



Abdominal Exercises

ROMAN CHAIRS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes upper abs.

EXECUTION: (1) Sit on the Roman Chair bench, hook your feet under the support, and fold your arms in front of you. (2) Keeping your stomach tucked in, lower yourself back to approximately a 70-degree angle, but not all the way back so your torso is parallel to the floor. Raise and curl your torso forward as far as possible, feeling the abdominals crunch together in a full contraction.

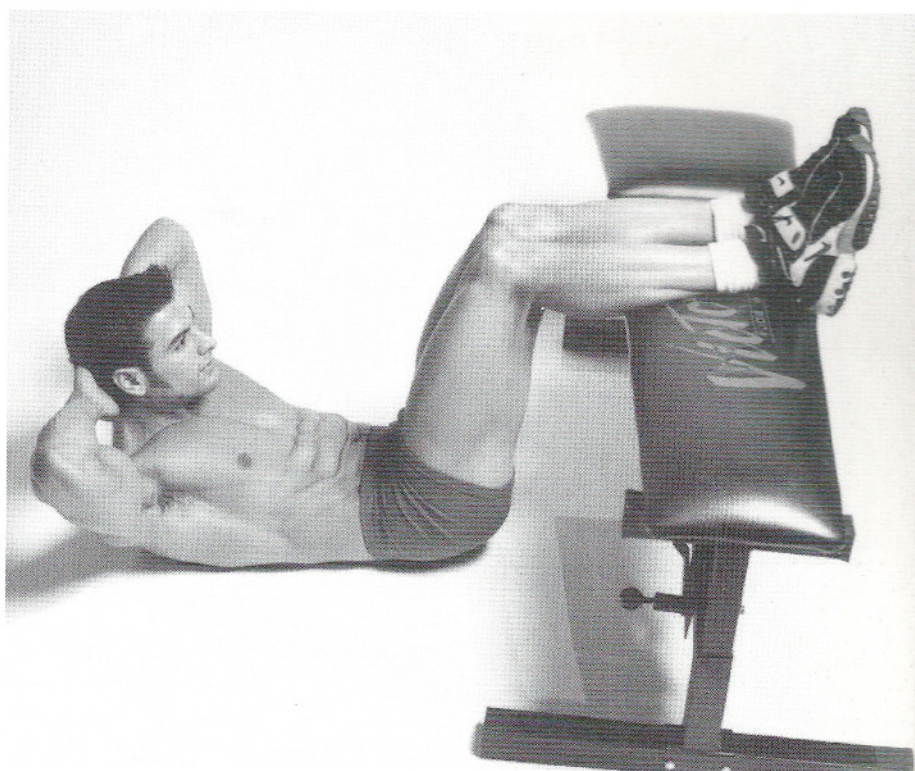
I like to rest the front of the Roman Chair bench on a block of some sort to create an incline and increase the intensity of the exercise. You can introduce variable resistance into this exercise by starting out with the front of the bench raised and then, when you are getting tired, lower it to the floor and continue with your set.

CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes upper abs.

EXECUTION: (1) Lie on your back on the floor, your legs across a bench in front of you. You can put your hands behind your neck or keep them in front of you, whichever you prefer. (2) Curl your shoulders and trunk upward toward your knees, rounding your back. Don't try to lift your entire back up off the floor, just roll forward and crunch your rib cage toward your pelvis. At the top of the movement, deliberately give an extra squeeze of the abs to achieve total contraction, then release and lower your shoulders back to the starting position. This is not a movement you do quickly. Do each rep deliberately and under control.

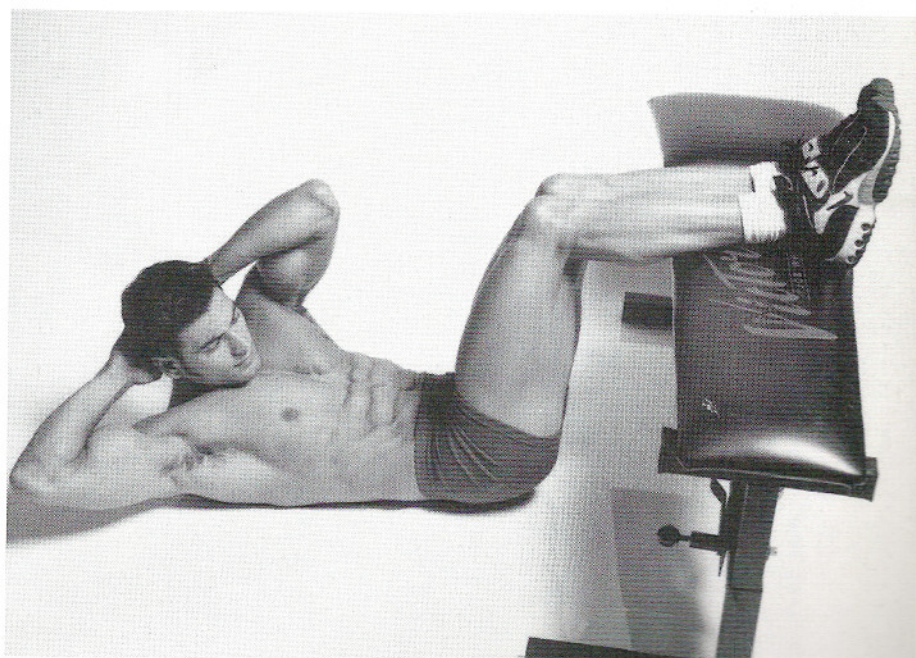
You can vary the angle of stress on your abdominals by raising your foot position. Instead of putting your legs across a bench, try lying on the floor and placing the soles of your feet against a wall at whatever height feels most comfortable.



