



Did You Know?

The less sleep you get, the more belly fat you may have. Belly fat is directly related to increased cortisol levels. Cortisol is a steroid created by our bodies naturally in response to stress from lack of REM sleep. More than 30 percent of Americans have sleep disorders, but most do not know it. (See page XX for info on how to sleep better.)

—Jeffery S. Durmer, M.D., Ph.D.,
D.A.B.S.M., chief medical officer
at FusionSleep Sleep Medicine
Program

Belly Busters

The truth about losing
stomach fat

By Karina Timmel

While your main concern may be looking good in summer clothes, there are serious health reasons to pay attention to your midsection. The “visceral fat” that is stored in the belly can build up around your organs and become a risk factor for cancer, heart disease, stroke and type-2 diabetes, making it more dangerous than having a heavy butt or thighs. To determine if you need to lose some belly fat, measure your waist size at the belly button—it should be half your height or less.

Everyone has their own (often misguided) ideas of how to slim down. To clear the air, we spoke with some of Atlanta’s top nutrition and fitness experts to get their thoughts on real ways to lose belly fat and—most importantly—keep it off.

Gaining weight

If you are over 30, a non-existent gym routine and chip-snacking habit may not be the sole reason for your belly. At that age, hormonal shifts begin to happen in both men and women that make losing weight, or keeping it off, even more challenging. “Women’s estrogen and testosterone and men’s testosterone levels decrease after 30,” says Susie Shina, fitness life stylist and author of *Fit Enough!* “Testosterone produces lean muscle, which is what burns fat. So, the less lean muscle we have, the less fat we can burn.” Don’t feel hopeless (keep reading), but understand that you may need to work twice as hard to look half as good over 30.

Drinking caffeine

While downing some java before your workout may sound like a good idea to give you an extra boost of energy, you are really doing your body a disservice. “Drinking caffeine before a workout can significantly reduce blood flow to your heart while exercising,” says

Paula Gilman, R.D., L.D., C.D.E., with Nutrition Services at Kaiser Permanente of Georgia. Burn more calories and make the most of your workout by drinking a glass of water instead. “Drinking water actually prepares your body for exercise as muscles require water for all their functions,” Gilman says.

Doing crunches

You can do hundreds of crunches a night, but it won't shrink your belly. “You need to engage the total body,” Shina says. She recommends a fitness routine that includes intense cardio for short periods of time (20-30 minutes) every day of the week rather than longer workouts with moderate cardio. When you use exercise machines, maintain a two-finger grip so that all your muscles are at work to keep you balanced, engaging your core. Also, strength training is an essential part of a 30-something-and-beyond exercise program—men should be lifting weights three times a week and women two times a week. “Go to a trainer once if you don't know what you are doing and have them show you exactly how to [lift weights],” Shina advises.

Even if you can't make it to the gym, there are day-to-day postural exercises that will help you achieve a flatter stomach. Stand and sit up straight at work and keep your core engaged throughout the day by sucking it in. Try it—your ab muscles will be sore by day's end.

Eating carbs

For the love of your body, eat carbs. Without carbs, your body thinks it is starving, and will store anything you eat as fat to have reserve energy the next time you don't eat, Shina says. Not only can this ruin your metabolism (which helps burn calories and fat), it also increases the risk of kidney and liver problems, among other things. “The effects of completely eliminating carbs can be just as unhealthy as overeating them,” Gilman says. “To lose weight, I recommend a well-balanced diet

that incorporates high-fiber starches, fruits and low-fat dairy for carbohydrate, lean protein and unsaturated fat. You will be more likely to keep the weight off in the long run, without harming your body.”

Going on fad diets

Sorry, folks, there is no magic bullet, or we'd all be on it. “Of course anyone will lose weight on the Flat Belly Diet—it's a 1,600-calorie diet,” Shina says. How many calories you need depends on your lean muscle, current body fat and physical activity, but on average, women should eat 1,600-1,800 a day and men about 2,000-2,500.

Munching on super berries

Many have been hailing the acai berry as the super food of 2009. “Few studies have actually tested the benefit of acai and its ability to shed pounds,” Gilman remarks. However, the berry contains high levels of antioxidants that help defend the body against life's stressors and also play a role in the body's cell-protection system. “There's no doubt that berries and other fruits are a key part of any healthy diet promoting weightloss,” Gilman notes.

