



The Abominable Abdominals

Of all the muscles in the body, the abdominal muscles or “abs” seem like the hardest to develop - and for two good reasons. They do not increase in size or change shape as much as other muscle groups and they do not become easily visible until the layer of subcutaneous fat around your midsection is reduced. Try not to focus on the latter, those with “ripped abs” have either been thin all their lives or have a very strict diet. But even if having a “six pack” is your main goal, keep in mind that the real importance behind an abdominal workout is the strength and stability it gives your lower back. Because your stomach muscles oppose your lower back muscles, a strong stomach is a requirement for a strong (and stress free) back.

A couple of the simplest and most effective exercises for the abs are crunches and leg raises. Done properly, crunches work the upper abs and leg raises work the lower abs. Abdominal muscles respond better to higher repetitions, but to be perfectly honest, it is not necessary to perform excessive amounts. Thirty may be much better than 10, but 75 is only slightly better than 50. Besides proper technique, there is however, a way to get extra value out of exercising your abs through breathing (refer to page 121 of the book for more information on the importance of proper breathing technique). Exhaling automatically contracts the abdominal muscles, so flatten your stomach while blowing through your mouth as you tighten and shorten (CC) your abs with whatever maneuver you have chosen to perform. It’s one of the only exercises where you can double your workout (and CC) by playing by Mother Nature’s rules.

As for your weekly regimen, a Stanford University study showed that two days in a row and one day of rest in between will give you the best results for developing your abdominals. It may not correspond with all of your resistance training days, but most abdominal exercises can be performed anywhere there is enough room to lie on your back, sit on a chair or hang from a pull-up bar.