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perfect fit

**A firm waistline is generally an accurate indicator of overall fitness**

# Waste to waist

turn, twist and bend the middle body and keep it erect. The obliques are best developed by exercises that work the body at an angle, such as diagonal crunches, as demonstrated in figure 2.

Even the most well exercised abdominals cannot totally tame a bulging belly area, as this is one of the prime sites of excessive fat storage. The best way of keeping it to a minimum though is a combination of a sensible calorie-limited diet, some aerobic activity and muscle toning exercises.

There is no 'best' exercise, as no single movement can maximally engage all the muscles involved in toning the midsection. More than one exercise is required to just work the rectus

abdominis thoroughly. following modifications to ensure both safety and effectiveness. During exercises where you are lying down completely, and the lower limbs are involved in the performance of the exercise, place your fists under your tailbone to protect your back. Never let the back arch. If this begins to happen, lift the legs up a little higher, to the extent where the mid back is flat, not arched. If, on the other hand, you are not lying down completely, and the upper body is involved, then rest the mid and lower back on the mat/floor, while lifting only the head and shoulders off.

\* If you have a weak neck, during exercises where the upper body is involved, sit up on the higher end (rather than lying

and get the abdominal muscles ready to work. It isn't necessary to stretch the abdominal muscles themselves. They are regularly stretched as you stand, sit, breathe and move around.

You could warm up by marching or jogging in place for 5 to 8 minutes or perform some other aerobic activity like dance aerobics or riding a stationary bike.

## The ab crunch

\* The ab crunch (figure 1 demonstrates a modified ab crunch) is one of the most effective and safe abdominal exercises. It avoids straining the lower back, which can happen as the upper body lifts off the floor. If done correctly, without jerking the neck, the upper cervical area remains well protected.

\* To perform the basic crunch, lie with both legs bent (at about a 90 degree angle) and slightly apart. This supports and protects the back. If the crunch is done with your legs straight, you seriously risk straining the lower back. At least one, if not both legs, should be bent. Slowly lift the head and shoulders off the floor using the abdominal muscles, raising yourself up to the bottom of your shoulder blades.

\* Arm positions can vary the intensity of the exercise. To reduce the intensity, extend the arms forward. To increase the intensity, bring your fists up to your forehead (as demonstrated).

Be careful not to jerk the neck up as you lift. Exhale as you lift up and inhale on the way down. Don't try hard to hold the feet down. This only pressurizes the hip flexor muscles (located where the leg meets the main body on the anterior side) and detracts from the work of the abdominals. Do three sets of eight each to start with. Later, slowly overload by gradually increasing the number of reps per set.

## The modified diagonal crunch

\* This exercise trains the internal and external obliques. These are the muscles that shape the sides of your waist. Their main function is to twist and turn the

upper torso.

\* Begin with the upper body raised off the floor (fig. II). Keep both legs bent, and let them turn to the floor on one side. Don't force them down, just let the weight of the legs lean over to one side. Twist the upper body in the opposite direction. In this position lift and lower marginally. Cover approximately four-six inches on space on this crunch. Exhale while lifting up, and inhale while lowering. Do two sets of eight each to start with before switching over to the other side.

## The hip lift

\* This exercise targets the lower abdominal area (the belly). Lie on your back with your legs raised and ankles crossed, the head lifted and supported by the hands. Be careful not to tug onto the head. Contract the lower abdominals to lift your hip area slightly off the floor as you breathe out. Breathe in as you relax. Do three sets of eight each to start with before loading yourself up with more.

## The V sit-up

\* This exercise zeros in on the rectus abdominis and the transverse abdominis, or the below-belly group. (Are all you beer guzzlers listening in on this?)

Using both the upper and the lower body, form a 'V'.

Move both the upper and the lower body closer into one another simultaneously to form a narrower 'V' while exhaling, and then away from one another simultaneously to form a wider 'V' while inhaling.

