Etching a Ripped, Rugged Midsection With X Reps
—Quick 10-Minute Training Programs—

by Steve Holman and Jonathan Lawson
X-traordinary Abs was written to help you achieve a muscular, ripped midsection with sensible bodybuilding and fat-loss strategies. Weight training and dieting can be demanding activities, however, so it is highly recommended that you consult your physician and have a physical examination prior to beginning. Proceed with the suggested diets, exercises and routines at your own risk.

Photography by Michael Neveux

Cover model: Steve Holman

Copyright © 2005 by IRON MAN Magazine and Homebody Productions
All rights reserved.

The material in this document may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any manner or form without prior written consent from the publisher.

Homebody Productions
P.O. Box 2800, Ventura, CA 93002

www.X-traordinaryAbs.com

www.X-Rep.com

www.X-tremeLean.com
Etching a Ripped, Rugged Midsection With X Reps

—Quick 10-Minute Training Programs—
Introduction

Do you really want a chiseled set of abs? Who are we trying to kid? Of course you do! Even if a guy or gal is scrawny, with hardly any muscle anywhere else, if their abs are etched, they get oohs and aahs from anybody in their vicinity when shirts come off. (You’ve seen the skinny movie stars or models who get best-body nods just because they have abs—and not much else in the way of muscle.) In other words, if you don’t have abs that resemble carved cubes of granite, you’re just not in shape—at least that’s people’s perception.

If you don’t have them, don’t worry—you soon will. And if you kick your motivation into overdrive and get your bodyfat in the lower single digits, you’ll have a visible six-pack without even flexing. That’s right, just standing relaxed your attention-grabbing midsection will still display a rippling ruggedness (now that’s impressive!).

We’ve been X-traordinary ABS

Our amazing one-month results were due to a combination of efficient abdominal programs that included X Reps and fast fat-elimination tactics.
training together at the IRON
MAN Training & Research
Center for about 10 years,
and we have more than 40
years of training experience
between us. During that time
we’ve tried all kinds of ab-
training routines—from high-
rep blitz-‘em-and-burn-‘em
schedules to loads of sets
doing four or five exercises in
a row without rest. We got
some results, but it wasn’t
until we learned exactly how
the abdominals function and
how to get the most out of
every set of ab work that the
results really came into clear
view—as in shredded,
delineated abs and serratus
(which are those cool
slashing lines on the sides of the upper midsection).

And with our efficient techniques, such as X Reps, it
doesn’t take set after set to get the job done. In fact, our
X-traordinary ab routines take about 10 minutes! The keys
are quick full-range attacks with extended sets and
occlusion, or impeding blood flow, at the right times and
on the right exercises. But we’re getting ahead of
ourselves.

The first step is to understand how your abs function.
Then we’ll give you the tools to let ‘em rip!

—Steve Holman and Jonathan Lawson
IRON MAN Training & Research Center

When it comes to women, a little
bit of ab definition goes a long
way in creating an in-shape, sexy
aura. Jennifer Goodwin proves
that!
CHAPTER 1

Force and Range of Motion
Your midsection is the body part that people use to judge your physical condition. Most believe it reveals whether you’re in or out of shape. And when your stomach is flat with razor-sharp delineation, it rivets people’s eyes to your physique. Great abs scream healthy sex appeal. That’s the very reason a muscular midsection is a top priority of every body-conscious person alive, man or woman.

Unfortunately, most people miss the boat and waste far too much time when it comes to abdominal training. One reason is that they ignore the abs’ true range of motion. For example, everyone from personal trainers to aerobic gurus has hailed the standard crunch as the best all-around ab developer, but once you analyze it, you’ll see that it’s really only half an ab movement.

Any exercise physiologist will tell you that the full range of motion for the rectus abdominis is about 30 degrees past the point at which the floor stops your movement during standard crunches. In other words, to train your abdominals through a complete range, you must arch your back prior to pulling into the contracted position. Physiologists also say that a muscle’s strongest position is near it’s full-stretch position. That’s a key spot along an exercise’s stroke that you need to overload for fastest development (more on that later), and you don’t stress that semistretched position with standard crunches because you can’t arch your back to get elongation in the muscle.

By arching and allowing your upper back to travel past parallel all the way to 30 degrees behind the center point,
you prestretch your abdominals, which can activate the myotatic reflex. That’s an emergency response from your nervous system that helps you activate more midsection muscle fibers. Although the muscle isn’t at its strongest when it’s fully stretched, a prestretch does help you work the muscle more efficiently and effectively, which means you get faster, more complete development with fewer sets.

So a full-range crunch—as opposed to half a crunch that

The start position of the standard crunch (top) makes it only half an ab movement. Notice how the abs are already partially flexed before the movement begins. You don’t get full range of motion unless you’re able to arch your lower back, as with the full-range crunch, and your upper back travels past parallel before you curl your torso into the contracted position.
you perform on a flat surface—is much better, but that’s only part of the X-traordinary Abs solution.

