



ABS Revealed

Exercises and programs
for six-pack success

Jonathan Ross

Two-Time Personal Trainer of the Year

Abs Revealed

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JONATHAN ROSS



Human Kinetics

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Exercise Finder

Exercise name	Floor (no equipment)	Basic equipment	Stability ball	TRX	Slide	Page number
Supine draw-in	●					44
Supine brace	●					45
Prone plank	●					46
Side plank	●					47
Reverse crunch with hand targets	●					48
Dead bug	●					49
Harder-than-it-looks (HTIL) crunch	●					50
Negative crunch with control	●					51
Quadruped draw-in with arm and leg movement (bird dog)	●					52
Reverse crunch from floor	●					70
Bicycle crunch	●					93
Reverse crunch from bench		Bench				71
Frozen bicycle		Bench or abdominal board				72
Hanging knee raise		Pull-up bar				73
Hanging leg raise		Pull-up bar				74
Flying bicycle crunch with medicine ball		Medicine ball				94
Hanging knee raise with a twist		Pull-up bar				95
Bar chop		Light barbell or weighted bar				96
Standing oblique crunch with cable		Pulley machine				97
BOSU double crunch		BOSU balance trainer				109
Roll-up on stability ball			●			53
Side plank on stability ball			●			54
Reverse crunch with stability ball			●			55
Semi-vise crunch with stability ball			●			56
Vise crunch with stability ball			●			57
Vise crunch with leg roll with stability ball			●			58
Leg drop with ball balance			●			59
Plank with elbows on stability ball			●			60
Plank with shins on stability ball			●			61
Crunch on stability ball			●			75
Offset-arm crunch on stability ball			●			76

Exercise name	Floor (no equipment)	Basic equipment	Stability ball	TRX	Slide	Page number
Crunch with lateral arm swing on stability ball			●			77
Crunch with offset torso on stability ball			●			78
Quad crunch with single leg on stability ball			●			79
Running prone plank on stability ball			●			80
Lateral rolling plank on stability ball			●			81
Plank with knee tuck on stability ball			●			82
Layout pike on stability ball			●			83
Hip roll on stability ball			●			84
Kickboxer crunch on stability ball			●			98
Plank with cross-body knee tuck on stability ball			●			99
Rotating crunch with lateral arm swing on stability ball			●			100
Hip roll with thread the needle on stability ball			●			101
Leg raise with TRX				●		62
Resisted roll-up with TRX				●		63
TRX V-up				●		64
Assisted roll-up with TRX				●		66
Elevated crunch with TRX				●		85
TRX pike				●		86
Elevated mountain climber with TRX				●		87
Elevated crunch and body saw with TRX				●		88
Kneeling layout with TRX				●		89
TRX pull-through				●		90
Elevated oblique crunch with TRX				●		102
Pendulum pike with TRX				●		103
Pendulum mountain climber with TRX				●		104
TRX hip roll with thread the needle				●		105
TRX side plank with reach-through				●		106
TRX side plank with tuck				●		107
Oblique V-up with TRX				●		108
Twisting-knee tuck with slide					●	110
Side-plank tuck with slide					●	111
Twisting-hip pike with slide					●	112
Mountain climber with slide					●	113

Preface

If you want great abs, you have to know how to train them, but knowledge is not enough. Great abs require much more than just doing exercises and having strong abdominal muscles. You may have the best abs possible, but if they are blanketed by a layer of body fat, no one will see them. Underneath the skin and body fat, we all look like an anatomy chart. Consider sumo wrestlers. They are strong and they have lots of muscle, but do you want to look like them? Probably not. Their massive amounts of muscle are hidden by even greater amounts of fat. This book shows you how to get strong abs and how to reveal them.

For decades, abdominal training has consisted of specialized techniques, equipment, and supplements that treat the abdominals as if they were separate from the rest of your body. Thankfully, this stone age of abdominal training is now over. With *Abs Revealed*, you are entering the chiseled age. The abdominals are part of the machine of your body. Although you want that body to be visually appealing, you still need the machine to work well. Every movement you make involves some part of your abs; they are the engine of movement in your beautiful machine.

