

How to Banish Belly Fat for Good!

By Lisa Schilling RN

- The \$64,000 question is:

What can I do to get rid of my belly pooch or this roll of fat across my middle? This is the number one question I hear! People want the magic bullet to spot reduce, but it does not exist. But on the bright side, I can give you a Get REAL formula to live the lifestyle that leads to a flatter mid-section...read on.

Often this question comes from someone with a low percentage of muscle and a comparatively high percentage of body fat. Excess fat gathers in areas where you're genetically inclined to store it, your middle.

- Is scale weight the best way to measure fitness?

Some feel it doesn't matter (such as serious weight lifters who weigh slightly heavier than normal, but have low amounts of body fat), and some think scale weight is the ultimate measure, they judge what shape they are in solely by how much they weigh.

- Consider this example.

You may still weigh, just what you did 20 years ago, but if you didn't exercise much during that time, your body composition will have shifted so that your body doesn't look as it did then, despite the fact that the scale weight is the same. That's because muscle tissue declines and body fat accumulates.

- Does body weight does matter?

Depending on the individual, body weight does matter. A person with 50 plus pounds to lose will need to lose body weight and body fat. Building muscle alone will not cause the significant body composition shift required to become a lean and healthy weight.

On the other hand, if you do not have much weight to lose, going by scale weight alone is misleading since it does not reflect how much body fat and muscle you have.

- So what is the solution?

To decrease fat anywhere in your body, you must burn more calories...period. But the way you do it does matter. Dieting alone can cause a reduction in mid-section fat, but you also get skinnier in areas you wouldn't want.

- Can I just diet?

Dieting alone leads to a loss of muscle mass, which slows the rate at which you burn calories. A better approach is to shift body composition by building muscle and losing body fat through exercise. Ultimately the scale may stay about the same, or you may even gain a few pounds at first. In this case, the scale weight is not always as important.

- So what exercise will work?

Many people think if they do enough crunches to feel-the-burn, they are making great strides towards a flatter belly. Unfortunately that is not the case. The burn is from the muscles fatiguing, not fat burning away. Core exercises like crunches and sit-ups will not whittle off belly fat. They can strengthen the muscles underneath, but they will not do anything for the fat covering them. When it comes to muscle building, you need to build it all over, not just the belly.

- Where do I start?

Your first step is to do more cardio (walk, run, bike, use a cardio machine, dance, etc.). If you're a beginner, start slow and easy, building your way up gradually to longer, more intense and higher-impact sessions. If you haven't been doing anything, simply trying to fit in 15 or 20 minutes of cardio on most days may even make a difference. Once you've built up your fitness level, aim for 60 minutes or more of cardio on most days of the week.

- Anything else?

In addition, you will need to strength train. Start out doing one set of ten repetitions. Choose a variety of exercises targeting the major muscles in your upper and lower body, two to three times a week. As you get stronger, add another set until you are doing two to three sets of eight to ten repetitions for each exercise. When this gets easier, increase the weight.

- I don't want to get bulky!

Any weight training will increase your strength if you are new to it. But once you have been doing it for a few months, if you do not increase the resistance, you will not get stronger or build muscle. This will not lead to huge mass, it will create firm and toned muscles. It is actually not that easy to build muscle and you will need to eat more healthful food in order to get enough calories per day to fuel your extra aerobic exercise and the muscle development you are trying to achieve.

- How does nutrition play a part?

A nutritious diet and healthy eating plan will enhance your efforts and allow your body to work at its optimum. If you want the best performance from your body you need to fuel it properly! A multivitamin and mineral supplement, as well as a fish oil capsule, can be helpful for body performance. When planning meals, aim for lean proteins, whole grains, dairy, and lots of colorful fruits and vegetables. Try to eat your food as close to natural as possible, the less processing the better.

- How long until I start seeing results?

After a few months of following this nutrition and exercise regimen, you should start to see a firmer, stronger, thinner-bellied you. Remember, an exercise won't flatten your tummy; it is your lifestyle of exercise that will keep you lean and trim!