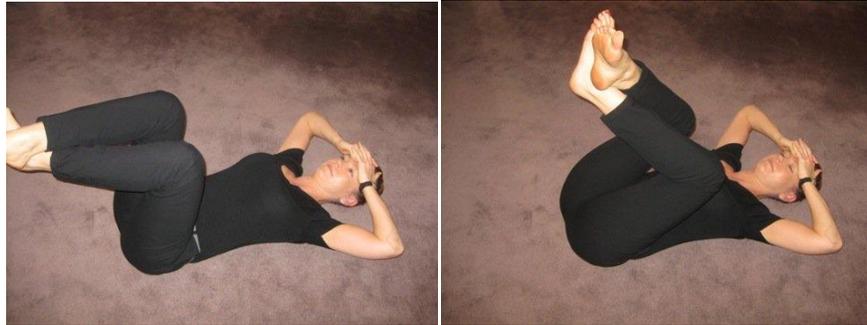


3 Simple Exercises for Lower Abdominals

(Forget curls, sit-ups, and leg raises)

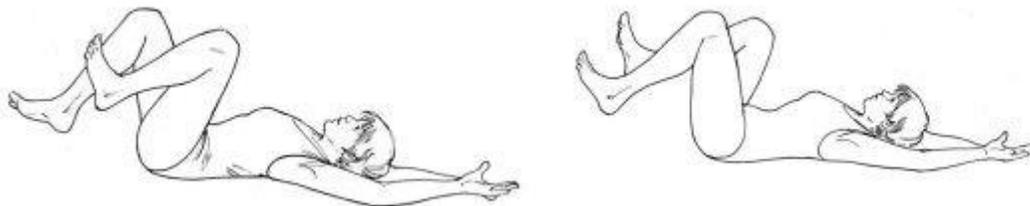
Note: Abdominal exercises will tone your abdominal muscles. And strengthen your core which is vitally important for overall spinal health.



Reverse curl ups help control the lower abdomen and support the low lumbar spine. The Transversus abdominus (the deepest and most important abdominal muscle) and internal oblique muscles naturally tend to switch off with excessive hours of sitting. This means that just about every one of us needs to do some form of lower abs exercise to switch them back on and restore them to strength.

Doing reverse curl ups also makes it easier to recruit the pelvic floor muscles. This is just as important because just about everybody is weak at the front of the pelvic floor (not so much at the back because it's easier to squeeze your butt cheeks together) and quite unable to elicit an isolated contraction here. Reverse curls ups will also aid good breathing, rather than accentuating bad breathing patterns.

Reverse curls ups, are done by rounding your lower back as you bring your knees towards your chin, head staying on the floor. Start with your feet off the floor, knees at 90 degrees (see photo), Try to lift your bottom off the floor as you bring knees to chin. If you have a neck problem, clamp your hands on the front of your forehead (this helps to take the neck out of action). Keep your ankles crossed to make the legs less unwieldy and keep your knees wide so your hips don't pinch. Return to starting position. Fifteen at a time is the optimum number.



Legs Passing is another exercise for the lower abdominals. As with reverse curl ups, the legs passing exercise also recruits the transversus abdominis. This then makes it easier for the other abdominal muscles to work better.

Legs passing is very good at getting your back relaxed and your hips swinging if your spine has become rigid with pain. It does this by making the left and right sides of your abdominal wall work differently as your legs go up and down. This literally discombobulates your back muscles, making them release their hold as you concentrate on the front.

You start this exercise on your back with knees bent and both feet flat on floor. Raise your right knee to chest, bringing it as close to the right armpit as possible. Then *while this one is returning towards the floor*, you lift your left leg, so the legs literally pass in mid-air. Keep arms over head.

Please note that you do not at any stage straighten either leg, as in the bicycling action, as this is a huge strain on the lower back. Rather, keep the legs fully bent at all times. Always start off by pulling your abdomen in hard to lift the leg and don't ever let the lower back lift away from the floor. On your way down, each foot should just brush floor, touching with the heel rather than the big toe, before the return journey. As with the 'reverse curl ups' 15 back and forths for each leg.



The other very effective best exercises for the lower abs are the **oblique twists**. This exercise specifically targets the internal oblique muscles, which are the primary lower abdominals. They principally activate both the internal and external oblique muscles and in so doing, also tighten the sides of the waist.

Keep arms at shoulder level and do not rest them upon the floor, as this makes it all too easy to use counter-pressure through the arms to raise the very heavy legs. Ideally, the arms should hover approximately an inch above the floor at all times, so that you have to use your oblique muscles and pelvic floor muscles alone, as strenuously as possible. Not having your legs crossed at the ankles also recruits a stronger action of the pelvic floor during oblique twists. Keep legs at about 90 degrees and slowly roll legs from one side to the other, as far as is comfortable, not so far that your legs touch the floor. Try to hold each side for about 5 seconds.

The hardest part of the oblique twists action is changing direction and pulling the legs back the other way, and this is when it's tempting to push into the floor with the arms, that must be resisted. It is also important to keep the thighs together and not lift one leg at a time when swinging the legs up and over the body the other way. Ideally, you should perform 15 oblique twists to both sides.