With this book, you will discover how to train your abdominals for show while learning where the abs are and what they do as well as strategies that help you show them off. You'll learn creative, cutting-edge exercises that work your abs like never before, combined with the latest thinking on how nutrition and aerobic training have a powerful effect on the appearance of your midsection. You'll discover the right place to begin based on your current fitness level, and you will receive a workout plan that lets you have a life outside of your workouts and accurate information that cuts through myths that undermine even the most committed exercisers. Get ready for workouts that are intelligent, efficient, and driven by results. The approach in *Abs Revealed* will help you start, progress through the exercises, and finish with stellar abdominals.

In part I, you'll find the core concepts, or the basic information you need to reach your results. In chapter 1, you'll learn about the anatomy of your abs in simple terms. You don't need to be an exercise scientist to understand how to put this information to work for your abs. Chapters 2 and 3 give you the most current thinking on the roles of aerobic training and nutrition for reducing fat to reveal your abdominals. The cutting-edge techniques for maximizing your aerobic training in chapter 2 make the most of *caloric quantity* (total calories burned in a workout) and *caloric quality* (calories burned from fat in a workout) using interval training. This approach will change the way you track cardio intensity. Instead of doing more cardio, you'll do it better. In chapter 3, food becomes the ally (rather than the enemy) of great abs. The right foods at the right times will power you through effective workouts. This chapter explains how to choose carbohydrate wisely, why choosing the right types of fat can actually propel you toward better muscle definition, and how to deliciously fuel your body. You'll never want to miss another meal!

Part II presents exercises you've never seen before. It also explains how to get the most out of the exercises and equipment to target the abs and how to modify each exercise. The exercises are designed around you—your abs and your body—in three phases. You will work toward the washboard in chapter 4 with exercises that use basic equipment or your own body for resistance. You know that your ab muscles work hard in exercises to create movement, but you might be surprised that they can work even harder to prevent movement. In chapter 5, the exercises use body weight and equipment to move in a single direction, mirroring the three actions of your spine. The exercises are designed to work your abs even harder with the stability, or anti-movement ability, that you developed in chapter 4. Finally, the exercises in chapter 6 combine multiple directions of movement, using all of your abs together for maximum results. This chapter presents many options for challenging your abs.

To achieve abdominal success, you need a strategy for putting it all together. Part III provides these tools. Chapter 7 presents great tips for setting goals and prioritizing your nutrition changes for the greatest effect. You will find a simple strategy for successfully using any amount of time you have. The process of sculpting your abs is broken down into three phases: Rock, Paper, and Scissors. In the Rock phase, you will lay down new, strong muscle and will begin reducing body fat with exercises from chapter 4. Next, as your layer of body fat thins in the Paper phase, you will take on greater challenges with exercises from chapter 5. Finally, you get cut in the Scissors phase with exercises from chapter 6. Each phase also deepens your commitment to your nutrition goals and aerobic training. Once you've revealed great abs on your body, you'll learn foolproof strategies in chapter 11 so you can maintain your results.

Throughout the text, you'll find pearls of training wisdom, nutrition nuggets, and insights from my many years as a fitness trainer. Along the way, you'll also enjoy an occasional look at many of the myths and misconceptions that can lead you away from the path toward great abs. *Abs Revealed* delivers the clarity you need while you pursue your best abdominals. Take a giant leap forward by removing the obstacles in the path to great abs! *Abs Revealed* gives you the tools you need to chisel the abs you want from the rock of your body.

Acknowledgments

I must acknowledge whatever or whoever gave me the strength to turn a personal tragedy into a positive result. It's an odd world where many people use tragic events in their lives as excuses for engaging in behaviors that only make their lives worse. My father's death from obesity led directly to my entry into a fitness career that has been nothing but wonderful.

Thank you to all the wonderful and intelligent people I have learned from over the years. I spent the early years of my fitness career learning as much as possible and surrounding myself with the best people in the fitness industry. It's truly a shame that many of them aren't household names because they should be. The well-worn phrase "standing on the shoulders of giants" is most appropriate in this case. What I absorbed from them planted seeds that eventually grew into many of the ideas, concepts, and fresh perspectives on fitness you will enjoy in this book.

A special thank you to all the clients and people over the years who said to me, "you should write that down," or constantly told me I should start writing. I finally got the message.

Thanks to all of the staff at Human Kinetics for helping me express my ideas in the best way possible and to produce a finished work we can all be proud of.

