

Can you isolate and “flatten” the lower abs with exercises?

For many people, particularly women, having a protruding lower belly encourages them to do exercises targeting the lower abdominals.

However, it's impossible to completely isolate the upper abs from the lower abs, even if it feels like you are. Muscle contraction is all or none; a muscle can't contract just in certain areas. In addition, the four muscles in your abdominal area are not independent. They all work together as a team; you can't train one part without affecting all of them.

The best way to affect the muscles in the entire abdominal area is to practise a wide variety of movements, including those that *seem* to work the lower abs more. So don't focus only on the so-called lower ab exercises, like the reverse crunch or hanging leg raises, where the lower body moves toward the upper body (unlike crunches or sit-ups where the upper body flexes forward). Include various exercises in your abdominal routine.

However, the “lower ab” exercises do offer more tension on the tendons in the lower part of the muscle (tendons attach muscle to bone), just as “upper ab” exercises put more tension on the tendons that attach muscle to bone in the upper part of the muscle. Tendon strength is important too, although it may not necessarily make a visible difference in the appearance of your tummy bulge.

To activate or place more “stress” on the lower abdominal tendons, maintain a pelvic tilt during the action (ask a certified fitness instructor about proper technique). Avoid mindlessly swinging your legs. Concentrate on feeling the lower portion of your abs doing all the work.

Lower abdominal bulge may also be due to subcutaneous body fat. In which case, a sensible diet and being regularly active will utilise that stored fat – not doing endless abdominal exercises (which is primarily just affecting muscle *strength*).

However, if you already have low body fat, but still have



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by Eve Lees

a bulge under your navel, there are many contributing factors to explore. Certain health conditions, like bladder inflammation or infection, can contribute to protruding lower abdominals. Food allergies or sensitivities and poor digestion can also affect the distension of the abdominal area.

Consider also how much refined sugars and other highly processed foods you eat (which can affect the health of your intestinal flora and your digestive abilities), how much you eat at one sitting, how quickly you eat and drink, and how thoroughly you chew your food. All these can contribute to that annoying tummy bulge!

Eve Lees is a Nutrition Coach, a Health Speaker, and a Freelance Health Writer. For more health info, follow Eve on Facebook or Google “Eve Lees Blog.”