



TOM SEABOURNE

**YOUR
BEST**

ABS

**REVOLUTIONARY CORE
WORKOUTS FOR A STRONGER,
FLATTER STOMACH**

Your Best Abs

Your Best Abs is dedicated to my wife, Linda, who taught me how to cook and inspired me to write just one more book. At first Linda thought the Your Best Abs program was too easy, but after trying it, she now truly believes in, and practices, the workouts and shares the moves with her clients.

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FOREWORD

Your Best Abs is revolutionary in its approach, but the research behind the benefits of bracing the core has been around for years; the martial arts community has been practicing breathing behind the shield for decades. Tom Seabourne recognized the importance of these vital concepts and brings them to light in *Your Best Abs*. The premise is simple: Train the abs as they are designed to work, not by doing crunches and sit-ups. There is a cost benefit to training the abs.

Repetitive spinal flexion, as in most typical abdominal workouts, may be detrimental to the lamina, facets, and disks of the spine. Unbeknown to many, the purpose of the abs is to resist spinal extension. The core muscles don't move bones and joints around a lot. Instead, their purpose is to brace and hold, not push and pull. Core muscles function to contract when you need them, without additional spinal movement. This static, isometric, hold position can be trained and improved. You can strengthen abdominal muscles and improve their endurance without a full range of motion—you simply flex them, like flexing your biceps for a show-your-guns pose. Observation of the female calf muscle provides a thoughtful analogy. Women who wear high heels seem to have more well-defined calf muscles than women who eschew heels. Calf and ab definition depends on how much fat there is between the skin and the muscle. You cannot spot-reduce fat, but you can strengthen the muscle underneath. (Even though wearing heels creates an isometric contraction of the calves, it's not really recommended.) He compares the relationship between wearing high heels to create beautiful calf muscles to the cost-benefit of performing sit ups to getting great abs. What use is great abs coupled with lower back pain? Why have great looking calf muscles if it causes bunions, foot, hip, and lower back pain? Raise your heels off the floor, and your calf muscles automatically contract. Imagine holding your heels off the floor all day long. So there is little doubt that isometrics are beneficial for shapely calf muscles.

What Seabourne is proposing is not as dramatic. He just asks you to hold your abs tight several times a day, at your convenience. *Your Best Abs* provides a way to sculpt the abs without damaging the lower back or any other part of the body. The concept is simple, and the benefits are profound. It doesn't matter if you are a professional bodybuilder or wheelchair athlete. The core muscles stabilize the spine for activity. Whether performing upper body or lower body moves, the activation of the midsection is the deciding factor for performance enhancement. The aesthetics of a male's well-defined six-pack may be related to a functional core and procreation.

Seabourne presents easy-to-follow exercises that focus on co-contracting the abs in a variety of positions and modes of training to get great abs. The exercises are not difficult, and you can do them anytime, anywhere. You don't have to dress-out to perform the exercises. In fact, you can perform abdominal static holds during any action. Seabourne presents you with a variety of cardio, strength, flexibility, and power moves that challenge the core, but you can use core isometrics with any activity you choose. His hope is that you eventually stiffen your midsection for every endeavor. The goal is to brace the abs during all activities, both in and out of the gym (except during sleep). The research-based strategies in *Your Best Abs* allow you to improve at your pace. Work out easy or hard depending on your schedule and aspirations. If you want a smaller waistline, stronger core, or a combination of both, progress is up to you. It all depends on your effort. I'm glad there is finally a book that presents the truth about abdominal training. *Your Best Abs* is revolutionary and will change the way people train their abdominals at home and in the gym.

–Herb Perez

1992 Taekwondo Olympic Gold Medalist

PREFACE

When I was 11 years old, my father was stationed on the island of Okinawa. I was introduced to traditional karate at the Seibu-kan dojo. We practiced punches, kicks, strikes, and blocks from a variety of stances. We warmed up, cooled down, punched makiwara boards, and hit heavy bags. It was the same grueling two-hour workout six nights a week. Although we never performed a single sit-up or crunch, most of us had ripped abs. By the time I was 12 years old, I had a well-defined six-pack. I wasn't trying to achieve abdominal definition; it happened as a by-product of training.

I never heard my karate buddies discuss their physiques. We weren't trying to lose weight or flatten our stomachs. The focus was simply to improve karate skills. Every time we punched, kicked, or blocked, we were taught to exhale through pursed lips, co-contracting our abs automatically. Co-contraction of the abs means the abdominal muscles press strongly against each other. The purpose of the sharp exhalation was to increase power and brace the core against a counterattack. Whether sparring or performing kata (a series of moves against an imaginary opponent), the sensei reminded us to maintain perfect posture so that power was transmitted through a stiffened core.

