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core workout

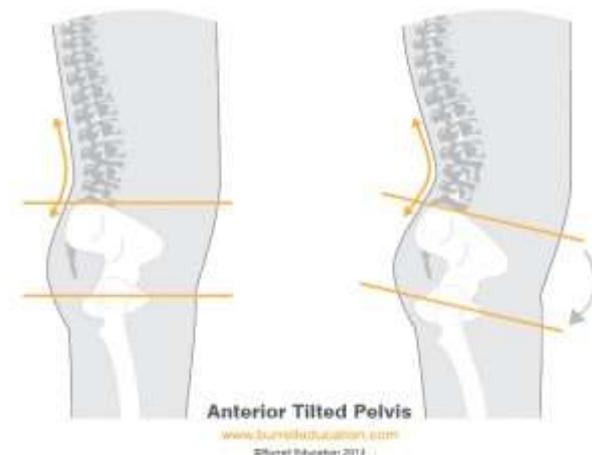
Possibly the most common question I get asked is along the lines of: 'how can I get a flat tummy?' or 'what exercises will make my tummy smaller?' so with that in mind I've recently been using some core-focused workouts with PT clients and in my HI-LI fitness circuit class, and I thought it might be something you would like to try out at home.

I've filmed all the exercises, to go with the notes below, so that you can see how they look but once you've watched the video hopefully the notes will act as sufficient reminder for subsequent workouts.

Before I go into the exercises, it is important to mention that there are many things that can affect the appearance and function of our tummy/abdominal wall, including:

posture:

The tilt of your pelvis has probably the biggest influence on the look and feel of your belly.



In a neutral pelvis position, there will be a supporting length & tension in the muscles and other soft tissues in the front and the back of the body. When the pelvis habitually tips forward into an anterior tilt (shown above), the soft tissues in body will lose this ideal synergy resulting in:

- an increased lordosis in the lumbar spine, with shortened and tight muscles in the lumbar area, the front of the hips and the front of the thighs
- added pressure from the internal organs which are also tilted forward causing a protruding belly & lengthened and weakened muscles in the abdomen and backs of the thighs



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Massage, stretching and the use of trigger point balls will help to address the imbalance, along with improved postural awareness and appropriate, well-executed abdominal exercises.

stress:

It is well-documented that stress hormones can cause your body to store belly fat and it therefore stands to reason that managing your long-term stress levels can make a positive difference. Activities such as leisure walking, sleeping, going off-line, spending time with people we love and restorative exercise (eg Pilates, yoga, stretching, meditation) can all play a pivotal role in our total well-being & they are definitely something to consider if you think that stress might be contributing to your unwanted tummy. For more on this subject read [here](#).

nutrition:

It goes without saying that what you are eating will play a part! If you are feeding your body with poor or inappropriate nutrition, or you have uncontrolled dietary issues that causing bloating & distension of the tummy wall, no amount of exercise is going to be the solution. Be honest with yourself about your eating habits and seek professional help from your GP or a nutritionist if you have concerns in this area.

Of course there may be other issues to consider so please seek appropriate advice if you think it is what you need. Once you have ruled out and addressed any issues, here are some exercise suggestions that may be helpful in strengthening your core muscles.

As usual, start with a few minutes of simple mobilisations and warm-up movements before you begin the exercises; if you are adding these exercises on at the end of a general workout, you will already be warm to start with.

Pick up the exercises at the level that is right for you at the moment – harder is only better if your body can support the extra load; easier is often the best place to start. I will show various options and use different equipment - please decide what is best for you (ie best for you = the one you can do without compromising the integrity of your tummy wall).

Rest when you no longer feel that the exercise is working the right area of your body (eg. if your legs feel like they are doing all the work or your neck muscles are feeling tense). And don't do anything that doesn't feel right for you.



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Core circuit:

1. **Upright kneeling front raise** – kneel on something comfortable, tuck the toes under and lengthen the spine; avoid moving backwards as you lift your arms; think of keeping a connection between the ribs and the pelvis throughout the movement; breathe
2. **Kneeling or incline push-up** – use an incline position against a wall or kitchen worktop or come to the floor in a box or $\frac{3}{4}$ position; maintain a long spine and neutral pelvis throughout; breathe out as you come back to the start
3. **Shoulder bridge hold with arm extension** - keep a connection between the ribs and the pelvis (ie. avoid lifting the ribs to the ceiling as the arms go overhead); take the shoulder bridge away if you need to; breathe
4. **Side plank** - choose the best variation for your body; maintain a long spine and neutral pelvis throughout; avoid holding your breath
5. **V-sit hold or pulse** - you want to feel your sit-bones sinking into the mat whilst keeping a long spine and neutral pelvis throughout; avoid holding your breath; legs, neck & shoulders need to stay relaxed & free of tension
6. **Supine running legs OR leg scissors** - lie face-up with legs bent and feet flat on the floor; find a neutral spine; bring the legs into a table-top, lifting one leg at a time and maintaining neutral spine (you can imprint the spine if you need more stability); control the size and speed of your movements so that you can maintain stability through the torso; change to a single leg variation if necessary
7. **Supine leg circles** - lie face-up with legs bent and feet flat on the floor; find a neutral spine; extend the legs to the ceiling, lifting one leg at a time and maintaining neutral spine (you can imprint the spine if you need more stability); control the size and speed of your movements so that you can maintain stability through the torso; change to a single leg variation if necessary

Watch me doing all of the moves in the video [here](#) – and I added some afterthoughts on push-ups [here](#).

As always, find exercises which are suitable for your body & please ask if you have any questions at all

Jx

(this workout is aimed at regular tmf clients but it is generally suitable for everyone; however, if you are new to exercise, recently post-natal, or have any health concerns please seek medical advice or professional guidance before embarking on a new exercise routine)