

Blitz that belly

IF YOU'VE CONSUMED MORE THAN YOUR FAIR SHARE OF CHRISTMAS CALORIES, YOU MAY BE KEEN TO WORK ON YOUR STOMACH. **JEFF ARCHER** PRESENTS A VARIETY OF ABDOMINAL EXERCISES TO SHAPE AND TONE YOUR MIDRIFF

Personal Trainer FOR WOMEN

JEFF ARCHER

Jeff is a highly experienced personal trainer and the Director of The Tonic. The Tonic is a UK wide network of personal trainers. For further information telephone: 020 8995 1302 or email: info@the-tonic.com or visit the website: www.the-tonic.com



EXPERT

It's the New Year and you can delay no longer. It's time to put your resolutions into action. Let's be honest, some people can consume up to a whopping 7000 calories on Christmas day alone so it's not surprising that you might be feeling a little bit sluggish and a tiny bit wobbly around the middle by the time you return to normality.

It's easy to put on a few pounds over the festive period. Your normal food routine and exercise programme are disrupted and you'll probably go visiting where you'll be encouraged to eat and drink more than you're used to. So what's the secret to blitzing that belly and getting rid of the extra baggage as quickly as it arrived?

Don't forget your CV work!

Your stomach might feel a bit wobbly, so the first thought is to work it as hard as you can to tighten everything up. This would be a good start, but while strength training for your stomach will tone the area and help to raise your metabolism slightly, you've got to burn off those extra calories sitting above with some high intensity CV exercise. Focussing only on the abdominal muscles is like only changing the sheets on the bed for those Christmas guests while leaving them a dirty duvet – you've made the effort but no one can see it because you've neglected to fix what's on top. You can have the best six-pack in the world but if it's covered in a layer of fat, no one will ever know.

The best way to burn fat quickly is to choose exercise you like and work as hard as you can. Running, cycling, swimming, rowing, dancing, Spinning® and circuits are all effective. Short sharp workouts will push you out of your comfort zone and get the calories burning fast. Interval training where you alternate between a comfortable speed and a speed that really pushes

you is a great way to increase the overall calorie burning of your workout. Constantly altering your pace between easy, comfortable, moderate, tough and 'Oh my god, I can't keep this up much longer' will also get you great results.

Make it varied

Varying your weekly activities is more effective than doing the same activity all the time. If you run on a Monday, swim on a Thursday and cycle on a Saturday, you'll be challenging the body in different ways each time you exercise which requires extra energy and extra calories to be used up from fat stores. End each workout knowing that you've really pushed yourself.

One thing to be avoided is aiming to exercise in 'the fat burning zone'. This involves moderate intensity activity for long periods, which is why it's often attractive. The down sides are that each workout takes forever and you run out of patience before you see any real results. Moderate exercise will produce slower results than more intense exercise so be honest with yourself about how quickly you want to see a difference in your body and then exercise accordingly.

Be wary of your food intake. It's fine to relax a bit over Christmas as long as you return to your normal, healthy food routine afterwards. Don't be tempted to restrict your calorie intake in January too much or your body will rebel. It's best to maintain a regular calorie intake. Eat in excess and you'll store calories and add pounds; cut back too drastically and your metabolism will slow down meaning the body is reluctant to give up its store of fat. Keeping your calorie intake consistent will ensure that your weight will fluctuate less and your tummy will never expand. So watch your food and keep up with your cardio workouts to ensure you can show off your stomach!



1a



1b



EXERCISE 1

The Classic Crunch

1

Suitability level: Everyone

Why it's worth doing: A strong abdominal area is crucial for all activities and is particularly important for protecting the lower back. This exercise works the deep abdominal muscles as well as the middle and upper areas of the six pack.

What to do:

- Lie flat on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor.
- Stabilise your low back by tightening the pelvic floor and then use your abdominal muscles to curl up at the waist and lift the shoulders from the floor.
- Keep your head in line with your body as if you had an orange between your chin and your chest.
- Your pelvis and legs should not move while you lift the shoulders.
- Pause briefly at the top and lower slowly without letting your head or shoulders drop back to the floor completely.
- Repeat 15 times before relaxing to take three deep breaths to recover.

2

EXERCISE 2

Reverse Crunch

Suitability level: Everyone

Why it's worth doing: It's an exercise for the often-overlooked lower stomach muscles. You can use this exercise as part of your overall stomach workout to improve your core stability, balance and strength.

What to do:

- Lie on the floor, face up with your head and neck relaxed and your arms by your sides.
- Cough gently to tighten up your stomach muscles and then maintain this tension in the stomach, remembering to breathe naturally.
- Stabilising from the stomach so that your back remains flat on the ground, lift one foot off the floor and then the other so that your thighs are perpendicular to the ground.
- Now, using your lower abdominal muscles, slowly draw your knees in towards your chest as far as you can, aiming to raise your bottom and lower back a little way off the floor.
- Then return to the start position without allowing your knees to travel too far away from your body.
- If you feel your lower back arching up from the floor you've gone too far.
- Begin with a set of 15 and work up to a set of 20 as you become more comfortable with the exercise.

