

abs express

A FIT TORSO doesn't just help you look good in a bikini (though that's definitely a plus); strong abdominal muscles protect your back by providing stability and improving posture. Crunches are one of the most effective ab exercises, so we're bringing you a great routine from *15 Minute Abs Workout* by Joan Pagano (DK Publishing) to sculpt your belly and condition your core. To avoid injury and get blood and oxygen flowing throughout your body, make sure you thoroughly warm up by running in place or doing jumping jacks for a few minutes before beginning the routine, or add these moves to the end of an aerobic workout. ANNE-MARIE COOK

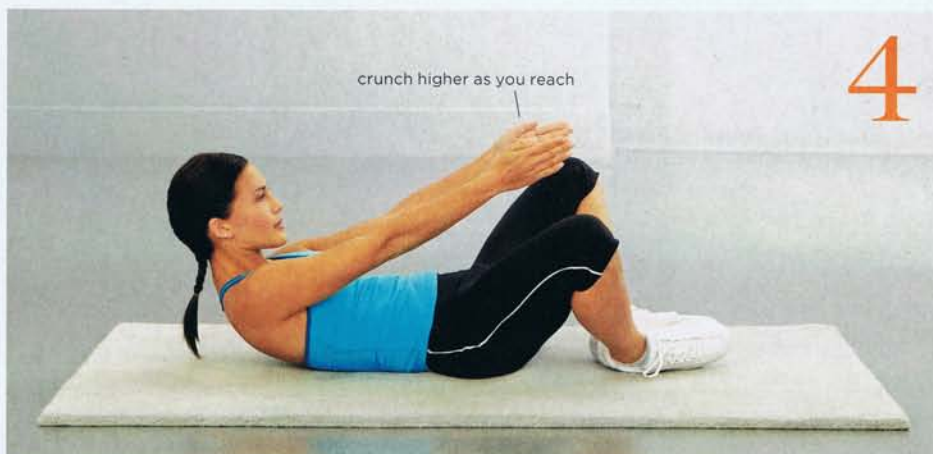
SHORT CRUNCH From "neutral" position (knees bent at 90 degrees, feet flat on the floor), move your feet close to your buttocks, set your abs (think of tightening the muscles from the ribs to the hips), then place your hands behind your head. Inhale first, then exhale, scooping out your abdomen, belly button to spine, as you lift your shoulder blades 30 degrees off the floor. Release, slowly lowering your shoulders (but not your head) to the floor. Repeat 10 times.



LONG CRUNCH Extend your legs, keeping a slight bend in your knees. Inhale first, then exhale and pull *in* when you crunch *up*. Add a hold at the top of the movement and release slowly. Learn to keep tension in your muscles while you continue to breathe. Repeat 10 times, then stretch out arms and legs and rest. >>

(continued from page 64)

SIDE CRUNCH From neutral position, cross one ankle over the opposite knee and place your hands behind your head. With elbows wide, inhale, then exhale and twist one shoulder toward the opposite knee. Pause, then slowly release without resting your head on the floor. Repeat five times on each side.



DIAMOND CRUNCH Lie with your knees out to the sides, soles of your feet together, and heels close to your body. Rest your head in your hands and tighten your abs. Exhale as you lift your shoulder blades. Extend your arms toward your feet, crunching up higher. Return hands behind your head, release down, and repeat six times.

BICYCLE Return to neutral position, hands behind your head. Start by lifting your upper torso into a crunch, then exhale as you twist one elbow to the opposite knee, bringing your knee into your chest and extending the other leg toward the floor. Inhale back to center and twist to the other side. Alternate sides for five reps, keeping shoulder blades lifted. Reach out long to stretch.

