

## The Insider's Secrets to a Flat Stomach

By Nick Mitchell

Every day without fail my inbox has at least half a dozen queries in it all asking the same thing. Whether it's from a man or a woman, young or old, one thing that everybody wants is a flat stomach. They want to know what to eat, how to exercise, and more often than not why all the work they are currently doing (for some reason I tend to frighten off most of the couch potatoes from even contacting me in the first place!) just doesn't seem to be working.

So here is the inside scoop on what it takes to finally achieve that lean and streamlined waistline you have always dreamed of having. Take a deep breath, relax, let it out, think of watching the ocean lapping the sunny shoreline of a Caribbean beach as you sip your pina colada. There you go, that's your first step to a slimmer stomach! You don't believe me?! Does that sound too good to be true? Well today is your lucky day because if you're doing everything right and still not getting there then that was the best abdominal defining exercise you have could possibly have done.

The key to a flat stomach lies in diet, exercise and the forgotten art of relaxation. I have a number of clients who come to me with skinny arms and legs and bafflingly (to them) protruding bellies. It's the curse of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is because stress directly impacts upon the way we store body fat. People who have stubborn localised deposits of fat around their abdominal region, especially in the lower abdomen and belly button areas, have elevated levels of cortisol due to stress. If everything else is right (a big fat) we have seen tangible improvements in a matter of weeks with as little as 15 minutes of morning meditation. Of course the cosmetic benefits of reducing cortisol levels pale into insignificance in comparison to the overall health and well being improvements, but I know that you're a vain bunch and want to focus on the superficial!

There are a few other tricks I have up my sleeve that can also be put to great effect. One protocol I have been implementing with startling results is to apply liquorice root gel onto the stomach first thing every morning after showering. Two weeks of daily application will assist your hormones in resetting themselves and give you ample time to see visible changes. Credit for this goes to the man who I consider to be the greatest conditioning coach in the world, Charles Poliquin, whose Biosignature programmes (<http://www.upfitness.co.uk/services/index/64>) are radically reshaping our understanding of spot reduction and hormonal manipulation.

Another trick that I have clients undertake is to steer well clear of traditional cardio / aerobic work. Endless bouts of jogging, bike riding, or similar activity can actually increase the body's cortisol levels making your belly fatter. The very thing you are working so hard to avoid! Instead do your cardio in an interval fashion . pick any exercise that works your entire body and go as hard as you can for 45 seconds, reducing to a slower recovery speed for 1-2 minutes and repeat 5 to 10 times. Not only does this reduce cortisol, it's also an infinitely better protocol for burning body fat than regular, steady state cardio. Studies have shown it's 3 times better in fact!

And the best exercises for toning and tightening the abdominals? Try 3 . 4 sets each of these exercises, twice a week:

**1) Swiss Ball Crunches** for the upper abs

- ~ Lie on a Swiss ball so that your lower back is resting comfortably on the ball.
- ~ Exhale, contracting your abdominals to lift your torso away from the ball, keeping your chin on your chest.
- ~ Hold the contraction at the top of the movement for two seconds, then inhale as you return slowly (on a 4 count) to the starting position.
- ~ Continue until fatigued (about 20 to 25 repetitions).

**2) Low cable pull-ins** for the lower abs.

- ~ Attach a looped rope or weight belt to the low end of a cable pulley.
- ~ Lie on your back in front of the machine and hook your legs through the loop. Your knees should be bent and the loop resting on your lower thighs.
- ~ Place hands under your glutes.
- ~ Exhale, pulling your knees toward your chest as you contract your abs. Keep your spine flat to ensure the lower abs are doing most of the lifting.
- ~ Hold the contraction at the top of the range of movement for two seconds, then return slowly (on a 4 count) to the starting position.
- ~ Continue until fatigued (about 10 to 15 repetitions).

There you go . a series of inside tricks that have helped shape the waistlines of clients ranging from top female fashion models to professional fitness athletes, through to hundreds of desk bound, stressed out bankers and lawyers. I haven't given the entire game away, there are of course numerous other strategies to speed things up but we'd have to save those for another article or contact me and we can talk about whether you would suit some personal coaching of your own.