Thanks to the models who gave their time, expertise, and their abs for the images in this book.

Thanks to anyone who has ever taken anything I've said and used it to make their lives better. That's all I really want—to share information to help everyone reach their own potential.

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PART I

Core Concepts

Stability and Strength for Show

Clients have asked me countless times while grabbing a part of the body, “What can I do to get this in shape?” Frequently, the body part in question is the abdominal area. Right or wrong, fitness programs often focus on the abdominals. This makes a certain amount of sense. After all, people with great abs never have bodies that are flabby or untrained everywhere else. However, plenty of people have big chests and thick guns but also have big bellies. Although many great exercises exist to develop the abdominals, you may find it difficult to make yours look the way you want.

Great abs are not merely strong. Most sumo wrestlers and power lifters have very strong arms and legs, but they couldn’t lift much without strong abdominals. However, you probably don’t want to look like them. Because the midsection is the first place that body fat goes to be stored and the last place that it leaves when calories are burned, the abdominals are the standard by which we judge our fitness level and by which others judge our sex appeal.

Mistakes in the Middle

Historically, the abdominals have been trained at random with many ineffective strategies that used either a lot of exercises or a lot of repetitions without much rhyme or reason. For example, many people do hundreds of crunches to target the abs, but they don’t do similar numbers of squats, pull-ups, bench presses, or any other exercises to train other parts of the body. This style of training is essentially very low-intensity cardio for the abs. When reps are that high, performing

crunches is no longer resistance training. By definition, resistance training is a short, high-intensity activity. If you take a couple minutes to do a set of anything, you're working aerobically. Another reason to avoid sets of 100 crunches is that repeated flexing of the spine can contribute to spinal disc injuries, such as herniation.

For decades, the abdominals have been trained ineffectively and incorrectly because we feel they are particularly important. We simply do more exercises for the abs than we do for any other body part. But although we give them favored treatment in our workouts, the abdominals don't know or care just how special they are to us. They are just one group of muscles among many in the human body and are subject to the same scientific rules that govern all other muscles. They don't get special treatment in terms of biology. They perform their job and then rest. They get stronger when taken past their current ability level and they get weaker if they are ignored. They are subject to the same rules of breakdown, recovery, and growth as all other muscles.

A New Approach

Taking a more intelligent and modern approach to training that avoids the mistakes of past exercise programs and ineffective equipment will give you abdominal muscles that look great. Even when we were young, we had the key to understanding the secret of having good abdominals, but we didn't know it at the time. Remember the song "Dem Bones" that we sang as kids?

*The toe bone's connected to the ankle bone,
The ankle bone's connected to the shin bone,
The shin bone's connected to the knee bone,
The knee bone's connected to the thigh bone,
The thigh bone's connected to the hip bone. . .*

The lyrics to this traditional African-American spiritual might be a little spotty on the anatomical details, but they show us the way to effective training. The song that helped us learn body parts as kids also illustrates the major shift in thinking that is necessary to reveal your best abdominals: Everything is connected to everything else. You can drag an entire chain by grabbing and pulling a single link. Pulling on one link in the chain produces results for all the other links. Unless you barely touch it at all, you can't move a single link in isolation. When it comes to moving your body, remember that everything you move is connected to something else.

Think of it this way: A movie star who wins an Academy Award doesn't just say thanks and walk off the stage after receiving it. The actor begins listing the roles he played, both large and small, on his way to becoming a star and all the people who contributed to his success, including parents, old drama teachers, personal assistants, talent agents, and others behind the scenes. In fact, this litany of supporting roles often goes on so long that the orchestra must play to signal an end to the star's speech. Struggling actors who become stars do so only with the support of a massive group of people who are the true driving force of their success.

The same idea applies to your abs. To put on the best possible abdominal performance, you have to train the abs you can see and the ones you can't, or

the supporting cast. Your six-pack is the star, but it needs a lot of support to be successful. The muscles under the six-pack are never seen, but they support the success of your washboard. Physiologists call these two groups of muscles the *inner unit* and the *outer unit*. Suppose you have the best snow jacket in the world. Even the best jacket in the world can't do its job properly if you wear it without any other clothing. The supportive layers worn underneath the jacket help it function properly. Your hidden layers of abdominal muscle have the same relationship with the visible layers on the surface.