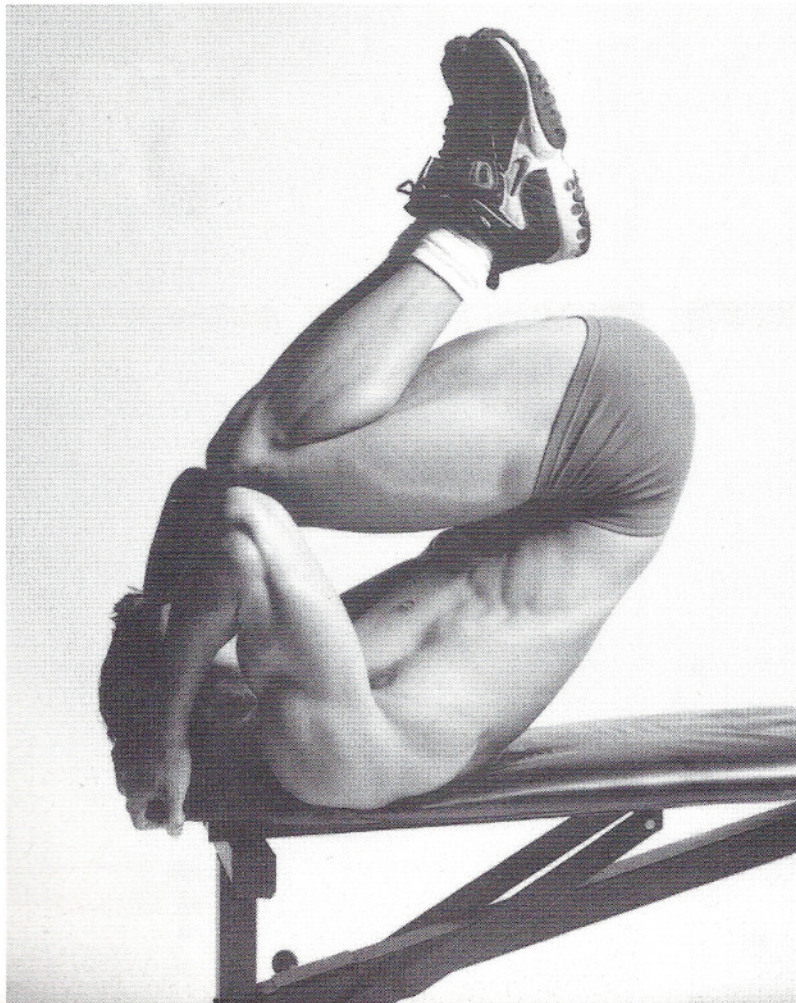
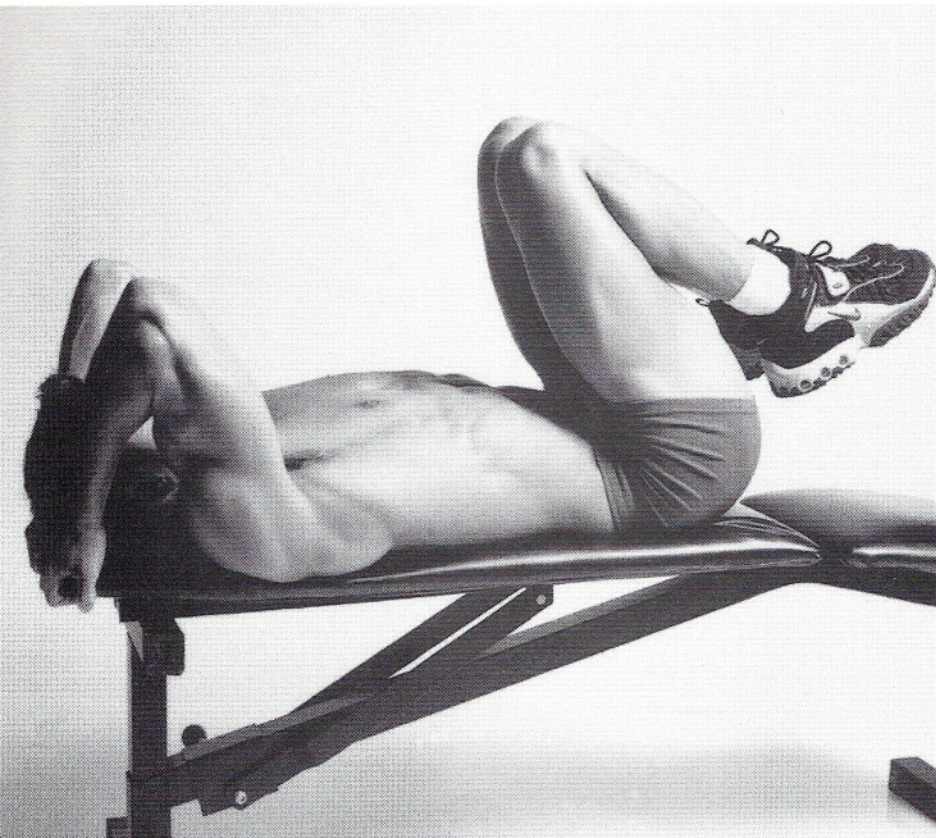
TWISTING CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For upper abs and obliques.

EXECUTION: (1) Lie on your back on the floor, your legs across a bench in front of you. (2) You can put your hands behind your neck and curl your trunk up toward your knees, rounding your back. As you do this, twist your torso so that your right elbow comes across toward your left knee. Release and lower your torso back to the starting position. Repeat, this time twisting in the opposite direction, bringing your left elbow toward your right knee. Continue to alternate, twisting in one direction and then the other throughout your set.



T. J. Hoban



REVERSE CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

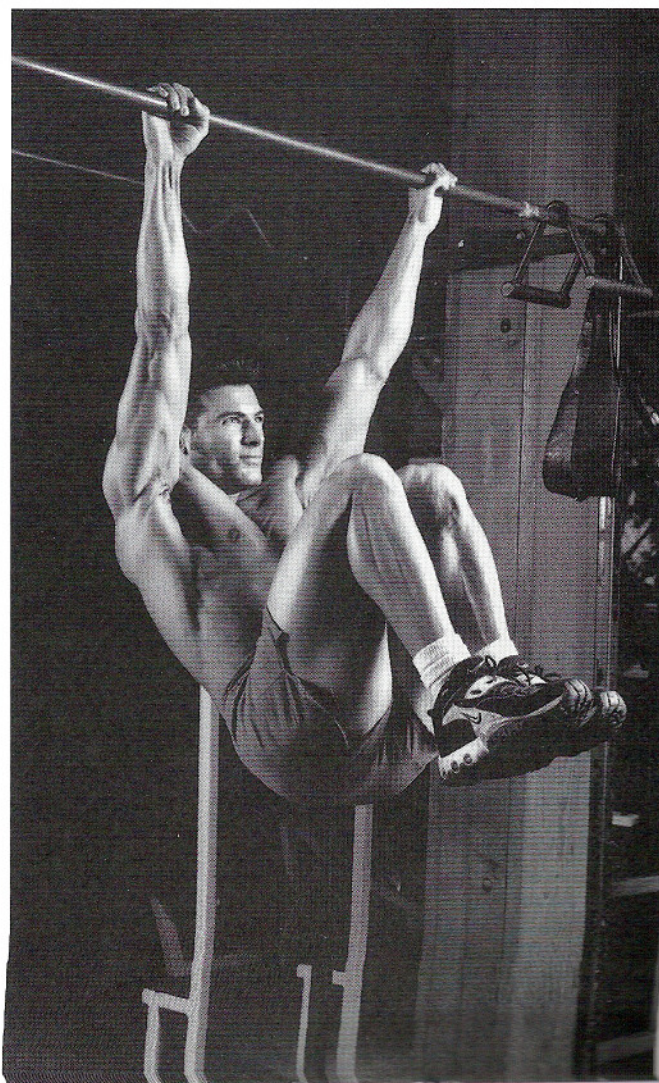
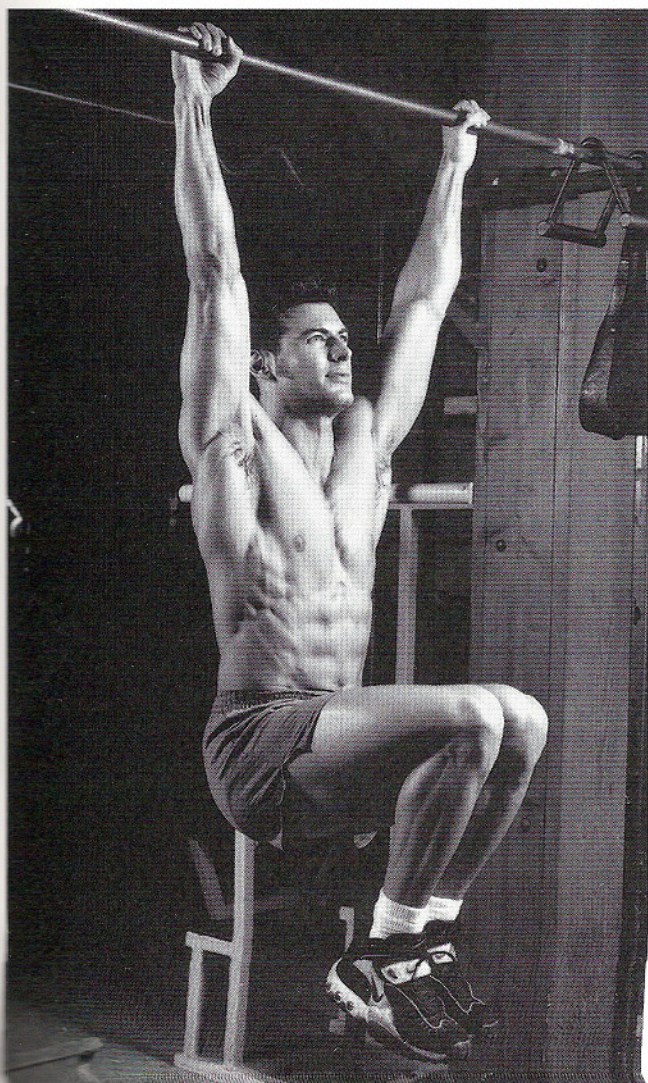
EXECUTION: This exercise is best done lying on a Bench Press bench that has a rack at one end. (1) Lie on your back on the bench and reach up behind you to hold the rack for support. Bend your knees and bring them up as far toward your face as you can without lifting your pelvis off the bench. (2) From this starting position, bring your knees up as close to your face as you can, rounding your back, with the glutes coming up off the bench and crunching up toward the rib cage. Hold for a moment at the top and deliberately squeeze the ab muscles for full contraction. Slowly lower your knees until your rear end comes to rest on the bench again. (Don't lower your legs any farther than this. You aren't doing Leg Raises.) Again, do this movement deliberately and under control rather than doing a lot of quick reps.

