

Killing yourself over abs isn't effective

As it turns out, having rippled abs doesn't actually require a lengthy commitment to an exercise routine. It doesn't require a pricey machine or a strange seaweed diet. It's pretty easy, really.

It requires picking the right parents.

That's the word from Jerry Greenspan, owner of Exercise Equipment Experts, 1640 W. Lane Ave. Factors like genetics and body type have a huge impact when it comes to matters of midsections.

Some people store fat in a spare tire, and some people don't. That's why some people can consume nothing but candy and beer and still boast a teeny waistline. It's genetics and it's not fair—but maybe they'll get cirrhosis later.

Of course, there are ways to improve your abs. Greenspan knows all about that too. He's more than a businessman; he's also a physical therapist with master's degrees in both nutrition and biomechanics (that's human movement).

First and foremost, Greenspan says, "If you want a trim midsection, 75 percent of it is in nutrition."

He points to the physiques of college athletes to illustrate the point: "Look at

college football players—lots of young men, thickly muscled, 18-22 years old. They work out four or five hours each day, and you'll still see bellies on those guys. If abs were the product of plenty of exercise, those kids would all have them."

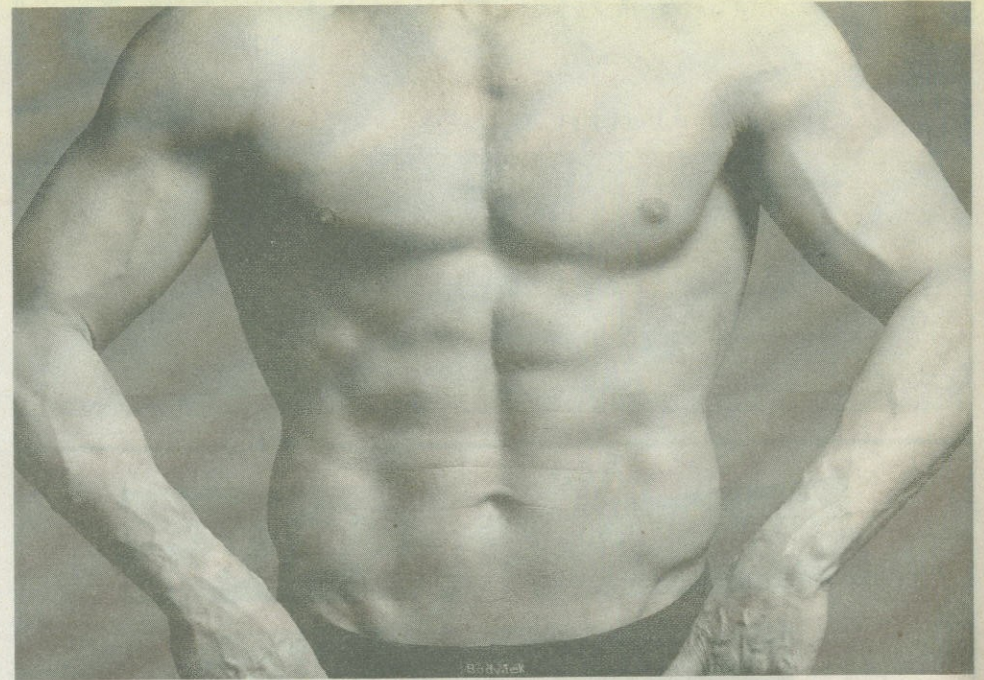
If the key to improvement lies in dietary habits, what exactly is the nutritional secret? The expert says that any one of a million programs can generate a lean body.

Becoming leaner does require more than healthy eating, though; it requires eating specifically for weight loss. Organic fruits, vegetables, butters and breads might be healthy, but they can make you just as fat as the regular old polluted foods.

Beyond diet and genetics, exercise still has some small part of the ab equation. We all know some workout junkie who cranks out thousands of crunches a day, and all those repetitions are pretty useless.

Greenspan says that there's no reason to do more than 100 crunches. "More is not better.... Don't exercise the abdomen every day; those muscles need rest like any other muscle."

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He says that exercising the abdomen twice a week is about right and yields the most improvement for the time investment. For the record, three times in a week is OK, too.

As for the best midsection exercises, there are plenty to choose from. There are abdomen-specific machines and devices (like on the infomercials), and many of those are effective for developing the muscle. The added resistance and

weight make for a more challenging workout, but Greenspan cautions that the extra pressure can take its toll on your joints.

Plain old abdomen crunches work the muscle, too, and it doesn't take an arsenal of different moves to improve your midsection. The abdomen is one muscle, and it all contracts regardless of whether the exercise is a crunch, a reverse crunch or some other variant.

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