You'll meet all the muscles soon enough, but before you do, remember that hidden abdominal stability yields visible abdominal strength, or a sculpted six-pack. Consider a bullwhip, with its firm, rigid handle and flexible tail. When striking a whip, the stability of the handle allows the force of the forward motion to flow smoothly through the lash to the tail, producing a dramatic result. Imagine what would happen if you tried to strike while holding the tail of the whip. No matter how hard you thrashed your arm, the other end of the whip would go nowhere. In the case of our training, stable inner ab muscles yield a dramatic result for the outer ab muscles, the arms, and the legs.

Anatomy of the Abdominals

The stars of the show are the main abdominal muscles: the rectus abdominis, the obliques (internal and external), and the transversus abdominis. However, in order to train more effectively, you need to make the distinction between the inner and outer abdominal muscles. As you review, remember this key concept: Outer muscles that are well developed and beautiful require inner muscles that are stable and capable. There's no point in putting on the world's greatest jacket if you're not going to wear a shirt underneath.

Outer Abdominal Muscles

The outer abdominal muscles include the rectus abdominis, the external obliques, the internal obliques, and the erector spinae. This entire series of muscles essentially surrounds the lower half of your torso and is, ideally, the most visible for great abs. These large abdominal muscles provide strength for movement and stability for preventing movement.

Rectus Abdominis

This outermost layer of abdominal muscle (see figure 1.1) makes up the six-pack and really serves as the tip of the iceberg when it comes to abdominal training. Everyone sees the six-pack, but the full story of the abdominals lies below the surface. The six-pack is actually an eight-pack, but you typically can't see the bottom two parts unless you are completely naked! The rectus abdominis is a long, thin muscle whose fibers run vertically down the body, beginning between the fifth and seventh ribs and ending at the pubic bone. It has eight bumps sticking out of a grid of flat tendons that bisect and run down the length of the muscle. This muscle flexes the trunk and moves the rib cage and pelvis closer together.

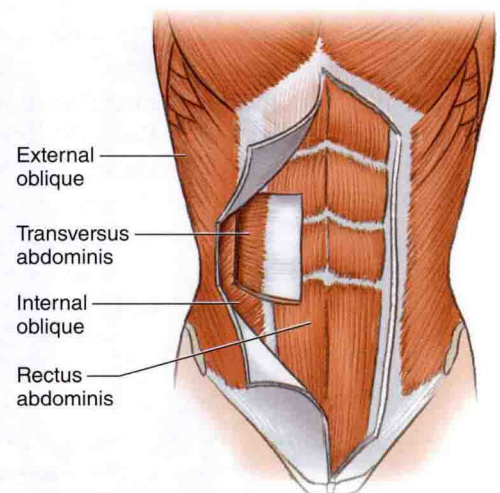


FIGURE 1.1 The eight-pack of the rectus abdominis.

Do Upper and Lower Abs Really Exist?

Much debate occurs over the existence of upper and lower abs. Anatomy purists correctly point out that the fibers of the rectus abdominis are one long length of muscle. On the other hand, nature doesn't like waste, so there must be a reason for the three sections of tendons that cut across the length of the muscle. For example, the biceps is also a single, long muscle, but it doesn't have tendons crosscutting its length.

Empirical evidence also exists to support differentiation within the muscle. You've likely done exercises that feel harder for the upper or the lower abs. During a workout, if you move your hips closer to your ribs, you're going to feel the lower portion of this muscle working harder than the upper portion is. If you move your ribs closer to your hips, the upper portion will dominate. Given this evidence, perhaps each part of the muscle differs in terms of its ability to contract. However, for the purpose of anatomy tests, the rectus abdominis is technically considered one muscle.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

MYTH: Crunches will give you flat abs.

REALITY: When training these muscles, you want to develop them just enough to make them look good when your body fat gets low.

If you make this muscle too strong and large, it will stick out and make your belly look bigger than it is. Ab training that consists only of sit-ups and crunches pushes this muscle out. You need a lot more than crunches for the best abs.

External Obliques

These muscles are visible, running diagonally from the ribs to the front of the pelvis (see figure 1.2) and the side of your eight-pack (rectus abdominis; refer to figure 1.1). Along with the internal obliques, they provide support and stability for the gut. Their action is to rotate your torso and to bend it sideways.