I continue to be fascinated by human performance. I played varsity tennis at Penn State and realized all of us exhaled—and some of my teammates even yelled—every time we hit the ball. This exhalation created a contractile pulse through the abs, generating power. I taught tennis and karate and was adamant my students exhale on each hit to transmit maximum power through a contracted core. It was natural. It felt right because that is what abs are designed to do. Later I became part of the fitness industry, wrote several books, and produced a couple of videos on core training. That led to co-hosting a best-selling abdominal exercise infomercial. I followed my colleagues and jumped on the crunch and sit-up bandwagon until I realized there was a better way. Harkening back to my early karate days, I realized there is no need to go down to the floor for crunches and sit-ups if you co-contract your abs naturally.

On our honeymoon in Jamaica, my wife and I noticed the phenomenal abdominal definition of the natives. Their plant-based diet and high physical activity levels beat crunches and sit-ups. As I was getting older, I noticed my belly beginning to pooch out a bit. It didn't seem as if I was getting fatter, more like I was losing muscle tone and good posture. This was new for me, and I didn't like it. I changed my diet. I cut down on starchy carbs and consumed lean protein and fibrous veggies. My digestion improved, but my protruding belly didn't. Some of my friends were going through the same bloat-belly

syndrome. Some tried sit-ups and crunches, but that just made their stomachs bigger. One of my colleagues secretly wears a weight-reducing belt under his shirt while working out. I researched “sucking in the gut” and discovered that strategy alone may not be such a great idea. When you pull your tummy in, you’re activating the transversus abdominis, and that actually diminishes spinal stability.

It wasn’t until I read Stuart McGill’s research about bracing the abs to prevent lower back pain that it all came together. Since using Dr. McGill’s bracing technique, my pooch has disappeared and I’ve felt better than ever. I start every morning by bracing my abs to pull myself out of my memory-foam bed. As a competitive ultradistance cyclist, I found a 5% core co-contraction prevented lower back pain. When I competed on the USA Taekwondo Team, I needed a 30% co-contraction to keep me strong and safe. I realized soon after making core contractions a habit that my hip pain diminished. My wife Linda doesn’t “work out.” She spends her free time at the office promoting her business. Before I met Linda, she wore an electrical muscle stimulator belt. Although she said she felt her abs contracting, she never lost an inch. Linda now braces her core daily, strictly for the X shape, cosmetic value.

My college students love static core training, too. At the beginning of each semester, I talk for an entire class period about stiffening the core. I share Dr. McGill’s research with them about how core contraction prevents lower back pain. The restorative change alone sways most students to try it. And many, like me, have continued bracing their abs as a part of their life.

A friend, Michael Prewitt, and I developed a fitness product to remind people to stiffen their core. The product caught the eye of a world-renowned fitness entrepreneur, but we have yet to launch the product into the world market. So I decided to write *Your Best Abs* to share as much information and motivation as possible to help people reach their *ab*-solute potential. Bracing the core is the most important part of the program. Although some exercises presented in *Your Best Abs* seem as if you’re targeting other muscle groups, core control is the primary focus. We want you to be able to co-contrast the core muscles for any activity you attempt. And if you want to get to the next level in abdominal development, check out the “Breathe Behind the Shield” chapter. And don’t forget about our “Fueling Your Muscles” nutrition chapter to lose the fat between the skin and the muscle.

Your Best Abs is full of abdominal exercises I learned in martial arts and transformed here to meet your needs and goals. These exercises enable you reach your core aspirations whether you are a couch potato, weekend warrior, or high-level athlete. Skim through the book and decide if our system is right for you, and if it is we want to hear about your progress.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my wife, Linda, for being the guinea pig for all the exercises presented in *Your Best Abs*. She was the first believer in the program. Dr. Stuart McGill's research and technical guidance was the inspiration for the concept. Michael Prewitt and Jeff Tuller helped me to invent a product to stiffen the core and keep people's posture perfect. Finally, Liz Evans, with Meyer & Meyer Sport, who is an amazing editor and had the confidence to move forward on our out-of-the-box idea.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone wants to have great looking abs, and few are satisfied with their midsections. It's hard to find the time and motivation to work out. You're either too busy working or taking care of the kids, so you let yourself go. Working out is uncomfortable. People get discouraged and quit. There are blogs, infomercials, books, videos, and even much of the discussion around the dinner table is about how to go from fat to flat, but if you keep doing what you've been doing, your stomach is going to look like it does now.