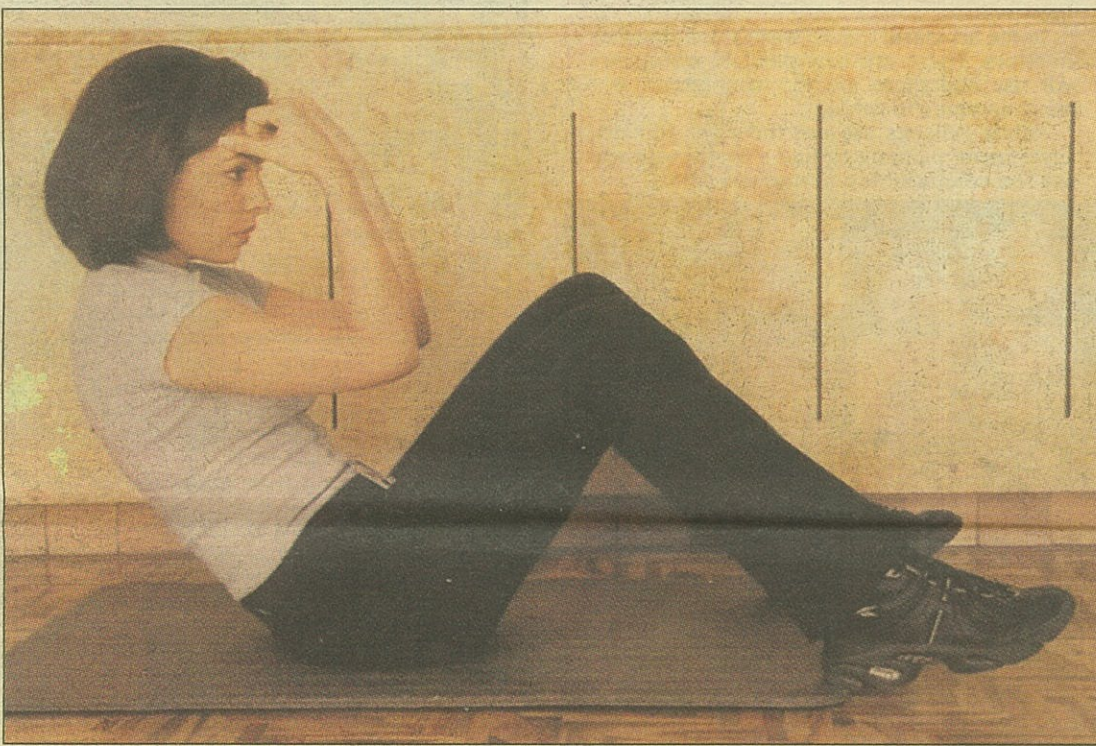
Keep the range of movement relatively small. Make sure the move is performed in a smooth and fluid manner.

Begin with two sets of 10 each. As you get stronger and more proficient at these exercises, slowly increase the number of reps and sets.

This exercise is best avoided for those with a weak back.

**Take charge of your body, your health and your appearance, and begin today! The perfect waist, or the perfect waste? It's all up to you!**

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The modified ab crunch (Figure I)

EVERYONE wants a flat, well-toned waistline. Most people express more concern about their midsections than about any other part of their body. For many, this is also the hardest body part to maintain well. For most of us, this desire may have purely aesthetic appeal, but it also has a sound basis in physiology. A firm waistline is generally an accurate indicator of overall fitness.

The abdominal muscles are critical to a large number of everyday movements such as walking, sitting, breathing, reaching, squatting, good posture. The abdominals power and stabilise your body in virtually every type of exercise, whether you're taking a squash shot or kicking a football. These muscles transfer force between the upper and lower body. They are like a girdle that supports both the organs and the back. You can't have a healthy back or good posture without strong abdominal muscles.

There are four abdominal muscles. The rectus abdominis is the longest ab muscle and is stretched between the rib cage and pubic bone. This muscle is often referred to as the 'six pack', as well toned abs look like a pack of six beer cans. Thorough toning of this muscle requires exercises that involve both the upper body and legs.

The external and internal obliques are the abdominal muscles on the side. They, like the rectus abdominis, assist in the flexing of the spine. They also

abdominis thoroughly.