Cleansing your colon

Diets like the Master Cleanse (where you drink a lemon juice mixture for 10 days) can be dangerous to your health. They are deficient in all the essential nutrients: calories, vitamins, minerals, protein, carbohydrates, fiber and fat. “There is no scientific evidence that you need anything like this or any other ‘detox’ program to cleanse your body or help you lose weight. I trust my liver to do its job,” Gilman says. She adds, “Frequent colon cleansing for weight loss can disrupt your body's electrolyte balance, causing dehydration and salt depletion.” Instead, scrub your colon clean the natural way—increase your fiber intake by eating more fruits and veggies. ●

READER RESOURCES

Blast 900 Fitness

56 East Andrews Drive, Suite 26
Atlanta, GA 30305
(404) 841-5430
www.blast900.com

Curves

1385 Highlands Ridge Road, Suite B
Smyrna, GA 30082
(770) 434-4006

Fitness Battalion Boot Camp

(404) 932-2249
www.fitnessbattalion.com

Fitness Together

4199 Paces Ferry Road, Suite H
Atlanta, GA 30339
(770) 384-0336
www.ftvinings.com

FusionSleep Sleep Medicine Program

4255 Johns Creek Parkway, Suite C
Suwanee, GA 30024
(678) 990-3962
www.fusionsleep.com

Gym of Buckhead

4920 Roswell Road NE
Atlanta, GA 30342
(404) 256-4653

Kaiser Permanente of Georgia

(404) 869-5952
www.kaiserpermanente.org

Midtown Athletic Club at Windy Hill

135 Interstate North Parkway NW
Atlanta, GA 30339
(770) 953-1100
www.midtown.com/atlantianorthwest

Piedmont Hospital Health & Fitness Club

2001 Peachtree Road NW
Atlanta, GA 30309
(404) 605-1965

Susie Shina

(678) 438-9185
www.fit-enough.com

Unit 2 Fitness

240 Ponce de Leon Ave., No. 2
Atlanta, GA 30308
(404) 745-3019
www.unit2fitness.com

Workout Anytime

www.workoutanytime.com

World Gym

4425 South Cobb Drive
Smyrna, GA 30080
(770) 801-0006
www.worldgymsmyrna.com

4 Easy Core Workouts

The most common mistake people make when it comes to their core workouts is paying attention only to the large muscle of the abdomen—through a ton of crunches or an “ab machine” that promises to flatten your tummy. The core is actually comprised of many different muscle groups, which encompass the abdomen, deeper abdominal muscles (TVA, diaphragm), obliques (your sides), glutes and muscles of the low back. Basic core conditioning should focus on balance between these muscles.

Here are four easy exercises that strengthen all the core muscle groups—incorporate these into your strength-training routine:

1. Quadruped

What it does: Warms up the core and helps improve balance.

How to: Start by kneeling on all fours, draw the abdomen in and hold. Then, slowly raise one arm straight out in front you, and at the same time extend the opposite leg back until it is completely straight. Hold for 2-3 seconds with abs drawn in and the glutes (butt area) squeezed. Slowly lower the arm and leg and switch sides.

How many reps: 10 on each side.

2. Plank

What it does: Helps strengthen deeper abdominal muscles and the back, which are essential for good posture.

How to: First, lie face down with your forearms flat on the floor by your sides and hands facing downwards. For beginners, keep your knees on the floor and slowly raise your hips until only your knees and forearms are touching the floor, and your body is in a straight diagonal line from the knees to your shoulders. If this is too difficult, another modification is to push up onto your hands instead of your forearms. Make sure the hips are not pushed up toward the ceiling and that you do not have an excessive arch in your lower back. More experienced exercisers can move up on their toes, rather than the knees.

How many reps: Hold this position as long as you can without breaking proper form.

3. Bridging

What it does: Strengthens glutes.

How to: Start by lying flat on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Slowly push through your heels to raise your hips until your body is a straight diagonal from the shoulders to the knees, squeezing the glutes together when you reach the top.

How many reps: 10-15.

4. Superman

What it does: Strengthens glutes and the muscles of the lower back.

How to: Lie face down on the floor with your legs straight and your arms straight overhead. Slowly raise one arm off the floor and, at the same time, raise the opposite leg as high off the floor as possible. At the top, be sure to have the abdomen drawn in tightly and squeeze the glute on the raised leg. Hold at the top for 1-2 seconds, then switch sides.

How many reps: 10 on each side. ●



Quadruped



Beginner's Plank



Bridging



Superman

—Neil Doldo, M.A., C.P.T., C.S.C.S., fitness director at Midtown Athletic Club at Windy Hill