

one pack is the new 6 pack!

by Patricia Ezechie

The next time you look in the mirror and chastise yourself for the gentle rounding of your tummy, or look longingly at yet another celeb with a 6 pack, take heart in the fact that although a 6 pack may look amazing it is not always synonymous with perfect health. That's right, perfect abs (usually viewed as having a chiselled defined 6 pack) does not always equate to a strong, healthy and flexible core.

Let's begin by dispelling some of the myths about a perfectly flat stomach. The likelihood of many of us ever having such defined abdominal muscles is slim, even if we spend the rest of our lives doing sit ups (perish the thought!). For the muscle definition to be visible through the layer of skin in the abdomen, it usually requires a very low percentage of subcutaneous fat in this area. Fat cells once formed never go away. I'm sorry to be the bearer of such bad news, but it's the truth. The first time I heard this was in an interview with Arnold Schwarzenegger. Although through diet and exercise you can remove the fat from fat cells, the cells themselves remain – lying in wait like greedy little empty sacks – hoping to be pumped up again by any excess calories we consume. Why is this important? Well, if you have a 6 pack you are likely to be younger (not had a chance to develop so many of those



tricky little fat cells), are genetically predisposed to abdominal leanness (naturally very slim), or have a low body fat percentage (performance athlete or potentially underweight). So, for the majority of us who do not fall into these three categories, it's time to let go of the fantasy and embrace the reality of what perfect abdominal muscle health is.

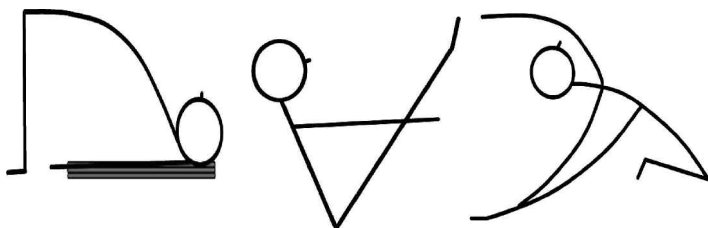
Now for the science bit. The abdomen is made up of four major muscles:

- The *Rectus Abdominis* runs vertically from the pubis (just below bikini line – the uppermost point of the pubic bone to the front) to the cartilage at the 5th, 6th and 7th ribs. When you see a 6 pack you are effectively seeing the silhouette of the rectus under the skin.
- The *External Obliques* located either side of the rectus (shaped like a 'V' when viewed from the front) runs from the lower 8 ribs to the iliac crest (the round bit at the top of the pelvis) and *linea alba* (line of connective tissue running down the centre of the abdomen).
- The *Internal Obliques* which lie under the External Oblique and just above the *Transverse Abdominis*, wrap around the waist and are connected to the lower ribs, *anterior iliac crest* and *linea alba*.
- The *Transverse Abdominis* which wraps around the torso from front to back, is the deepest of the abdominal muscles and runs horizontally from the 6 lower ribs to the pubis.

These muscles either independently or in unison support the spine, stabilise and align the pelvis, enable the trunk of the body to flex in all planes and rotate, facilitate heavy lifting and the forces required for forceful expulsion from the body (defecation and parturition). Together with the pelvic girdle, these abdominal muscles also hold in place all the organs in the lower abdomen (digestive and reproductive) and are key in enabling us to breathe fully and completely.

Once viewed in this light, it becomes clearer that for the core of the body to be healthy, the muscles of the abdomen need to be both strong and flexible – strong enough to support the core of the body and the limbs that hang from it, but flexible enough to allow full range of movement and suppleness. If these muscles are over exercised, they become hard and rigid and in extreme cases weaken and destabilise the core and the spine and cause hunching.

Perfect abs are not about hardness and rigidity but strength and flexibility – the essence of Yoga. As every Yoga pose requires the use of the core muscles, through a varied and balanced practice the ideal mix of strength and flexibility can be developed. So stop focusing on that thin layer of fat on your tummy - it is there for a reason (a discussion for another day). Think of the fabulous frescos that adorn all the temples in India of strong curvaceous women with soft strong bellies, or Ruben's beauties lounging in their splendour. Love your tummy, ditch the idea of the 6 pack and aspire for balance, strength and flexibility in your core using these 3 poses to help you.



Bridge Pose

Boat Pose

Gate Pose

Patricia Ezechie is a Yoga and Wellbeing Expert and founder of: www.yogastickmen.com. For details of her classes and courses, visit: www.yogasiromani.com. Full 'One pack is the new six pack' sequence available for download at www.yogastickmen.com.

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