HANGING REVERSE CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

EXECUTION: This is another version of Reverse Crunches, only you do it hanging by your hands from a bar or resting on your forearms on a Hanging Leg Raise bench instead of lying on a bench. (1) Get into the hanging position and bring your knees up to the level of your abdomen. (2) From this starting position, raise your knees up as far as possible toward your head, rounding your back and rolling yourself upward into a ball. At the top of the movement, hold and crunch the ab muscles together for full contraction, then lower your knees to the starting position with the knees pulled up. Again, don't lower your legs beyond this starting point.

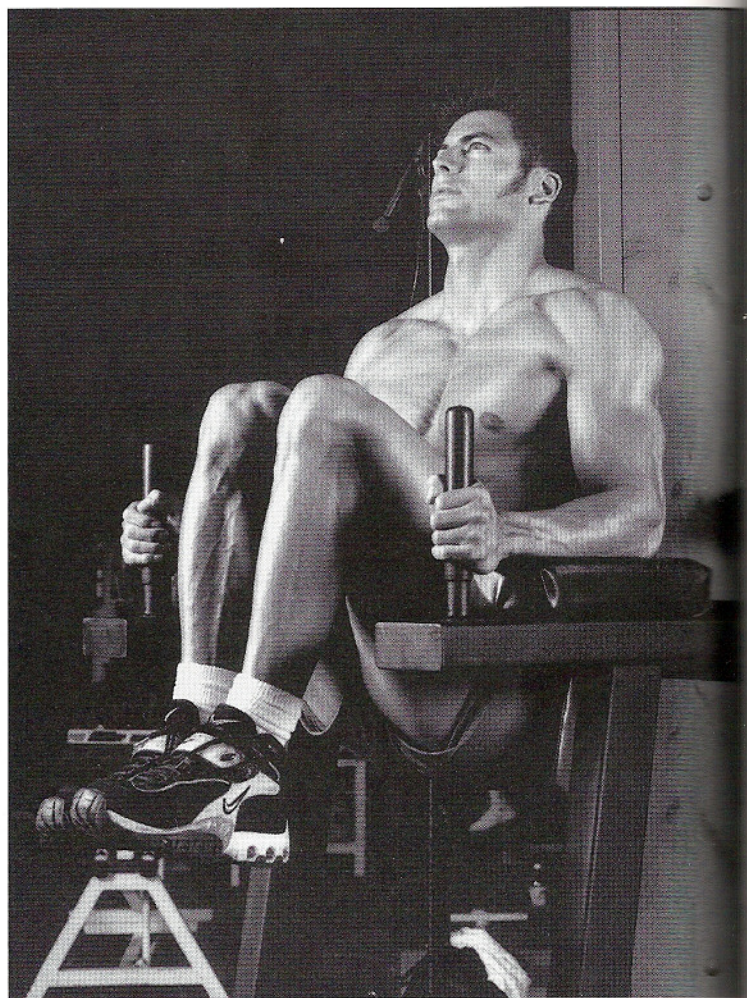
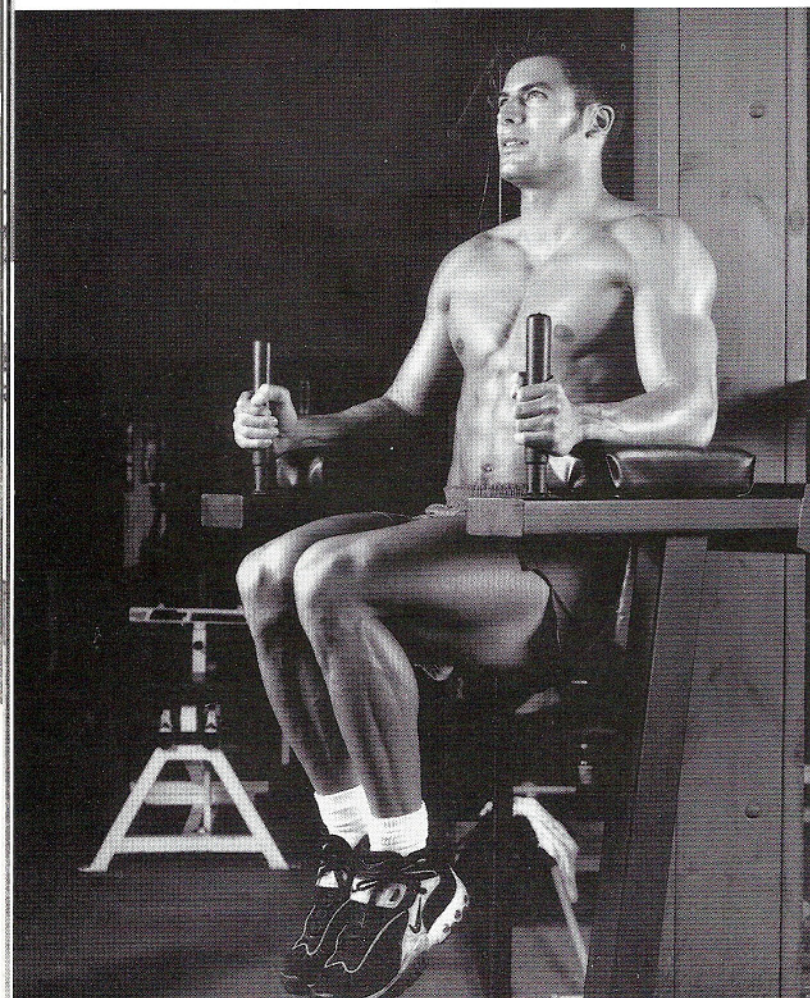
A lot of people and most bodybuilders (because of the mass of their legs) can't really do Hanging Reverse Crunches. An easier variation is to lie head upward on a slantboard. This gives you more resistance than Reverse Crunches on a flat bench, but you can dial in the amount of resistance you want by the angle at which you set the slantboard.