The truth is, obtaining a six-pack is not as hard as you may think. It is certainly not about performing 1,000 crunches a day. You don't get results with crunches and sit-ups because it's easy to cheat. They can also be dangerous because they have the potential to hurt your neck and back. Gimmicks, gadgets, abdominal creams, and contour belts provide only a temporary solution. Stop suffering through exercises that hurt your back and change the way you think about training your abs.

Your Best Abs is a game-changing, martial-arts inspired, complete system that precisely targets the six-pack and love handles, providing you with the only tools necessary for a ripped and firm waistline. Our holistic approach includes warm-ups, cool-downs, stretching, strengthening, power training, and a nutrition plan designed to deliver maximum results. Whether you're a beginner, intermediate, or advanced exerciser, *Your Best Abs* provides you with a course of action to chisel your abs and reshape your body.

If you have weak lower abs from having kids or if your belly sticks out, you can become instantly slimmer with our research-based, easy-to-follow program to pull your torso inward. You choose when and how much you train each week. All your core muscles fire when you use our special techniques. After a month, training becomes habit, and like flipping a switch, you have lean, toned, and sleek abs. Many professional bodybuilders do not train abs. Rather than doing crunches and sit-ups, most of the best bodybuilders get great abs as a by-product of training other muscle groups. Training shoulders, chest, and legs require the same isometric static co-contraction we teach in *Your Best Abs*. Our anti-movement system immediately cures the tortoise shell, bloated look visible in bodybuilders who overwork the abs.

Your Best Abs transforms your body and trains the abs from the inside-out, enhancing neutral spinal alignment, strengthening postural muscles, and improving athletic performance. Use the workouts presented here in addition to your existing program to sculpt a new you. Or, if you're limited on time, try our breakthrough core isolation techniques exclusively for a month, and you will certainly notice a difference in your waistline.

The exercises in this book will have you working all the abdominal muscles in one simple movement. Twisting and flexing the spine is dangerous, but the abdominal bracing strategies in this book are safe and effective. Although it feels simple, you're definitely getting a workout. It's easy on the body and easy on your back. There is a time to brace the abs and a time to relax. Laugh out loud. That's how easy it is to exercise the abs.

Your Best Abs teaches you to "turn on" or to deactivate your core at will. The lower back is not designed for crunches and sit-ups. Repetitively flexing the spine is the best way to cause injury to the spinal disks. Instead, the purpose of the core is to resist spinal extension. Sitting all day, especially slumped over, tightens the hip flexors. Sit-ups and slumping forward both flex the spine and tighten hip flexors. Performing multiple sit-ups just adds to the problem of poor posture. The most important aspect of training the core is stability, not flexion. Most people have an unstable core, increasing their chances for lower back pain. When you're trying to move your legs and arms efficiently, it is important to have a stable core. Imagine someone about to punch you in the tummy or tickle you. Your first reaction is to co-contract your core into an isometric static hold. *Your Best Abs* teaches you to tighten your core at every angle using isometric tension. It's the solution for the pooch.

The core is made up of several different muscle groups. These muscle groups work together in a plywood-type configuration to protect the spine and stabilize the torso. When you train these muscles consistently, they give you the X-shape you desire. You only have to work at 10 to 30% of maximum effort to see and feel great results. We show you how to train the abs in a crowded room and no one will know you're working out. And the floor exercises in *Your Best Abs* are safe and require very little actual movement. Our equipment exercises may be performed in or out of the gym, with or without equipment. The partner exercises are so much fun you don't realize you're training.

No one gets a six-pack without eating correctly. Although you cannot spot reduce fat around the waist, simply by sitting taller and bracing your abs you may eat less at mealtimes. It is not a requirement to go Ketogenic, Paleo, low fat, or low carb. Do what works for you based on epigenetics. What fueled your ancestors? Simply follow the basics: a plant-based diet with essential fat and lean protein.

To be able to co-contract your abs for more than 10 seconds, you must learn to breathe behind the shield. The shield is your core musculature; the breath emanates from the diaphragm. Take deep diaphragmatic breaths while maintaining a static hold of the core muscles. If an empty can was sitting upright you could probably crush it with one, hard palm heel strike. But punch an airtight, unopened can, and it maintains its integrity. That's the strength of breathing behind the shield.

