

PILATES FOR ULTIMATE ABS

WE ALL WANT THE ULTIMATE SET OF ABS, A TONED STOMACH, TO CARVE OUT A SERIOUS 6-PACK, TO FLATTEN THE GUT, WHATEVER YOUR MOTIVATION OR HOW YOU DESCRIBE IT, THE MID-SECTION IS OFTEN ONE OF THE HARDEST AREAS TO GET AND KEEP TONED. FOR SOME PEOPLE IT SEEMS LIKE IT'S EASIER THAN FOR OTHERS... THEY MUST KNOW SOME SECRET, RIGHT?

BY Jade Winters

Correct! They've discovered the secret to getting the ultimate set of abs: Pilates.

Pilates has been a fitness mainstay for many years and continues to grow in popularity, with over 11 million people in the USA alone doing Pilates on a regular basis, so there must be something to it, right?

You bet. Pilates is a dynamic, functional and killer workout that can be tailored to the beginner, the injured and even challenge the elite.

To achieve the ultimate set of Pilates abs it's wise to first understand the function of some of the abdominal muscles. The abdominal wall consists of a few key layers of muscle, let's start from the outside and work inwards.

THE RECTUS ABDOMINIS:

This is the least functional but on the other hand the most desired of all of the abdominal muscles as they are your traditional '6-pack muscles'. Their role is to flex or bend the spine forward (in daily life, we only really do this when we get out of bed in the morning). They start at the rib cage below the chest and go down to the pubic bone.

It's great to train the rectus abdominis, but unless you work the other muscles with it you will not flatten your stomach.

THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL OBLIQUES:

These muscles rotate the torso and bend the spine forwards. They also play a role in stabilising the spine. These muscles appear either side of the rectus abdominis and can often be seen going over the ribs and also around the love handle area. They will help (in



conjunction with the transversus abdominis) to draw in and redefine the waistline. These muscles are very functional as they also help to stabilise the rib cage in addition to the spine, which is important in activities such as swimming and running, and strengthening these can also dramatically improve the tennis and golf games.

TRANSVERSUS ABDOMINIS:

The real secret behind Pilates (if done correctly) and getting the ultimate set of abs is that it uses the transversus abdominis and pelvic floor muscles. These are deep abdominal muscles that do a few very important jobs. The transversus' normal function is to form a deep internal corset that acts to draw the abdomen inwards and stabilises the spine during movement.

In general, support by this muscle is considered to be the most important of the abdominal muscles and has also been found to be in a weakened state in those who have chronic back pain or back problems.

We require strength in all stomach muscles, achieving 'global core strength' in order to protect the spine and for the spine to be able to cope with our day-to-day routine, but in the majority of people this muscle is often undertrained and hard to activate.

Even those who do regular abdominal work at the gym or at home can often be overstrengthening some of the other stomach muscles such as the rectus abdominis (or the 6-pack); causing a muscle imbalance and either putting the spine at risk of injury or making the stomach muscles work ineffectively and never achieving the ultimate set of abs that's desired.

To achieve the ultimate set of abs all of these muscle groups must be trained equally. The most effective way to train all of the abdominal muscles, including the transversus abdominis, is Pilates.

HOW TO ACTIVATE THE TRANSVERSUS ABDOMINIS AND PELVIC FLOOR:

To activate the transversus abdominis, simply lie on your back with your feet on the floor and your knees bent. Find the front of your hip bones (the part that's pointing up towards the ceiling) and place your fingers on the hip bones and simply roll the finger tips over these bones onto the inside of the hips so your finger tips are just one centimetre inside the bone and applying just a little bit of pressure, your fingers should be still touching the hip bones.

Now engage the pelvic floor by stopping the flow of urine whilst constricting the muscles deep in the back passage as if you are preventing breaking wind (no nicer way I can put that) and hold tight.

Then while holding on the pelvic floor, imagine there is a line on the surface of the stomach connecting the hip bones together and focus on drawing that imaginary line towards the spine and also the hip bones towards each other (without sucking in the stomach or lifting the rib cage upwards). In addition to this you may also like to think of

drawing the navel to the spine.

You should feel just a small amount of tension in the muscles just inside the hip bones under your finger tips. Keep the pressure on the fingers and release the stomach muscles quickly. You should feel the tension under the finger tips release.

Repeat this several times until you master it. Try to keep all of the other stomach muscles relaxed at this stage as we are just focused on isolation and activation. Once you have mastered this, you can then progress to trying to hold the activation of these muscles whilst doing increasingly challenging exercises.