VERTICAL BENCH CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

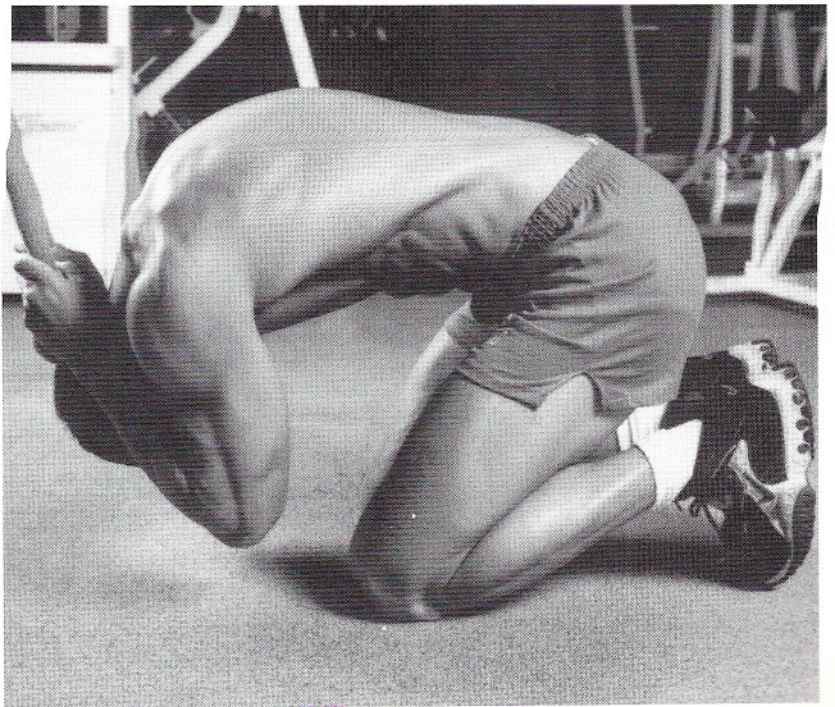
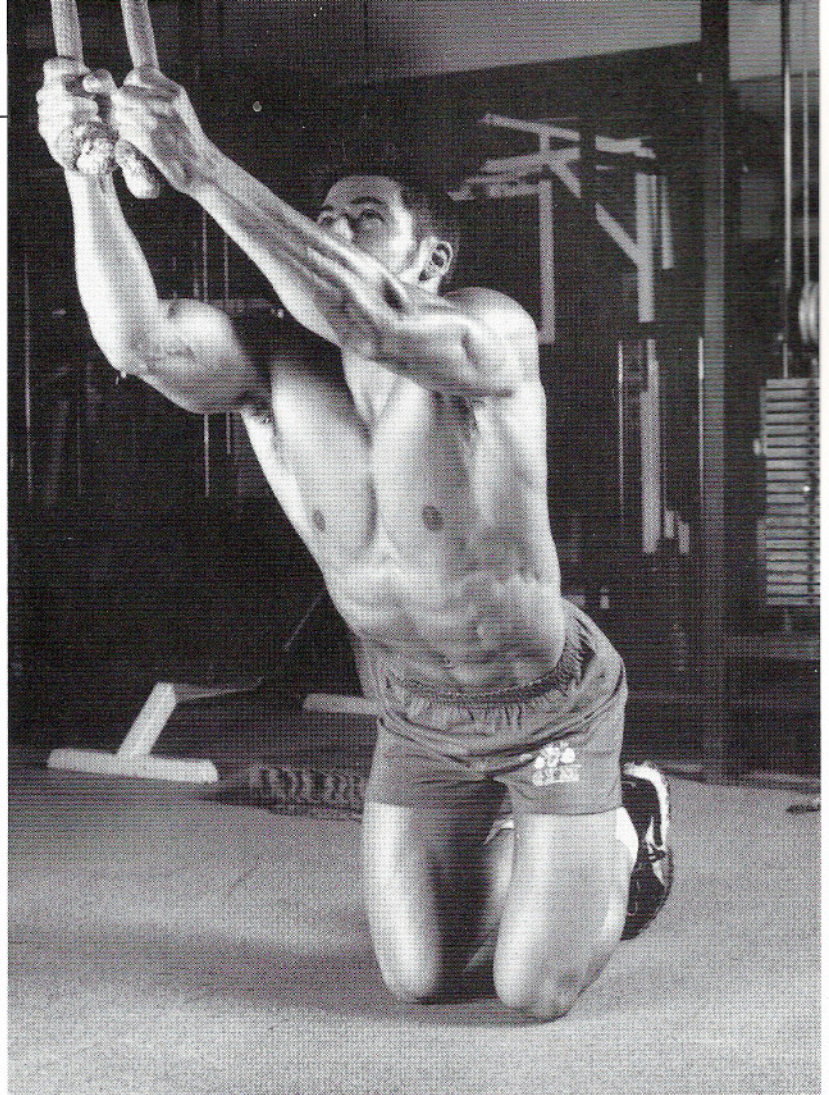
EXECUTION: This is a variation of Hanging Reverse Crunches. (1) Instead of hanging from a bar, position yourself on a vertical bench that allows you to support yourself on your elbows and forearms and bring your knees up to the level of your abdomen. (2) From this starting position, raise your knees up as far as possible toward your head, rounding your back and rolling yourself upward into a ball. At the top of the movement, hold and crunch the ab muscles together for full contraction, then lower your knees to the starting position with the knees pulled up. Again, don't lower your legs beyond this starting point.

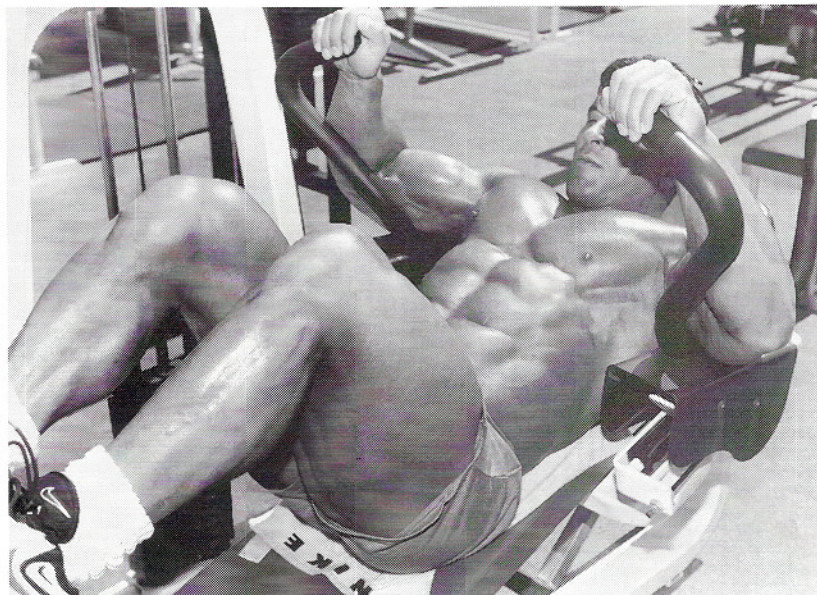


CABLE CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For upper and lower abs.

EXECUTION: This is an exercise you used to see much more in the “old days” than you do today, but it’s an effective one. (1) Attach a rope to an overhead pulley. Kneel down and grasp the rope with both hands. (2) Holding the rope in front of your forehead, bend and curl downward, rounding your back, bringing your head to your knees and feeling the abdominals crunch together. Hold the peak contraction at the bottom, then release and come back up to the starting position. Make sure the effort involved is made with the abs. Don’t pull down with the arms.





