

# Rx for a Flat Waistline

By Richard J. Wolff, RD, LDN

Maintaining a flat waistline in our fast-paced culture can be difficult. One of the challenges you face is to make sense of the confusing and often contradictory advice that seems to be everywhere. Abdominal slimming devices, fat-burning supplements and exotic diets promise results with little to show. Fortunately, flattening your waistline is possible. Practicing the right behaviors on a consistent basis can make all the difference. Here's what you really need to know and do to get a flat, healthy waistline!

## **Stop Targeting Your Waistline**

Performing abdominal exercises (like crunches, twists and side bends) is an inefficient and ineffective way to burn fat off your waistline. Infomercials that promote the latest abdominal slimming devices shamelessly omit the fact that exercising your waistline is not an effective way to shrink abdominal fat cells. When abdominal muscles contract, they don't burn the fat that surrounds your waistline. Energy to fuel the contraction of abdominal muscles comes from glycogen (carbohydrate stored in skeletal muscle), free fatty acids and glucose (fat and sugar in your bloodstream). As a result, performing exercises that target your abdomen will not reduce the size of fat cells in your waist.

## **Strengthen Your Midsection**

The only way to improve muscle tone in your abdominal wall is to increase the strength of those muscles. The best way to increase the strength of a muscle is through strength training (lifting weights). When strength training, focus on the quality of the exercise to achieve the best results. In their *Guidelines for Exercise Testing and Prescription* the American College of Sports Medicine recommends that both the lifting and lowering phase of the exercise be performed in a controlled manner. At MEDFITNESS™ we achieve excellent control by lifting the weight in ten seconds and lowering the weight in ten seconds. This slow, controlled speed forces your muscles to work at a high level of intensity, generating significant increases in muscle strength and tone.

## **Skip the Daily Sit Ups**

Performing daily waistline exercises is one of the biggest mistakes you can make. A daily dose of abdominal exercises (e.g., sit-ups, crunches, side bends, leg lifts, etc.) will not improve muscle tone or burn fat off your waistline. The idea that daily sit-ups (or any abdominal exercise) are required to build a flat, healthy waist has absolutely no scientific basis. Performing daily abdominal exercises only distracts you from what you really need to be doing.

## **Forget about the Fat-Burning Zone**

Physical activity will help you lose body fat and flatten your waistline. Data from the National Weight Control Registry <sup>1</sup> and Health Management Resources (HMR) shows that burning at least 2000 calories per week (about 300 per day) leads to greater fat loss. Including both moderate and high intensity activities will help you burn 2000 calories sooner versus later. Personally, I enjoy outdoor walking and biking to burn most of my calories. Between walking, biking and strength training, I am able to maintain a flat, healthy waistline without killing myself!

When exercising, don't worry about getting your heart rate into the fat-burning zone. Exercising in the fat-burning zone does not help you lose body fat. To discover why you don't have to burn fat to lose fat read my article, *The Fat Burning Myth* in the MEDFITNESS™ Library at [www.medfitness.info](http://www.medfitness.info). To figure out how many minutes you need to invest to burn 2000 calories per week, get a copy of our *Calorie per Minute Worksheet* also in the MEDFITNESS™ Library at [www.medfitness.info](http://www.medfitness.info).

## **Add Structure to Your Diet**

The right diet is essential for achieving a flat, healthy waistline. In fact, your diet plays a much bigger role in determining waist size than exercise does. Despite the confusion, research is clear about eating and fat loss. Highly structured diets that include portion-controlled foods produce significantly better results than free-choice diets! More than 70 research studies show the easiest way to lose body fat is by using packaged meals (e.g., low-calorie shakes and entrées) which help limit food choices.

Not only are meal replacements fast and easy, dieters who use them lose and keep off significantly more weight than dieters on free-choice diets where they choose their own foods.

According to George L. Blackburn, MD, of Harvard Medical School, “Meal replacements work best when they become a routine part of your diet or are used whenever you start to regain body weight.” A report published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found similar benefits to using meal replacements. The report evaluated 29 studies and found that dieters who used meal replacements lost more weight and kept it off longer than those who restricted calories by choosing their own foods <sup>2</sup>. In fact, after 5 years those using meal replacements were keeping off 3 times more weight than those following free-choice diets.

At a time when the environment makes losing weight nearly impossible, meal replacements provide a time-out from the food decisions we face every day. This time-out can be a huge relief for people struggling to lose body fat. Despite the propaganda, there is no magic formula for melting belly fat. Consuming fewer calories than your body requires will produce weight loss and a flatter waistline!

## **Get Some Help**

The MEDFITNESS™ Workout is an efficient and safe way to improve muscle tone. To experience the MEDFITNESS Workout, schedule a *Free Trial Workout* by calling (630) 762-1784 or visiting [www.medfitnessprogram.com](http://www.medfitnessprogram.com).

The HMR at Home® Program gives you everything you need to begin losing a lot of weight right away. Join HMR at Home® and get 10% off your Healthy Solutions Quick Start™ Diet Kits. Plus, receive FREE shipping on every HMR at Home® order. To get more information about the HMR at Home® Program, visit [www.medfitnessprogram.com](http://www.medfitnessprogram.com)

## **About the Author**

Richard J. Wolff, RD, LDN is the president of MEDFITNESS. He is the author of *Fitness Wisdom* and has written for the *Daily Herald*, the *Kane County Chronicle* and the *United States Weightlifting Federation*. His articles have been featured in *Personal Fitness Professional* and *Nautilus*,

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#### References

1. Obesity (2008) 16, 153-161
2. Health News, January 2002, the Massachusetts Medical Society