

THE SECRET TO flat ABS FAST!

» Pilates | By Jade Winter



We all want a flat stomach, but for some people, it seems to come easier than others. They must have some secret, right? Wrong, says Jade Winter – it's just that they've discovered Pilates

{ Think Gisele Bündchen, Jennifer Hawkins, Madonna and Jennifer Aniston – they are gorgeous, glamorous and have bodies that most of us crave. They've also got totally flat abs and that's because they're all Pilates disciples.

The secret behind Pilates – if it's done correctly – is that it uses the transversus abdominus and the pelvic floor muscles. These lie deep in the abdominal wall and do a few very important jobs.

The transversus' normal function is to form a deep internal corset that acts to draw the abdomen in and stabilise the spine during movement. In general, it is considered to be the most important of the abdominal muscles, and weakness here is often a contributor to chronic back pain or back problems. In fact, 'global core strength' comes from all the stomach muscles, protecting the spine and allowing it to cope with our day-to-day routines. However, in most people, this particular muscle is often hard to activate and is often under-trained.

Even those who do regular abdominal

work at the gym or at home can end up over-strengthening some of the other stomach muscles, such as the rectus abdominus – that's the 6 pack. This can cause a muscle imbalance, putting the spine at risk of injury, making the stomach muscles work ineffectively, and never achieving that flat tummy.

To activate your transversus abdominus, 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 towards the ceiling. Place your fingers on your hip bones and simply roll them onto the insides of your hips, applying just a little bit of pressure. Your fingers should still be touching your hip bones.

Now, engage your pelvic floor and hold it tight, then focus on drawing your hips towards each other – without sucking in your stomach and lifting your rib cage – and drawing your tummy button in towards your spine. You should feel just a small amount of tension in the muscles just inside your hip bones. Keep the

pressure on your fingers and release your stomach muscles. You should feel that tension under your fingers release.

Repeat the sequence several times until you master it. Once you have got the hang of it, try the following Pilates moves at home, to flatten your stomach and redefine your waistline.

It's important to note that when you begin to curl your upper body up off your mat and start to use some of the other stomach muscles, your tummy will want to bulge outwards. Always focus on flattening an imaginary line on the surface of your stomach in towards your spine, preventing any bulging from occurring. Only ever curl up as far as you can maintain a flat stomach.

Like these moves? Try one of the Pilates DVDs from the Studio Pilates International® range. Alternatively, the Amazing Abs e-download incorporates all these killer moves and more, for only \$11.95. It's available only from www.studiopilates.com.

Abdominal curl – to warm up and activate your abs

1a



Lie on your back, with your feet down or in tabletop for more challenge, your knees squeezed together and your fingers interlocked behind your head to support your neck. Keep your elbows wide. Exhale as you slowly curl your ribs to your hips,

lifting your head and shoulders, and curling your upper body up. Draw your tummy button in towards your spine to flatten your abdominals. Inhale and slowly relax back down. Repeat this 20 times.

To work harder, try it with the legs up in tabletop position

1b



Single leg stretch – to challenge the abdominals more

2



Lie on your back with your knees bent into tabletop position, and your hands around your knees. Exhale and curl your ribs to your hips, lifting your head and shoulders. Extend one leg out straight, inhale, hold your body up and

bend your leg back in. Exhale and extend your other leg out. Keep your eyes on your knees, and your abdominals flat and dished. Don't let your lower back arch. Repeat this 20 times on each side.

'Global core strength' comes from all the stomach muscles, protecting the spine and allowing it to cope with our day-to-day routines.

Criss cross

3



Lie on your back, with your legs bent up in tabletop position and your knees a hip distance apart. Put your hands behind your head, with your elbows wide. Curl your ribs to your hips, lifting your head and shoulders. Rotate your upper body, drawing one ribcage towards the opposite hipbone, and extend the other leg out straight. Return back to the centre, maintaining the curl, and swap to the other side. Continue to alternate sides. Repeat 50 times – 25 each side.

SPECIAL OFFER

10% OFF

the entire Studio Pilates International® range of products, DVDs and education courses when purchasing online at www.studiopilates.com

The Studio Pilates International® range includes the Amazing Abs e-Download and the stylish Pilates mat featured in 'the secret to flat abs fast' article so you can redefine your waistline in style



Simply enter the codeword **fitness** in the discount/coupon field when checking out of our online store

For a limited time only. Offer ends 10 August 2009

100s – Build endurance and flatten your stomach

4

Lie on your back, with your knees bent, and holding your 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 tummy 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.



Side Bridge – sculpt your sides

5

Lie on your side, with your top foot slightly in front of your lower one and your legs straight. Raise yourself up on your elbow, or onto your hand if there's no pain in your wrist. Raise your hips so that there is one long line between your head, hips and feet, and reach your top hand towards the sky. Feel this work your supporting arm and the underneath side of your waist. Hold this position for at least 6 breaths, then swap sides.

