

December 2008

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Beyond Sit-Ups and Crunches: Understanding the Core

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Too often we simply go through the motions when working our abdominals. Many times the focus is on the *quantity* of repetitions rather than the *quality* of the exercises. Why do we need to do all those crunches, when we can achieve much greater benefits by choosing different exercises? Use the following methods to tweak your abdominal workout and see what it can do for your core.

What is it that keeps crunches and sit-ups from being beneficial to shaping our core? The answer is found in the “psoas paradox.” Basically, the psoas major is a hip-flexor muscle, which together with the other two hip flexors, pulls your thigh bone up toward your torso. When you perform crunches or sit-ups, the psoas major does most of the necessary work. Thus, the abdominals do not get the workout you intended.

Furthermore, crunches and sit-ups can put a lot of strain on the spine. Over time, this repetition could cause chronic lower back pain. There are many other exercises to strengthen the entire core with greater efficiency and without causing back problems.

In order to fine tune your abdominal workout and get the desired results, you must understand the machine that we refer to as the “core.” We must resist thinking of core muscle actions in terms of straight lines. Most of the core muscle movement patterns are *diagonal or rotational*. Therefore, we should keep this concept in mind when choosing abdominal exercises.

First, let’s consider **static exercises**. This type of exercise requires you to control your limbs in space in a wide variety of movement planes and ranges of motion. An example is the plank exercise. Begin by getting into a bridge position (face down). Now, raise one leg and hold it out to the side. Repeat on the other side.

Next, let’s consider **movement-based exercises**. This form of exercise forces muscles to work together in multiple planes and various degrees of rotation. A great example is a standing wood-chop exercise using a medicine ball. You can chop in vertical, horizontal, or diagonal patterns.

The **speed** at which an exercise is performed is vitally important as well. Too often people fall into a controlled tempo and do not stray from that pattern. Try accelerating and decelerating. Accelerate from a stopped position to full speed for the first half of the movement then start to decelerate to a complete stop on the second half of the movement. This requires the core to stabilize the entire body throughout the motion.

Another important concept to understand is **progression**. If you repeat the same abdominal workout time after time, you will limit its benefits. There are a few easy ways to vary your workout. First, work to increase the *speed* at which you perform the exercise. After you increase your speed, work to increase the *range of motion* for which you can perform the exercise. Once you have successfully accomplished increased speed and increased range of motion, you can move to *heavier weights*.

For more information or sample exercises, ask Body Shop staff or visit www.uky.edu/HR/wellness/workouts.html.

Calendar

Will you be the next Biggest BLUE Loser?

Biggest BLUE Loser is a 10-week weight loss competition presented by UK Health & Wellness. It's a fun, healthy way to improve your diet and start exercising. It's your chance to be named UK's Biggest BLUE Loser and win great prizes. Best of all, it's your chance to get healthier. You'll have the support and tools you need to lose big. **And NEW this year, teams may compete as well as individuals!** Registration deadline is December 19. For more information, please visit www.uky.edu/HR/wellness/BiggestBlueLoser.html.



Meet December's Membership Specialist

New to the Body Shop? Have questions? Chance is a Graduate Assistant for Health & Wellness who is here to help you. Feel free to ask him questions, offer suggestions, or set up a time to get oriented to the Body Shop facilities. You can find him in both facilities or you can reach him at healthandwellness@email.uky.edu. You can also read his -- and other staff profiles -- at <http://www.uky.edu/HR/wellness/profiles.html>.

Chance Cianciola, CPT, CSCS

Body Shop Holiday Hours*

Dec. 22

Alumni 6-8:30 a.m., 11a.m.-2 p.m., 4-8 p.m.
Seaton 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 4-7 p.m.

Dec. 23

Alumni 6-8:30 a.m., 11 a.m.-2 p.m.
Seaton 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.

Dec. 24-Jan. 1

Both Body Shop facilities closed

Jan. 2

Alumni 6-8:30 a.m., 11a.m.-2 p.m., 4-7 p.m.
Seaton closed

Jan. 3

Alumni 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

Jan. 5-13

Alumni 6-8:30 a.m., 11a.m.-2p.m., 4-8 p.m.
(close at 7 p.m. on Friday, Jan, 9)
Seaton 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. and 4-7 p.m.

(Note extended hours at Seaton during lunch-time. Time to work off the Holiday calories!)

*Tentative and subject to change.