

10 Tips for Abdominal Training in the Gym

1. Do big exercises that link your upper body to your lower body. Leg extensions and preacher curls might look pretty but they're not in the same ball park as squats, dead lifts, and wood chops for building abdominal strength
2. Do specific abdominal work at the end of your sessions. If you fatigue your abdominals at the start of your workout your other exercises will suffer
3. Don't use weight belts – these reduce the amount of abdominal work you need to do during exercise and also change the mechanics of how your abdominals work increasing the likelihood of injury. Unless you intend on wearing a weight belt around 24/7 you need to build up your abdominal strength
4. Don't over invest in crunches. Doing hundreds of crunches turns you into a “banana shaped person” and makes the upper abdominal (six-pack) muscles very dominant. These upper abdominals can overpower the other abdominal muscles resulting in poor abdominal function
5. Lower abdominals are commonly weak. These are the muscles that help you to tuck your pelvis under and flatten your lower back. Specific lower abdominal exercises are useful for most people
6. Your deep abdominal muscles are essential for looking after your spine. To recruit these actively draw your tummy button into your spine. When weight training or doing abdominal exercises this “drawing in” should precede the movement you're doing in your exercise
7. Train your abs in many different ways. Your abdominals give you strength when twisting and side-bending. Your training should incorporate these movements too
8. Learn to use a Swiss ball. Swiss balls aren't the answer to abdominal training, but are a very useful training aid. They can also help improve your abdominals throughout the day when used as a seat.
9. Stand and sit in good posture throughout the day. When you slouch you change the way that muscles work around your spine – including your abdominals.
10. Spend at least 3-4 weeks paying more attention to abdominal strength at the start of your sport season, or if you're getting back into exercise. The stability and strength of your body is dependant on your core strength