a calorie deficit and that comes from decreasing food intake, increasing activity, or a combination of both.

What I suggested to this young man was cutting back the ab training, spending the time he was wasting on excess ab exercises for more intense, calorie-burning cardio and weight training for the rest of the body. I also suggested he do an accounting of his food intake, get his nutrition in order and decrease his calories slightly if necessary.

As it turned out, his diet was a mess, and as nutrition experts like to say, "You can't out-train a lousy diet."

It's a monumental error to think that 1,000 reps of ab work a day will make your abs finally "pop" when your diet is a disaster and that's leading to fat storage. It's not that ab exercises aren't important. But all the ab exercises in the world won't help as long as you still have body fat covering the muscles. You can't "spot reduce" with abdominal exercise and **YOU CAN'T SEE YOUR ABS THROUGH A LAYER OF BODY FAT!**

My
Championship-Winning Ab Workout Routine

Personally, I only do about 15 minutes of ab work two times per week, with anywhere from two to four exercises for about 10-25 reps per exercise. Forget about thousands of reps of sit ups – it's a waste of time. The reason my abs look the way they do is not from endless repetitions, but because I get my body fat down into the single digits with a highly specialized fat-burning diet program.

Here's a recent ab routine that I've used (for bodybuilding/ ab-development purposes). I do this routine only twice a week and I change the exercises approximately every month so my body doesn't adapt. I prefer slightly higher rep range than other muscle groups, but as you can see, it is far from doing a thousand reps a day.

A1
Hanging leg raises

3 sets, 15-20 reps

Superset to:

A2
Hanging knee ups (bent-knee leg raises)

3 sets, 15-20 reps

(no rest between supersetted exercises A1 & A2, 60 sec between supersets)

B1
Weighted swiss ball crunches (or weighted cable crunches)

3 sets, 15-20 reps

Superset to:

B2
Incline Bench Reverse crunches

3 sets, 15-20 reps

(no rest between supersetted exercises B1 & B2, 60 sec between supersets)

How
To Use Cardio
For MAXIMUM Fat-Burning

Times have changed since the Aerobics revolution of the 1970's and 1980's. For years, aerobics was the darling of the fitness world. Then scientists began to acknowledge the benefits of weight training - for everyone, not just for bodybuilders.

Recently, the pendulum has swung the other direction and we've actually started hearing fitness "experts" suggesting that cardio should be kept to a minimum or even avoided completely. That's the way things tend to go in the fitness world - they swing back and forth in trends, from one extreme to another. Lots

of cardio or no cardio.

I suggest you avoid trend-hopping and pay close attention to what actually works, by people who know what they are talking about (such as bodybuilders, who are the leanest muscular athletes in the world). Doing nothing but cardio is a mistake. But cutting our cardio completely is also a mistake. The truth lies in the middle. Maximum fat burning occurs when you combine cardio training and weight training together.

Those who are genetically gifted with above average metabolisms will find that a slight drop in food intake and just a few days a week of cardio will usually do the trick. However, most people who are struggling with fat loss (sometimes referred to as "endomorph" body type) are simply NOT burning enough calories to get the results they want. The answer for them is more activity to burn more calories.

For health and weight maintenance, I would suggest 3 short cardio workouts per week, about 20-30 minutes per session. But for maximum fat loss, I recommend 4-7 days per week of cardio or other physical activity for 30-45 minutes (based on results), at a moderate pace. You can mix up the type of cardio you do, or choose the type you enjoy the most - stationary cycling, stairclimbing, elliptical machines, aerobic classes and other continuous activities are all excellent fat burners (it doesn't have to be indoors or on a cardio machine).

If time efficiency is a concern for you, you could do 2-3 of those cardio workouts as high intensity interval training and you'll achieve very good results even with briefer workouts. Even as little as 20-25 minutes per session can get great results IF your intensity level is high enough. Remember, seeing your abs is about low body fat. Low body fat is about burning calories and creating a calorie deficit. The calorie deficit is created by increasing the number of calories you burn and or decreasing the amount of calories you take in from food. Increasing intensity is one way to burn more calories in less time.

NOTE:

To reach the "ripped" 3.7% body fat level you see in my photos, I do cardio 7 days a week for 30-45 minutes per session, in addition to my 4 weight training workouts per week.

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Nutrition Secrets
For Great Abs

That leads us to nutrition. Many people say that "abdominals are made in the kitchen, not in the gym," and there's a lot of truth to that. You can do thousands of reps of ab work every week, but if your nutrition is not in order, you can forget about

getting a great set of 6-pack abs.

- Eat about 15-20% below your calorie maintenance level. If you use a more aggressive calorie deficit of 25-30%, then do not keep calories too low for too long; increase calories to maintenance or maintenance +10-15% 1-2 days per week.
- Spread your calories into 5-6 smaller meals instead of 2-3 big ones. Be very conscious of portion size. If you eat too much of anything (even "healthy" food), you can say goodbye to your abs. Period.
- Eat a source of complete, high quality lean protein with each meal (egg whites, lean meat, fish, protein powder, etc)
- Choose natural, complex carbs such as vegetables, oatmeal, yams, potatoes, beans, brown rice and whole grains. Start with approx. 50% of your calories from natural carbs and reduce carbs slightly (esp. late in the day) if you are not losing fat.
- Avoid refined, simple carbs that contain white flour or white sugar
- Keep total fats low and saturated fats low. Aim for 20% of your total calories from fat (and no more than 30%). A little bit of "good fat" like flax oil, fish fat, nuts & seeds, etc is better than a no fat diet. Essential fatty acids actually assist the fat burning process.
- Drink plenty of water - a gallon is a good ballpark to shoot for if you are physically active.

1000+ reps of daily ab work is an amazing feat of endurance, but that's not how you get visible, 6-pack abs! If you were to do 1,000 reps of ab exercises every day, you would have outstanding development in your abdominal muscles and you would definitely have great muscular endurance. Unfortunately, if your abs are covered up with a layer of fat, you will never see them even if you do 10,000 reps a day!

You
Condition
and Strengthen Your Abs With Specific Ab Exercises...

But The Secret To Seeing Your Abs Is Reducing Your
Body Fat!

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I once saw a photo of a man who broke one of the Guinness World Records for sit ups. It was the most paradoxical thing, but this man did not have any abdominal muscle definition. He was not obese or overweight at all, mind you, but he had a small enough layer of body fat that the muscular definition did not show through. I've never seen a better real life example which demonstrates the basic principle discussed in this article:

You get great abs from reducing your body fat, and you reduce your body fat by creating a caloric deficit through nutrition and metabolism-stimulating and calorie-burning exercise.

I've spent my entire career - through more than 18 years and 28 bodybuilding competitions - studying the science and practicing the art of body fat reduction. I speak from experience and I walk my talk as you can see from my pictures.

If you'd like to learn for yourself, what I've learned about fat burning nutrition and getting your body fat level low enough so that you can finally see a "6 pack rack" of abs, then be sure to take a look at the Burn The Fat, Feed The Muscle program. Thousands of men and women call this their "fat loss bible." For all the details, click here:

Burn The Fat

Train hard and expect success,

Tom Venuto,
NSCA-CPT, CSCS

Fat Loss Coach

www.BurnTheFat.com

About the Author:

Tom Venuto is a natural bodybuilder, certified personal trainer and freelance fitness writer. Tom is the author of "Burn the Fat, Feed The Muscle," which teaches you how to get lean without drugs or supplements using secrets of the world's best bodybuilders and fitness models. Learn how to get rid of stubborn fat and increase your metabolism by visiting: [Burn The Fat](#)