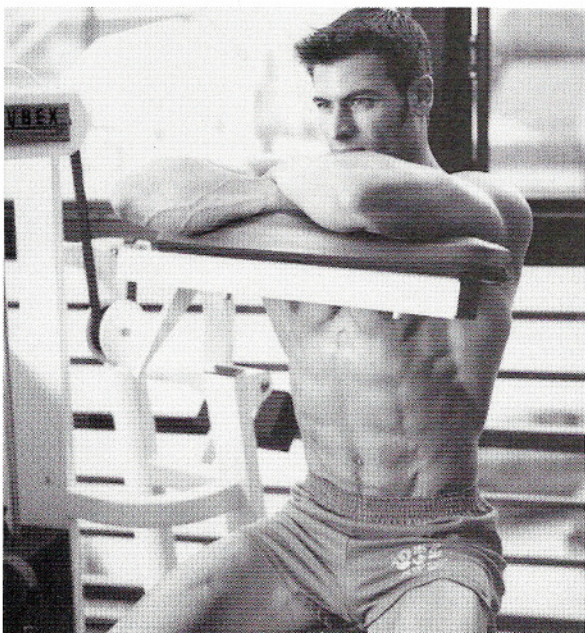
MACHINE CRUNCHES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For upper and lower abs.

EXECUTION: A great many bodybuilders feel that machines are unnecessary when it comes to ab training. But others swear by some of the ab training equipment currently available. Charles Glass, for example, often has his clients use a Nautilus Crunch machine. In all cases, however, concentrate on feeling the rib cage and the pelvis squeeze together as the abdominals contract. If you can't achieve this feeling, the piece of equipment you are using may not be suited to your individual needs.



Milos Sarcev



SEATED LEG TUCKS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For upper and lower abs.

EXECUTION: In all ab exercises the rib cage contracts toward the pelvis or the pelvis toward the rib cage—in this exercise, both of these things happen.

(1) Sit crosswise on a bench, holding on to the sides for support. Raise your legs slightly and bend your knees and lean backward at about a 45-degree angle.

(2) Using a scissors movement (this exercise is sometimes called Scissors Crunches), curl your upper body toward your pelvis, rounding your back, and simultaneously lift your knees up toward your head. Feel the crunch as your rib cage and pelvis squeeze together. From this position, lower your torso and knees back to the starting position.



SEATED TWISTS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: To tighten the obliques.

EXECUTION: (1) Sit on the end of a bench, feet flat on the floor and comfortably apart. Place a broom handle or light bar across the back of your shoulders and hold it. (2) Keeping your head stationary, and making sure your pelvis doesn't shift on the bench, deliberately turn your upper body and shoulders in one direction as far as you can. Hold at the extreme rotated position, then turn your torso and shoulders back in the other direction as far as you can, keeping the movement fully under control rather than swinging. Because this exercise contracts the oblique muscles but uses no additional resistance, it keeps them tight but doesn't add any extra bulk that might thicken your waist.





BENT-OVER TWISTS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: To tighten the obliques.

EXECUTION: (1) Standing with your feet apart, place a broom handle or light bar across the back of your shoulders, hold it, and bend forward from the waist as far as is comfortable. (2) Keeping your head stationary, and blocking your pelvis from rotating, deliberately turn your upper body and shoulders in one direction as far as you can. Hold at the extreme rotated position, then turn your torso and shoulders back in the other direction as far as you can, keeping the movement fully under control rather than swinging.

LEG RAISES

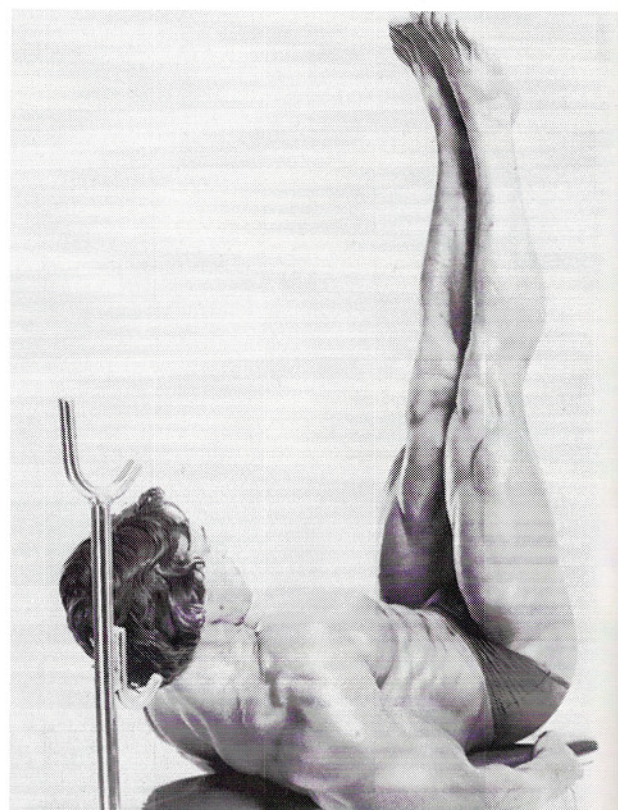
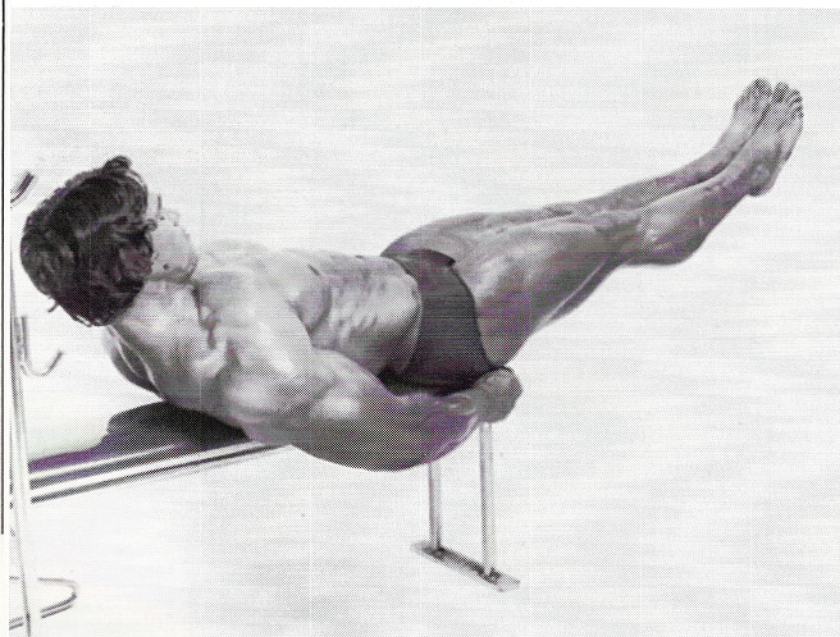
Leg Raises are a traditional abdominal exercise that has fallen out of favor with exercise physiologists. The reason is that the abdominals don't attach to the legs, so raising and lowering your legs works them only indirectly, as stabilizers. The muscles that raise and lower the legs are the iliopsoas muscles (hip flexors) that run from the lower back across the top of the pelvis and attach to the upper leg.

Nonetheless, I have gotten good results doing Leg Raises, as have many other champions, so I feel this encyclopedia would be incomplete if they were not included. I am a big believer in science and exercise physiology, but when it comes to bodybuilding the bottom line is always what works for you, regardless of what the "experts" might think.

