

Best Belly All-Around

By Martica K. Heaner, Prevention

Prevention

Slim down your middle faster with this dual routine that tones both your belly and back in one shot. Although some ab exercises can strain your spine — even if you don't feel pain when you do them — these isometric moves, in which you hold a position instead of doing lots of reps, were proven in an exercise lab to firm the midsection with minimal stress to the lower back. Plus, [a stronger back improves your posture](#), giving you [an instant tummy tuck](#). Get started now to see results in 3 weeks.

The Expert

Stuart McGill, PhD, author of *Ultimate Back Fitness and Performance* and a professor of spine biomechanics at the University of Waterloo in Canada, developed this workout: [Abs and back](#) — so you look trimmer from every angle!

Workout at a Glance

What To Do

Perform the moves in the order listed. Hold each for 10 seconds, bracing your abs (as though a ball were going to hit you in the stomach), but don't hold your breath. Repeat 4 to 8 times. Try the Main Move first. If it's too difficult, do the Make It Easier option. When you can complete 8 reps of the Main Move with ease, progress to the Make It Harder version. Do this 15-minute routine once a day, at least an hour after you wake up, so your muscles are warm.

For faster results

Do 30 minutes of cardio, such as walking, jogging, or cycling, most days, with 1 long, 60- to 90-minute workout each week.

Main Move

1. Controlled Static Curl

Lie with right knee bent, foot flat on floor, left leg extended, hands under lower back. Lift elbows and inhale deeply. As you exhale, contract abs and curl head, neck, and shoulders to raise shoulder blades a few inches off floor. Hold and lower, including elbows. Do all reps, then switch legs.



Make it easier: Simply brace abs, hold, then release, keeping head on floor.

Make it harder: Lift extended leg a few inches off floor and hold as you raise and lower upper body. Switch legs and repeat.



Main Move

2. Side Bridge

Lie on left side, propped up on elbow, with top foot in front of bottom so both feet are on floor. Contract abs as you

raise body, forming a straight line from toes to shoulders. Do all reps, then switch sides.



Make it easier: Lie with legs bent behind you and raise torso and thighs, resting on bottom knee.

Make it harder: From Main Move, rotate body to face floor, supporting yourself on forearms and toes, legs and torso in a straight line. Hold, then rotate back to Side Bridge. Do all reps, then switch sides.

Main Move

3. One-Legged Squat

Stand with right leg extended behind you, toes on floor. Hold arms out to sides at shoulder height. With abs contracted, bend left knee about 45 degrees, hinging forward a bit from hips, and slide right leg back as arms press forward, palms facing in. (Keep left knee behind toes.) Lift right leg slightly (1 to 2 inches, as pictured) and hold. Straighten left leg to stand, returning right leg to start and pressing arms back out to sides. Do all reps, then switch legs.



Make it easier: Keep back toe on floor throughout move.

Make it harder: Raise right leg higher (3 to 6 inches) when you extend it behind you, and keep it lifted throughout the entire move.

Main Move

4. Hip Airplane

Stand with right leg extended behind you so foot is off floor. Raise arms to shoulder height like wings, palms down. Contract abs and hinge torso forward about 45 degrees as you raise right leg behind you as high as possible, while maintaining balance and keeping hips level. Hold, then lower leg to stand and repeat. Do all reps, then switch legs.



Make it easier: Lift leg behind and balance without hinging forward with upper body.

Make it harder: From Main Move, rotate body to right, raising right arm so chest and hips face right and left arm points toward floor (shown). Hold, then rotate to left. Hold and return to center for 1 repetition. Do all reps, then repeat with opposite leg lifted.



Find More Workouts in the Fit Zone:

- [Downsize Your Thighs](#)
- [Tone Your Thighs, Tummy & Buns](#)
- [Wake Up, Work Out](#)

Popular Slide Shows on MSN Health & Fitness:

- [Inside Extreme Makeovers](#)
- [Rating Menopause Remedies](#)
- [Healthy Habits That Aren't](#)

Provided by Prevention

URL: <http://health.msn.com/dietfitness/articlepage.aspx?cp-documentid=100173586>1=10613>