2a



2b





EXERCISE 3

Crunches with a Twist

Suitability level: Everyone

Why it's worth doing: This is an exercise to strengthen your core muscles and define the sides of your stomach.

What to do:

- Lie on the floor face up with your knees bent and feet flat and slightly apart. Breathe deeply to relax and then stabilise your low back by tightening your pelvic floor. Your arms should be crossed at the wrist.
- Now use your abdominal muscles to curl up at the waist and lift the shoulders from the floor.
- Keep your head in line with your body and chin away from your chest.
- At the top of the movement reach your right hand forwards and twist your shoulders to one side keeping your head in line with your body, then return them to the centre position and lower down without letting your shoulders touch the floor.
- Repeat the movement but this time reach with your left hand and twist your shoulders to the opposite side.
- When you have completed ten twists to each side take a rest and then repeat the set.

Safety tip:

- Make sure that at all times during the exercise your lower back and feet are flat on the ground. If either lift off the floor then you need to slow down the movement and control it from your stomach.

EXERCISE 4

Double Crunch

4

Suitability level: Everyone

Why it's worth doing: This works the whole of the abdominal area from the deep down core stability muscles to the upper and lower sections of the more superficial six pack muscles.

What to do:

- Lie on the floor face up with your knees bent and feet flat on the ground.
- Activate your deep stomach muscles by coughing and holding the tension and then carefully raise your feet, one at a time, off the ground so that you end up with both thighs perpendicular to the floor. This is your starting and finishing position.
- Now, with slow movements, regular breathing and consistent core stability gently raise your shoulders off the ground while at the same time bringing your knees towards your chest.
- Pause briefly at the top of the movement and then lower slowly down without losing tension in your deep stomach muscles. This will ensure that your lower back is not compromised.
- Repeat 15 times, keeping the movements slow so that you are working the muscles hard all the way through the set.

To make this exercise harder:

- Perform it on a bench which will mean you have to move even more slowly to maintain your balance.

4a



4b



5a



5b



EXERCISE 5

Oblique Crunches

5

Suitability level: Everyone

Why it's worth doing: This is another exercise to train the side areas of your stomach.

What to do:

- Lie on the floor face up with your feet flat and your knees bent to 90-degrees.
- Place your fingers on your temples and keep them there throughout the exercise.
- Move your legs over slowly to one side so that you are lying with the side of one thigh on the ground, the other leg on top of the lower one and your shoulders still flat on the floor.
- In this position take a moment to activate your core stability muscles by tightening your pelvic floor and then raise your shoulders slightly off the ground. This is your start and finish position for the exercise and ensures that your spine is in a safe position.
- Keeping your lower body still, contract the muscles at the sides of your stomach to raise your shoulders a little further off the ground. Pause momentarily at the top of the movement and then slowly lower your shoulders without letting them touch the ground and without losing the contraction of your pelvic floor and core stability muscles.
- Complete 15 reps and then move your legs to the opposite side and repeat.

EXERCISE 6

The Plank

6

Suitability level: Everyone

Why it's worth doing: This is an exercise that improves abdominal strength without putting strain on the lower back.

What to do:

- Lie face down on the floor with your arms bent so that they are underneath you and you are supported on your elbows.
- Now tighten up your stomach muscles and raise your hips off the floor far enough to create a straight line from your shoulders to your knees, which are still in contact with the ground.
- Be careful not to let your hips sag so that your back arches. Similarly do not raise your hips too high so that the exercise becomes easy. Hold this position for eight to ten seconds and then relax.
- Make sure that you keep breathing as you hold the position – holding your breath will only lead to a rise in blood pressure.
- Repeat this eight times making sure you hold the position steady on each effort.

To make this exercise harder:

- Start in the same position but raise both your hips and your knees at the same time so you are balancing on your elbows and the toes/balls of your feet with your body in a straight line from the shoulders to the ankles.

6a



6b



7a



7b



7c



EXERCISE 7

Crunches with Medicine Ball/Light Dumbbells

7

Suitability level: For the more adventurous

Why it's worth doing: This will make your tummy work just that little bit harder.

What to do:

- Follow the instructions for the classic crunch but hold a medicine ball (or a set of light dumbbells) just above your chest.
- As you reach the top of the crunch movement, extend your arms upwards in a modified bench press.
- Let the arms bend back to their starting position and then lower your shoulders back towards the floor.

8

EXERCISE 8

Single Leg Plank

Suitability level: For the more adventurous

Why it's worth doing: Again, this will make your tummy work just that little bit harder.

What to do:

- If you need more of a challenge than even the full plank, get into this position and then raise one foot off the ground while you hold your body straight.
- Alternate your supporting leg and gradually increase the duration of the hold as you get stronger.

8a



8b



'Gradually increase the duration of the hold as you get stronger'