FLAT BENCH LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

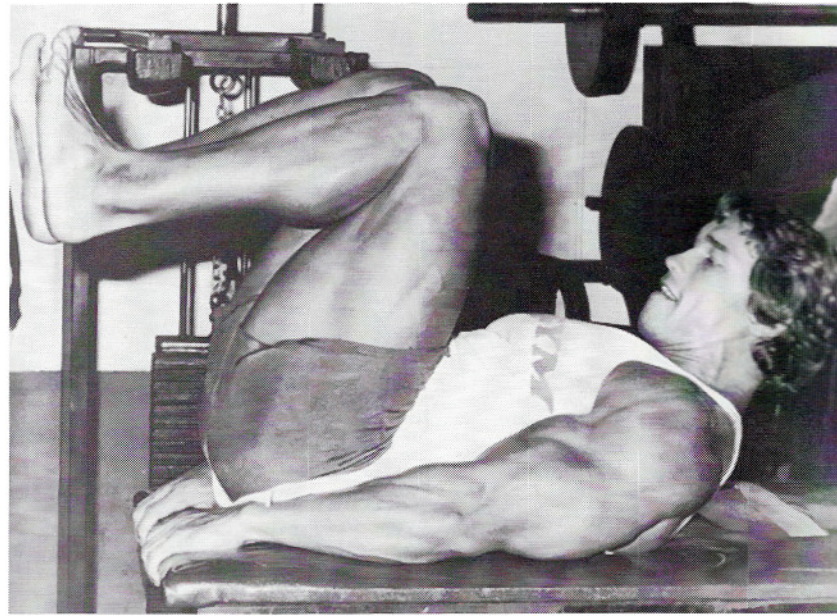
EXECUTION: (1) Lie on your back on a flat bench, your rear end just at the end of the bench, put your hands under your glutes for support, and extend your legs out straight. (2) Keeping your legs straight, raise them as high as you can, pause, then lower them until they are slightly below the level of the bench.



BENT-KNEE FLAT BENCH LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs

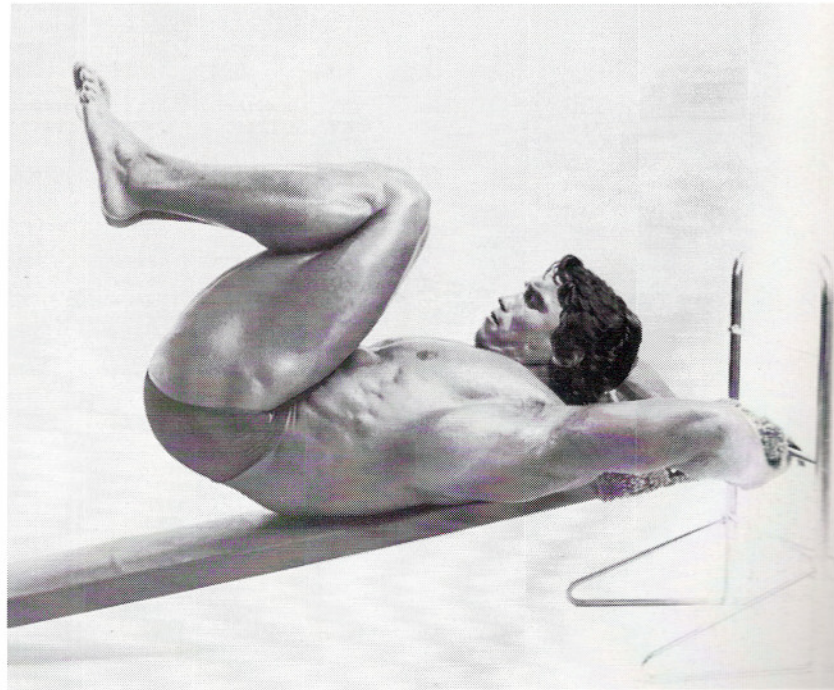
EXECUTION: Lie on a bench in the same position as with Flat Bench Leg Raises. Bend your knees, then raise your legs as far as possible, pause at the top, then lower your legs again, keeping them bent throughout the entire range of motion.



BENT-KNEE INCLINE BOARD LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

EXECUTION: (1) Lie on your back on an incline board, head higher than your feet. Reach back and take hold of the top of the board or some other support. (2) With your *knees bent*, raise your legs as high as you can, then lower them slowly, stopping just as your rear end touches the board. Exhale as you lift and inhale as you lower your legs. Bending your knees makes the movement a little easier and helps to increase your range of motion.



B. J. Quinn

BENT-KNEE VERTICAL BENCH LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

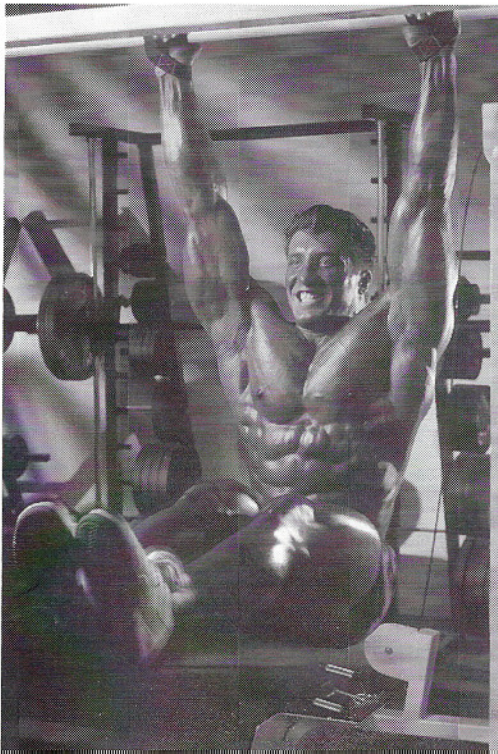
EXECUTION: (1) Support yourself on your arms on a vertical bench. (2) Holding your upper body steady, bend your knees and raise them up as high as you can, flexing your abs through the full range of the motion. Keeping your legs bent, lower them again to the starting position.

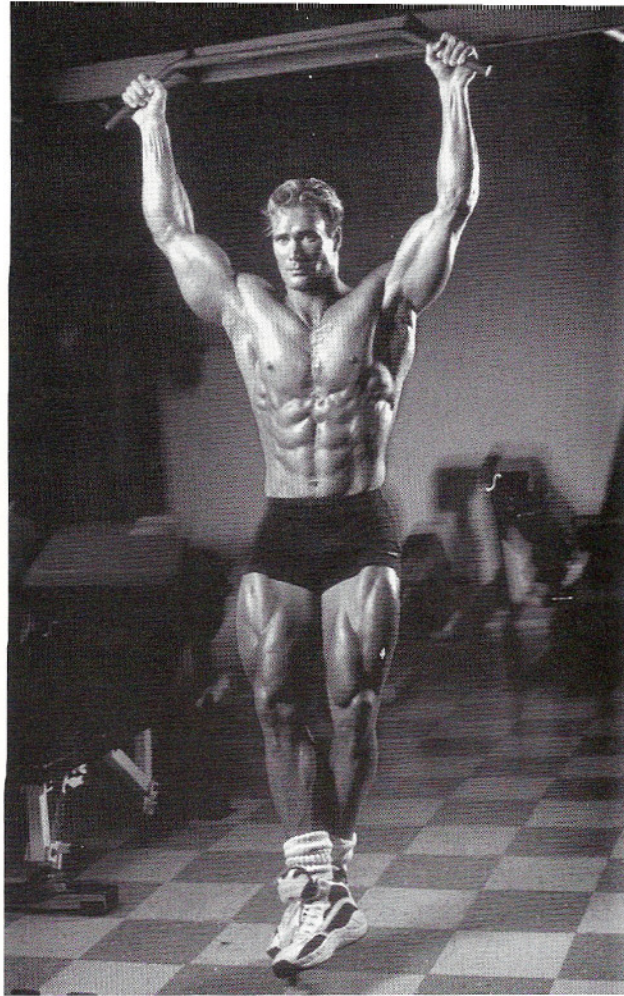
VARIATION: Any variation of an exercise forces the muscles to respond in new and different ways. When working the abdominals with Vertical Bench Leg Raises, try doing the movement using each leg alternately instead of simultaneously.