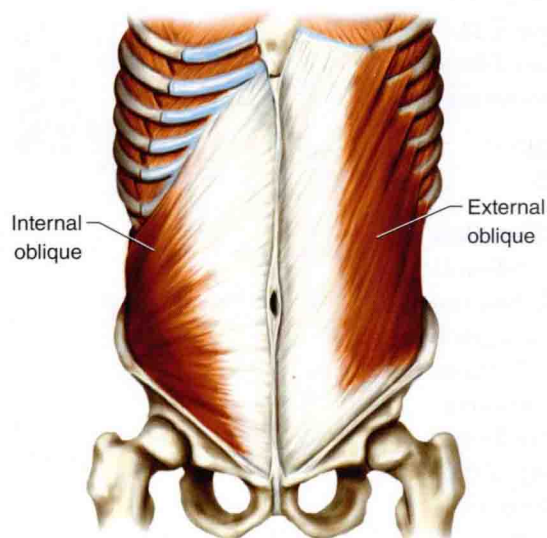


FIGURE 1.2 The external and internal obliques.

Internal Obliques

Although the depth of these muscles renders them invisible, they are no less important. They are one of the main stabilizers of your trunk. Like the external obliques, they lie on a diagonal, but they run in the opposite direction. They also rotate your torso. In torso rotation, motion is created by the internal obliques on the side you are turning toward and by the external obliques on the opposite side. As shown in figure 1.2, the fibers of the external oblique on one side line up with the fibers of the internal oblique on the other side. For example, twisting to the left is a result of the actions of the internal obliques on the left and the external obliques on the right.

Use your hands to remember the alignment of these muscles. To trace the direction of the internal obliques, rest your hands on top of your lower ribs and then slide each hand down and around to your back pocket on the same side. To trace the direction of the external obliques, slide your hands down and in, moving from the lower ribs toward your belly button. For the internal obliques, your hands should move in toward your organs; for the external obliques, they should move out away from your organs.

Erector Spinae

The proper balance of strength and stability between the abdominal and back muscles makes for a truly well-built body. You can't have strong abs without a good back. The group of erector spinae muscles (see figure 1.3) is made up of the iliocostalis (top layer) and the longissimus (second layer). These back muscles run from the base of your skull, all the way down your spine, before finally connecting to the pelvis. You can feel these muscles in your lower back by locating the two vertical ridges that lie on either side of your spine. To find these ridges, stand up and bend slightly forward at the hips. If you feel only the bumps of the vertebrae in your spine, you are flexing too far forward. To straighten your spine, bend from your hips instead of your waist. These two layers of back muscles round out your cast of outer abdominal players.

Inner Abdominal Muscles

The behind-the-scenes muscles of the inner abdominals make the outer ones attractive and successful. Think of these muscles coordinating their actions to form a protective cylinder, or box for your organs, deep inside your trunk. They also provide a stable platform from which your outer ab muscles can push off when it is time for action.

Transversus Abdominis

Imagine your eight-pack abs as the Earth's surface. If you were to drill down to the core, you'd go through the rectus abdominis and the external and internal obliques, eventually arriving at the last solid layer—the transversus abdominis (TVA) muscle. This muscle forms the front of your inner-ab box and holds your gut flat. It runs from the sides of your eight-pack around your back, then attaches along your lower ribs and pelvis (see figure 1.4). As shown in the figure, the fibers run horizontally, so when they contract, you feel as if a belt is tightening around your middle. In fact, this muscle sort of looks like the championship belt of a boxer or professional wrestler, and your eight-pack is the shiny buckle!

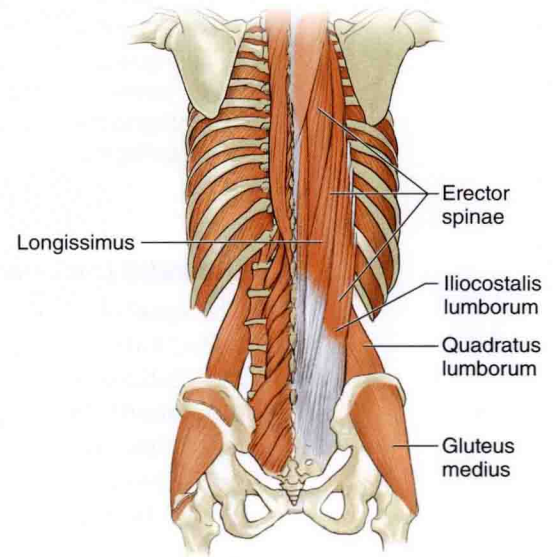


FIGURE 1.3 The muscles of the erector spinae.

