

Model Piper McCord

SECRETS TO A SLIMMER, TIGHTER

# WIDSELECTION

Photo by John Di Giovanni

By Shane Doll, CPT





# Dispelling The Crunches Myth

## Secrets to a Slimmer, Tighter Midsection

By Shane Doll

**S**o you've decided to work on getting a flat, firm stomach. If you're like most people, you'll start by doing countless crunches, only to be left disappointed with poor results. How can this be? I thought crunches were the best exercise for your abs. Truth be known, crunches are close to last on my list of the most effective exercises for a tighter waistline. In fact, you could never do a single crunch again and have the best abs of your life.

The first thing we need to do is look at the basics. If you want to have a firm, flat stomach, you need to do two things. Number one, you must remove the layer of fat covering your stomach. You can't see your abs if they're covered up by a layer of fat. Number two; you must work your core and abdominal muscles to tighten them up. Sounds pretty obvious, right? Unfortunately, we often overlook the simplest of details.

Here's the first of many reasons why crunches are ineffective at changing your waistline. If you want to remove fat from your stomach, you must burn it for fuel. The only place fat can be used for fuel is in a muscle cell. Your abdominal muscles are relatively small and

require very little energy. This means they simply cannot burn that much fat for fuel, no matter how hard you work them. This may sound crazy but if you want to lose fat from your waistline do more squats, lunges, rows and other total body exercises. The more you work the larger muscle groups, the more energy you'll burn from fat.

That's the first secret, if you want to have better abs exercise with more total body movements. Don't waste your time with isolation exercises or any exercise done sitting down. An effective resistance training program is completed three times per week and has plenty of total body movements done with intensity. The same old 3 sets of 15 reps will get you nowhere. The whole "light weights and higher reps for toning and firming" is another myth for another day. You must provide your muscles with an overload stimulus if you want to see a physiological change.

All right, I'm going to assume for now that you're eating right and doing thirty plus minutes of aerobic exercise five days a week to assist in the fat burning process. I'll discuss the cardio side in more detail in a future article. For now, let's

get back to that flat stomach. The best exercises for your "core" are ones that integrate, instead of isolating. Some of my favorites are medicine ball chops, planks, band rotations, single leg reaches and cable wood chops to name a few. The primary responsibility of your abdominals is to stabilize your pelvis during movements in which you rotate, flex or extend your back. The crunch helps with none of these and is an unnatural movement pattern. The muscles in your body work together as links in one big kinetic chain. Ever notice how yoga instructors have such great waistlines? I endorse yoga and know plenty of instructors. I have yet to see one doing crunches. Success leaves clues. If you train with weights like I do, simply look to incorporate functional exercises like the ones listed above into your routines for best results.

*Shane Doll CPT, CSCS is the owner of Shaping Concepts Fitness Training Studios. He specializes in 30 minute functional strength training workouts for people with busy lifestyles. For more information go to [www.shapingconcepts.com](http://www.shapingconcepts.com)*