HANGING LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: Emphasizes lower abs.

EXECUTION: (1) Grasp an overhead bar and hang at arm's length. (2) Keeping your legs fairly straight, raise them as high as you can, hold for a moment, then lower them under control back to the starting position. Keeping your legs straight adds to the resistance in this exercise, which makes the movement more difficult.

*Milos Sarcev*



Mike O'Hearn

TWISTING HANGING LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For the obliques and detail at the side of the torso.

EXECUTION: Start as in Hanging Leg Raises, hanging at arm's length from the bar and keeping your legs fairly straight. Next, raise your legs as high as you can *slightly to the side while twisting the torso to involve the obliques, serratus, and intercostal muscles.* Hold for a moment, then lower them under control to the starting position.

ADDITIONAL LEG-RAISE EXERCISES

In addition to the basic abdominal exercises, there are a number of leg-raise movements I have always liked and that I believe help firm and tighten areas like the hips, the lower back, and the buttocks. These are exercises that can be done for very high reps and that are just as easy to do in a hotel when you are traveling as when you are home or at the gym.

One benefit of these movements is the way they work the lower body from every angle—front, back, and rear. They are also useful for a wide range of people, from competitive bodybuilders to serious athletes, weekend athletes, and men and women simply trying to stay fit and in good shape.

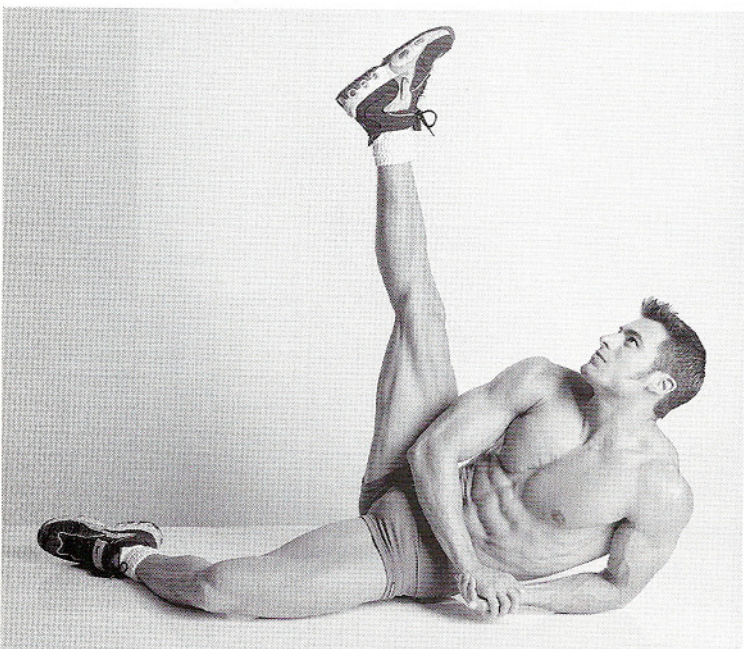


SIDE LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For the obliques and intercostals.

This exercise works the entire side of the torso and can really help give your waist a narrow look from the front.

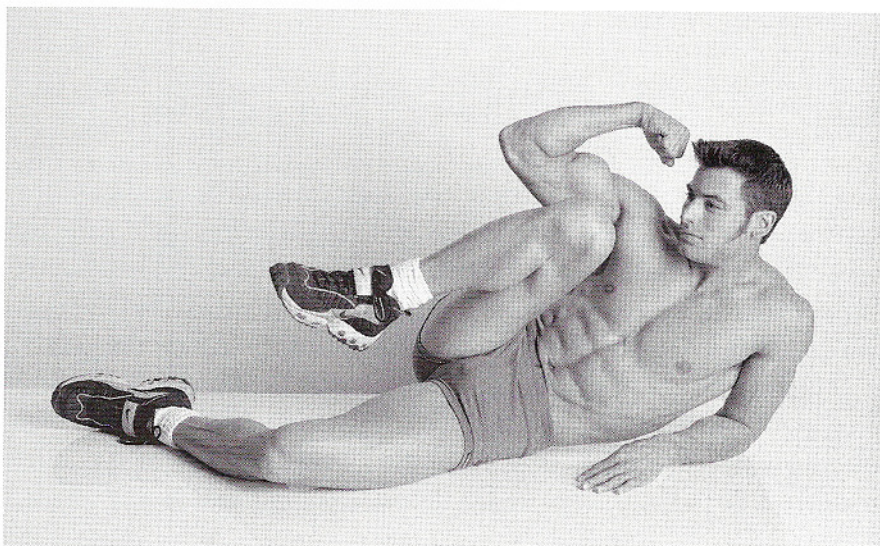
EXECUTION: (1) Lie on your side, supporting yourself on your elbow with your lower leg bent under for support. (2) Keeping the upper leg straight, raise it slowly as high as it will go, then lower it again, but stop short of letting it touch the floor. Finish your reps with this leg, then turn onto your other side and repeat the movement. Don't move your hips at all during this movement.



BENT-KNEE SIDE LEG RAISES

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For the obliques and intercostals.

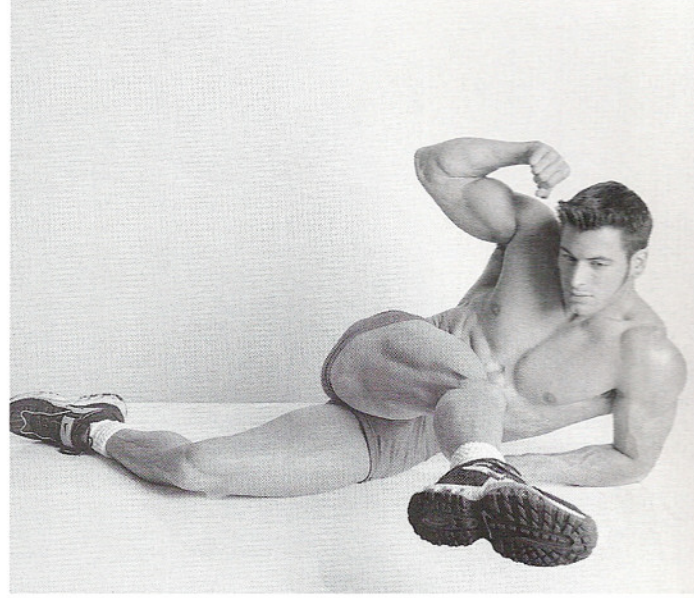
EXECUTION: Lie on your side, supporting yourself on your elbow with your lower leg bent under for support. Bend the knee of your upper leg and raise it slowly toward your chest as high as you can, then lower it again, stopping short of touching the floor. Finish your reps with this, then turn and work the opposite leg.



FRONT KICKS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For the obliques and intercostals.