A super athlete in any sport has mastered the art of transmitting power through the core. The legs and arms do their thing while the core stiffens and magnifies energy. The core provides the magic conduit to power the arms and legs by bracing the spine and stabilizing the midsection. A huge weightlifter may not hit a golf ball with the power and velocity of a skinny waif if he has not learned to “pulse” his abs at the precise moment of impact. Power your core with the precision of a martial artist.

You don't need a gym or special equipment to get great abs. Get an entire core workout while sitting, standing, waiting in line, or talking on the phone. Work out without generating a sweat. The sense of well-being is immediate as you boost metabolism, eat right, and do the ab-centered cardio. Your posture, breathing, and confidence will improve dramatically. Get started right away. Tighten, tone, and sculpt your abs. The results will come faster than you ever thought possible.



Pooch Belly



Co-contracted Abs

Co-contract your abs a few times a day.

CHAPTER 1

THE TRUTH ABOUT ABS

Lift your shirt and look down at your belly button. Grab some skin or layer of fat between your thumb and index finger. That quick pinch is the motivation to train the core. The core is the center of the body. But more important to most people, that is where the six-pack resides. It's actually a ten-pack, but most people can barely see a three- or four-pack. A six-pack can be yours without sit-ups, crunches, or fancy exercise equipment.

Basic exercises are the best. There is no reason to spend hours sweating and writhing through difficult moves when isometric static holds will get you flat abs. Recruit your core muscles for every move you make. Quality is always more important than quantity when it comes to ab training. Most people think exercise requires movement, but the best way to work the abs is without movement. It's hard to believe you get a good core workout without bending back and forth and sweating. You can train the abs while sitting quietly and motionless, watching your favorite movie. Most of us choose to be lazy. It's easier to watch a movie with relaxed abs. But you can change your mind and change your body by making isometric static hold core training a habit.

Once co-contracting your abs is part of your life, everything changes. Your posture and confidence improves. You stand taller and feel stronger. You can and should train your abs several times during each day. This is not the same rule as in the weight room where you only train each muscle group twice a week. Let your core muscles rest when you're sleeping. It's easier than you might think to train your core. It's not about red-

faced, gut-busting, high-intensity exercise. It's quite the opposite. Train your abs at 10 to 30% of maximum intensity to keep them taut and tight. Your core postural muscles are predominantly slow-twitch fibers. They respond best to low intensity, long duration activation. This is similar to the difference between shooting multiple, consecutive free-throws with a basketball or groaning through a heavy shot-put with a bowling ball. Train the abs with the same demeanor as playfully tossing a free-throw.

Whether you're sitting, standing, or lying down, you can train your abs. When you cough, your stomach muscles tighten. Don't cough throughout your entire core workout; instead, just brace the abs. Imagine a bad guy is about to wallop you in the tummy. If you are a martial artist, you can defend yourself with an imaginary block. Blocking with your arm or leg fires up your abs. But if you're not a martial artist, co-contract the abs into a brick-wall and prevent the imaginary punch from doing imaginary harm. If you don't want to cough, and you don't like to brace against an attack, pretend your significant other is attempting to tickle you. Your body reacts by co-contracting the core muscles to cough, brace, or short circuit the tickle attack.

ANATOMY OF THE CORE

The spine is similar to a pillar of 24 bones with the surrounding core muscles acting as guy-wires to hold it in place. *Core* is a term for the muscles that help protect the spine. The core is also the area from which all movement happens—everything emanates from the core. Your core acts as a force transfer center and stabilizer rather than a prime mover. The movers are the arms and legs. Let's take a look at the four muscle groups making up the abdominal core: rectus abdominis, external obliques, internal obliques, and transverses abdominis. Whether sprinting to the finish or picking up a gallon of milk, these four abdominal muscles brace together into a stiff conduit of energy transfer. Tighten these muscles, and all the power and energy produced by the arms and legs is transferred properly. Also, tightening the core abdominal muscles provides you with a feeling of strength, power, and confidence.

RECTUS ABDOMINIS

You already know all about the rectus abdominis (RA), or six-pack—those showy muscles in the middle of the stomach. Bruce Lee took advantage of his time by training his incredible abs unnoticed while sitting in boring meetings. He contracted his abs by pressing his lower back against a chair into a posterior pelvic tilt. There was no apparent movement, but the rectus abdominis muscles were receiving a secret, awesome, isometric workout. The "10-pack" is the rectus abdominis.