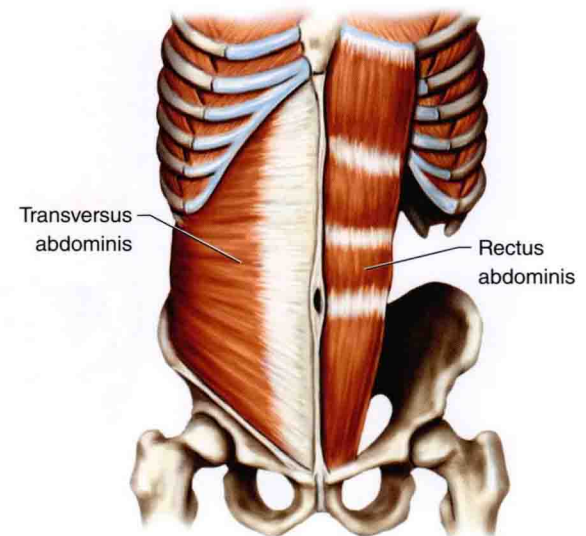


FIGURE 1.4 The fibers of the transversus abdominis run horizontally like a belt from the connective tissue that lies underneath the rectus abdominis muscle.

MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

MISCONCEPTION: Weight belts provide support for the back during lifting.

REALITY: The transversus abdominis works with the internal obliques to make a natural weight belt.

Wearing a weight belt causes your TVA to push out against the belt—exactly the opposite of what you want it to do during a lift. Weight belts should only be used when performing maximal lifts, such as those done by power lifters. In all other situations, training with a weight belt is a surefire way to make you weaker. Employees at home-improvement stores sometimes wear weight belts during their shifts to protect the company. If they hurt their backs at home because their inner abs are weak from using the belt, it won't cost the company as much money.

Quadratus Lumborum

The quadratus lumborum (QL) muscle runs from your bottom (12th) rib, along either side of your lumbar vertebrae, to the top of the pelvis (refer to figure 1.3). It stabilizes the spine and pelvis and plays a large part in any sideways-bending movement. Without a functioning QL, you probably wouldn't even be able to walk. Imagine the open space between the bottom rib and the top of the pelvis on skeletons you may have seen at Halloween or in science class. The QL muscle fills in this space.

Diaphragm

You probably know that the diaphragm is involved in breathing and speaking, but what does that really mean? When you take a full, deep breath, the diaphragm (see

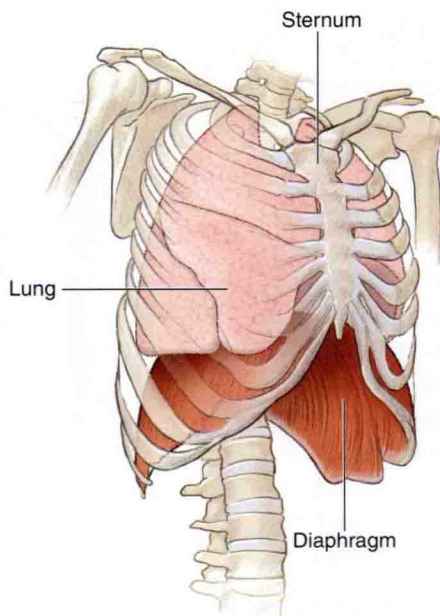


figure 1.5) essentially pushes down on your guts to make room for your lungs to expand. During exercise, the diaphragm pushes down, the TVA pushes in, and the QL compresses your organs tight against the spine to protect it. That's right—your inner ab muscles essentially shove your guts against your spine to keep the discs between your vertebrae from sliding all over the place.

If all these inner ab muscles, combined with the internal obliques and the TVA, are so important for rotating and stabilizing your spine, why are they almost never featured in traditional ab books and routines? The answer is simply because you can't see them. However, if the muscles that stabilize your spine are weak, your back will also be weak, preventing you from working your abs hard.

FIGURE 1.5 The diaphragm muscle pushes down to clear space for the lungs.