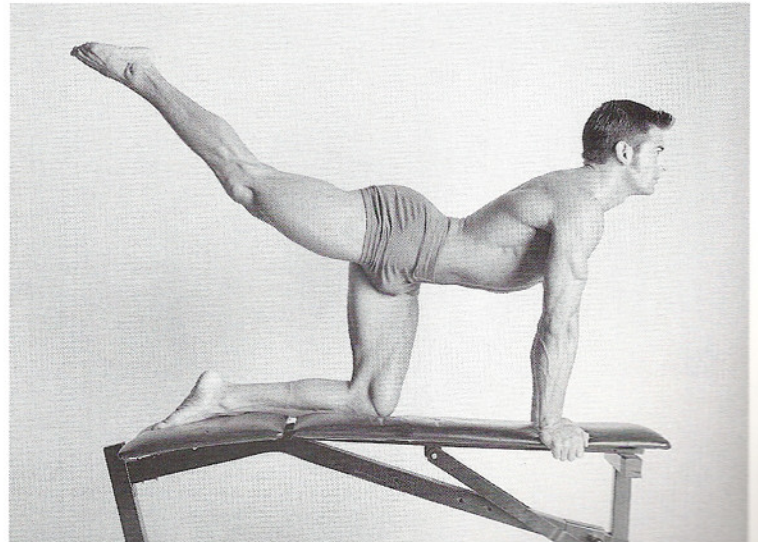
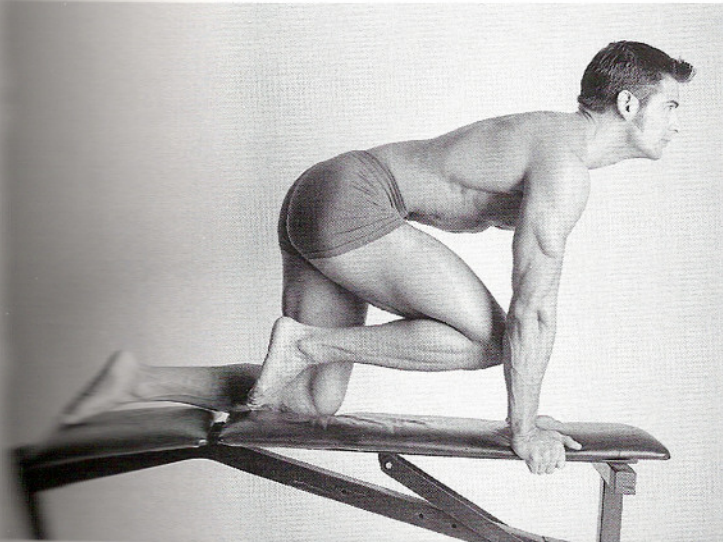
EXECUTION: This exercise begins in exactly the same position as Side Leg Raises. Here, though, you slowly move your upper leg forward as far as you can, keeping it straight throughout the movement. Finish your reps, and turn and work the opposite leg.

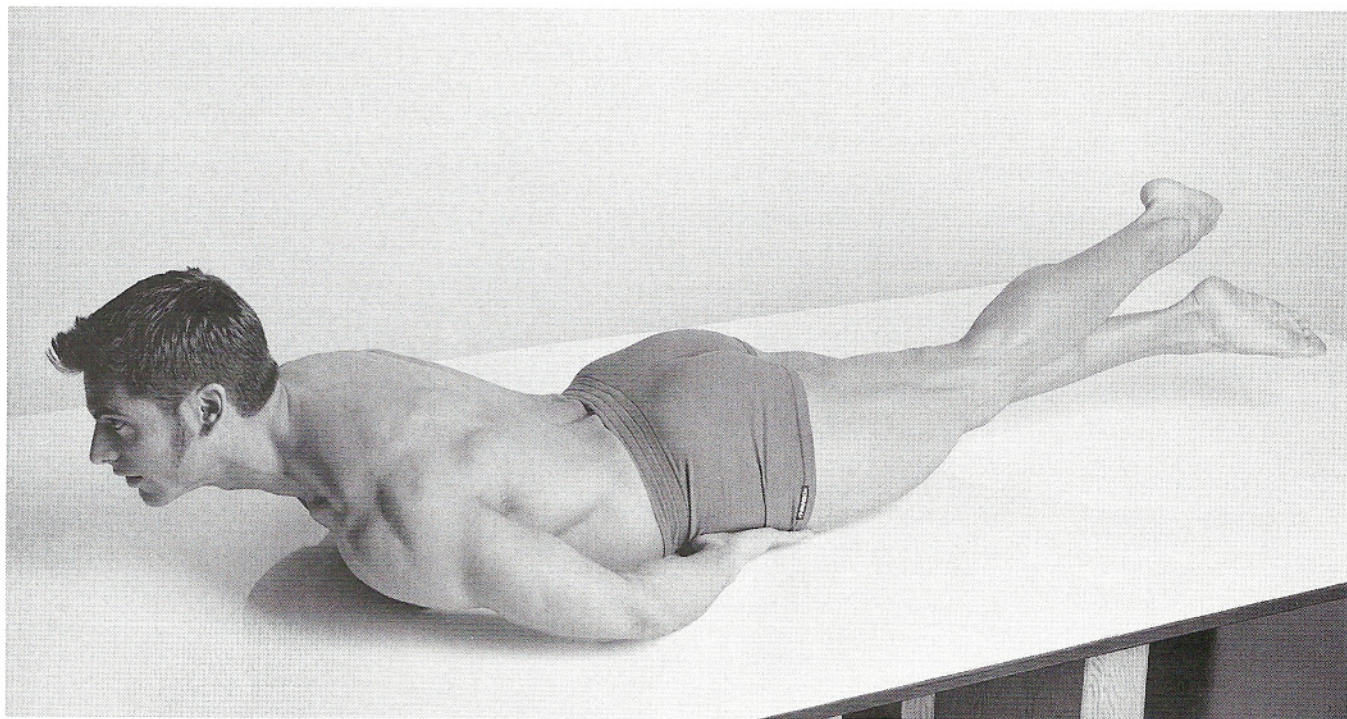


BENCH KICKBACKS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For the glutes.

EXECUTION: (1) Kneel with one leg on the end of a bench. Grip the bench with arms locked for support. (2) Kick one leg back as high as you can, then bring it back down, not letting it quite touch the bench. Concentrate throughout the movement on flexing and contracting the buttocks. Complete your repetitions then repeat using the other leg. (This can be done kneeling on the floor, but it's slightly more difficult.)





REAR LEG SCISSORS

PURPOSE OF EXERCISE: For the glutes.

EXECUTION: (1) Lie on your stomach, hands under your thighs. Raise your legs off the floor as far as possible. (2) Move your feet apart a short distance, then bring them together and cross one over the other. (3) Move them apart and then cross them again with the opposite leg on top. Repeat, alternating legs continuously until you have completed your repetitions. Throughout the exercise, concentrate on feeling the contraction of the buttocks.

VACUUMS

Being able to control your abdominal muscles to the point where you can hit and hold a full vacuum is becoming a lost art in bodybuilding. This is unfortunate, since a vacuum pose is not only impressive onstage, creating a much smaller waistline and exaggerating the size and fullness of the chest and rib cage, but also helps to develop abdominal definition and gives you the total control of the abdominal muscles that helps you avoid letting your abs bulge the moment you relax and stop concentrating on them.

Bodybuilders often forget under the pressure of competition that they are being watched the whole time they are onstage—even when they are standing at the back of the stage waiting for a comparison call-out. You should never give the judges the impression that you are tired, and keeping your abs from bulging and protruding is one way to assure you make the proper impression.

Nowadays, bodybuilders frequently have trouble hitting a vacuum because their abs get so massive—but the primary reason is that *they don't practice hitting vacuums*. This is not something you can master in an hour. You have to practice on a regular basis, just as you do any other kind of posing, for a period of weeks or months until you develop full control over these muscles.

To practice vacuums, get down on your hands and knees, blow out all your breath, and suck in your abdominals as much as you can. Hold this for 20 to 30 seconds, relax for a few moments, and then try it again two or three times.

The next step is to practice your vacuum in a kneeling position. Kneel upright with your hands on your knees and try to hold the vacuum as long as you can.

Doing a seated vacuum is more difficult still. But once you can hold a vacuum in a seated position without any problem, you will be able to practice holding a vacuum while standing and doing a variety of poses.