It's important to note that when you begin to curl the upper body up off the floor and you start to use some of the other stomach muscles such as the rectus abdominis and obliques, the stomach will want to bulge outwards. You should be always focused on flattening the imaginary line on the surface of the stomach towards the spine and preventing this bulging from occurring. Only ever curl up as high as you can maintain a totally flat stomach.

Try these Pilates moves while holding these muscles 'on' to help flatten your stomach, redefine your waistline and create the ultimate set of Pilates abs.

ABDOMINAL CURL

BEGIN YOUR ULTIMATE ABS WORKOUT HERE

Lie on your back with your feet down or in tabletop to challenge, knees squeezed and the fingers interlocked behind the head to support the neck. Elbows wide. Exhale as you slowly curl your ribs to your hips and lift your head and shoulders, curling your upper body up. Draw your belly button in towards your spine to flatten your abdominals. Inhale and slowly relax back down. Repeat this 20 - 30 times slowly.



CRISS CROSS

WORK THE OBLIQUES AND FLATTEN THE ABS

Lie on your back, with your legs bent up, held hip distance apart with your hands behind your head with the elbows wide. Curl the ribs to the hips lifting the head and shoulders. Rotate the upper body, drawing one rib cage towards the opposite hip bone and extend the other leg out straight. Return back to the centre, maintaining the curl and swap to the other side. Repeat 50 times -25 each side



IF YOU HAVE A BALL AT HOME OR AT THE GYM, TRY THESE:

AB TUCKS

INCREASE YOUR CORE STABILITY AND UPPER BODY STRENGTH

Place your feet on the ball, with the hands on the ground shoulder width apart and the body straight in a push up position. Bend the knees, drawing them towards the chest whilst rounding the back and drawing the nose towards the knees. Return slowly to the extended push up position. 2 sets of 15 reps.



OBLIQUE TUCKS

SMASH THE OBLIQUES WITH THIS KILLER EXERCISE

Place your feet on the ball, with hands on the ground shoulder width apart and the body straight in a push-up position. Bend the knees, drawing them towards the chest while rounding the back, drawing the nose towards the knees. This time rotate the lower body to alternating side. Return slowly to the extended push-up position. 2 sets of 20 reps (10 each side).



PIKES

BUILD THE SHOULDERS AND SCULPT THE ABS

Place your feet or shins on the ball, with the hands on the ground shoulder width apart and the body straight in a push up position. Slowly raise the hips towards the ceiling, keeping the legs straight and slowly lower the body back down to the push up position. Go slow as this is a little advanced and the work comes from the control back down, not on the way up. Repeat 10 times. **ufm**



HUNDREDS

BUILD ENDURANCE AND FLATTEN YOUR STOMACH

Lie on your back, with your knees bent and holding the knees. Curl your ribs to your hips by lifting your head and shoulders. Bring your hands down by your hips and simultaneously extend your legs straight up towards the ceiling. Draw your belly button in towards your spine to flatten your abdominals. Hold this position for 10 breaths – breathe in for the count of five and breathe out for the count of five to get to 100.



SCISSORS

CHALLENGE THE ABS

Lie on your back, curl the ribs to the hips lifting the head and shoulders; reach the hands down past the hips extending the legs straight up towards the ceiling. Scissor one leg down towards the floor as far as possible without letting the abs pop up, return leg back up and then slowly lower the other leg. Repeat 50 times - 25 each leg.



DOUBLE LEG LIFT

SCULPT THE SIDES WITH THIS SIMPLE MOVE

Lie on your side with your underneath arm extended past the head, your hips stacked one on top of each other and your top arm on the thigh or on the floor in front of you for balance. Exhale and draw the top hip up towards the rib cage, squeezing the side of the waist and raising the head up off the arm as you slide the fingers down the leg toward the knee. Inhale and slowly relax back down. Repeat 20 times then change sides.



TEASER

STEP IT UP A NOTCH WITH THIS MORE ADVANCED AB SCULPTING EXERCISE

Lie on your back with the arms and legs extended long. Inhale, take the fingertips to the ceiling. Exhale and curl the ribs to the hips. Slowly rolling the upper body off the floor and raise the legs at the same time to come up into a V-sit position. Hold this position for a moment, drawing the navel to the spine. Inhale take the arms up to the ceiling, exhale and slowly roll back down one vertebra at a time as you slowly lower the legs back to the floor at the same time. Repeat 10-20 times.

Notes: Maintain control with the movements, the body and legs move simultaneously to perform the movements, the slower you go the harder this one is.

