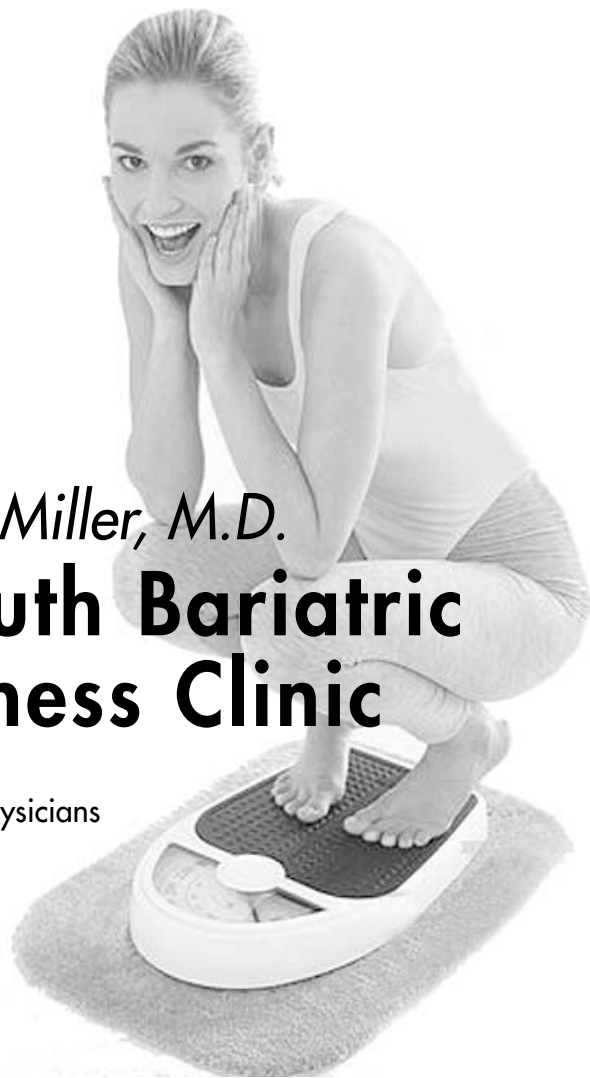


Look Your Best



Richard D. Miller, M.D.

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Ask Brigitte **A monthly column I wrote for a year in 2001.

Dunlop Tire Disease

Q I made a New Year's Resolution to work on my waist and abs in preparation for triathlon season. I have done as many as 300 - 400 sit-ups three times a week, as well as side crunches. This has been going on for two months and I still have no tone and can't get rid of the last vestiges of my "Dunlop Tire." (My gut done lapped over my belt!) I am 44 and have been running and exercising for over 32 years. Nothing seems to work. I thought that my lifting weights and doing some cardio exercise would give me a flat stomach. Some people say that all sit-ups do is build the muscle behind the fat, some say the only way to lose it is to "run it off."

Help me please . . . what works?

David
Memphis, TN



Brigitte

A What people are telling you is true. You do have to do cardiovascular exercise to "run it off" or help burn fat and yes, you have to strengthen your abdominal muscles by doing specific exercises to strengthen those muscles. The trick is to do them in combination and do enough of them *correctly* and *consistently* to achieve the results you want. The abdominal muscles don't respond as quickly as larger muscles (i.e., chest, shoulders, legs) because we don't use them as much in our everyday activities. Diet and genetics also play a part.

Abdominal muscles are weaker than hip muscles. We use our gluteal muscles and hip flexors every day to walk, get up, climb stairs. The tendency with sit-ups is to use your hip flexors more than your abs.

Don't do sit-ups; they won't work for what you're trying to achieve. If your abs are weak, your body will use your stronger muscles to lift you up.

The abdominals are comprised of the rectus abdominis (the broad flat muscle that extends the entire length of the abdomen from the lower three ribs to the top of the pubic bone) and external and internal obliques. Your rectus abdominis stabilizes the entire body and enables you to bend at the waist. The external and internal obliques (used with side crunches) run diagonally from the lower ribs to the pelvis. These muscles enable you to rotate at the waist, bend from side to side or swing a golf club. Strong abdominals maintain good posture and prevent back pain.

I believe that most people do not see results because they don't do abdominal exercises correctly. Many gadgets on the market really do work the abdominals, but stick with the basics and do them correctly. Some argue that if your abs are weak, some of these gadgets will help. My theory is that some of those gadgets continue to give you a "crutch" and limit you from achieving what you want to achieve.

The key is to combine exercises (and you have to do a lot of them!) every single day to achieve that "six pack" and get a flat stomach, along with proper diet and a cardiovascular activity that will hit your target heart rate for at least twenty minutes.

So to achieve the flat stomach that you want, you must do three things. Watch your fat intake (no more than 30% of your diet), do some kind of cardiovascular activity 3-4 times per week, and work your abdominal muscles every day. If you do this consistently and work hard, you'll see results within two months. Good luck!

Fitness questions? E-mail "Ask Brigitte" at askbrigitte@healthymemphis.com "Brigitte" is a personal trainer at the downtown YMCA, and does the morning traffic report for Rock 103.