## Some useful tips

\* When doing ab exercises, inhale during the relaxation phase and exhale during exertion. Correct breathing patterns are critical in exercise performance.

\* Not returning completely to a rest position will help keep tension in the muscles throughout the exercise. While initially you may want to return to the resting position before moving onto the next muscular contraction, as the body adapts to this initial stage, and you find yourself getting more proficient, and the exercise becomes easier, slowly start overloading to further improve.

\* Don't let gravity pull you down to earth. Instead, roll down as slowly as possible. This will make the exercise more difficult and more effective. It will also protect the back from being strained.

\* Increase the number of reps and sets slowly as you get stronger and better conditioned in order to see regular results.

\* You may initially take a break of about 10-15 seconds in between sets.

\* Hold each contraction for about 2-3 seconds before releasing the same.

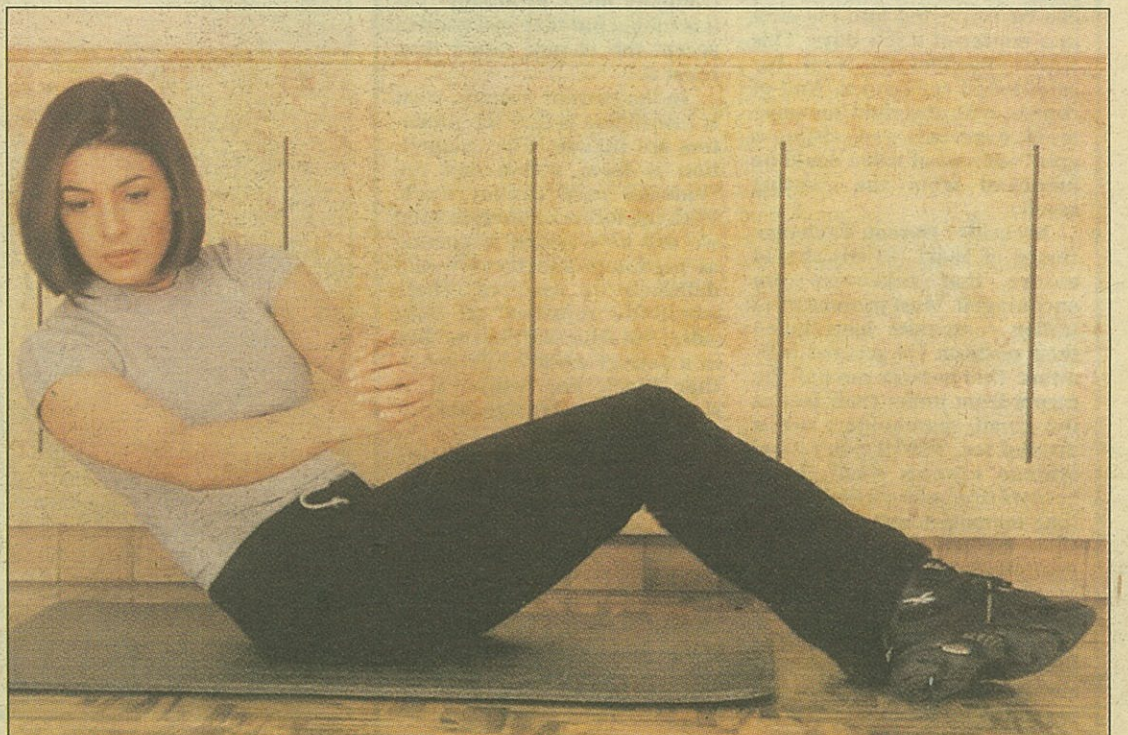
\* If you have a mid or a lower back problem, incorporate the

down closer to the floor) in order to keep the neck well protected, and eliminate strain.

\* Before embarking on any exercise programme, remember that all exercises are not suited to all people. It would be in your interest to take the advice of a fitness professional before you begin.

## Warm up

\* The warm up ensures safety



The Modified Ab Crunch (Figure II)