Any experienced weight trainer will tell you that compound exercises, or movements that involve more than one muscle working at a time, are much more efficient than so-called isolation exercises. Why? Because the muscle structures are intertwined and designed to generate the most power when they work as a team. That’s the very reason the so-called bicycle exercise—on your back pulling opposite knee to elbow in alternating fashion as you pump your legs like you’re riding a bicycle—shows the most ab-muscle electrical activity in EMG studies. The bicycle is a compound exercise that brings in the hip flexors for more power production, or force generation (force is a key concept to keep in mind).

The crunch on the other hand, be it full-range or the half-baked variety, is an isolation exercise. You want to first train your abs with a compound movement, like the bicycle or kneeups (on the floor or on an incline bench; not hanging—we’ll explain why later), to engage the most muscle fibers. Remember, do a multiple-muscle exercise first. You don’t want to fill your abs with fatigue products, like lactic acid, by first doing an isolation move like crunches. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves again.

Let’s analyze the midsection’s structure and function and then we can better construct a number of powerful ab routines you can use to chisel your midsection in no time flat.
CHAPTER 2
Ab Analysis
When we talk about abdominals, we’re usually focusing on the rectus abdominis, the show muscle of the midsection. Although it looks like a number of knotty masses, it’s actually one sheetlike muscle running from the bottom of the rib cage down to the pelvis. The delineated ripples are caused by tendons running horizontally and vertically, not by separate muscle structures.

When you zero in on this one muscle with full-range exercise, it not only makes ab training much faster and simpler, but it also activates almost all of the other surrounding midsection muscles, such as the internal and external obliques. You must keep in mind, however, that the dominant rectus abdominis has two functions, and you should work both for fastest development:

- It curls your rib cage down toward your pelvis.
- It curls your hips up toward your torso.

While both actions involve the entire rectus abdominis muscle, some research indicates that pulling your rib cage down (crunch) tends to place more stress on the upper
region, and curling your hips up puts more emphasis on the lower area. While that’s debatable, it nevertheless reinforces the fact that there are two functions and you should always train both for the most rapid development possible.

And as we said, when picking exercises for your abs—or any bodypart—it’s important to isolate the target muscle, as you do for the rectus abdominis with crunching movements, but, more important, you need an efficient exercise that has synergy, or muscle-teamwork. In fact, those multiple-muscle exercises should get top priority. Movements such as incline kneeups and on-the-floor kneeups, or hip curls work the abdominals with the help of the hip flexors—much as squats work the quadriceps with the
help of the gluteal muscles. When you include compound, muscle-teamwork movements as well as isolation exercises, you get the most complete development possible as quickly as possible—but that's not all there is to it....

Another important point you need to consider is overloading the semistretched point—that's the max-force point of each exercise. It's the point along an exercise’s stroke at which the target muscle can generate the most force, and therefore it's the best spot to activate the majority of muscle fibers. Most trainees believe you involve the most fibers at the point of maximal contraction, like the top flexed position of a crunch; however, that's actually the weakest point.

Most trainees are taught to emphasize the contracted position of exercises; however, the point where the muscle can generate the most force is where the most fiber activation occurs. On almost every exercise that's where the target muscle is semistretched. On leg-raise exercises, that’s near the bottom of the stroke, where the legs are down and heels are near the floor.
Say what? You read that right. Physiologists say that because the muscle fibers are so bunched up at the point of max contraction, the muscle is incapable of firing as effectively as possible. To get optimal fiber alignment, there must be some stretch in the target muscle, but not to the extreme. Once again, we call it the semistretched point and consider that the sweet spot of every exercise. A good example is near the bottom of an incline kneeup, when your legs are almost straight, feet near the floor (see photo on the previous page). A bad example is a hanging kneeup—when your legs are hanging straight down, there is no resistance at that semistretched point. That makes hanging kneeups an inferior exercise due to lack of any overload at that key point on the stroke. (We neglected to point that out when we wrote The Ultimate Mass Workout e-book; however, we did show incline kneeups as the ultimate hip curl exercise, which it is.)

Obviously that max-force point is extremely important, and we believe it’s the reason so many old-time bodybuilders developed incredible abs with leg lifts—they were keeping tension on the rectus abdominis right at that key sweet spot.

We’ve covered a lot, so let’s do a quick review. Here are the key training points to remember and apply if you want to etch X-traordinary Abs fast:

Notice that there is almost zero resistance at the bottom of the hanging kneeup exercise. That’s the max-force point, and a key position you should overload for best results. Due to lack of resistance at the sweet spot, hanging kneeups go on the inferior-ab-exercise list. You must have max-force point resistance.
1) Work your abs through a full range of motion. On crunches you shouldn’t neglect the back-arched position—30 degrees to the rear of center—that prestretches the rectus abdominis for optimal fiber recruitment and also activates other midsection muscles, such as the external obliques and serratus (slashing muscles on the sides of your rib cage). And on kneeups you shouldn’t do them hanging because there’s almost no resistance in the bottom, semistretched position.

2) Train both of the rectus abdominis’ functions, including a movement that curls your rib cage toward your pelvis (full-range crunches), known as upper-ab work, as well as one that curls your hips toward your torso (incline kneeups, not hanging), the so-called lower-ab work.

3) Exercises that isolate the abs are important, but first you want to do a compound movement that hits the abs with the help of other muscle groups, such as the hip flexors. Synergy speeds development because muscles are designed to work best in tandem, not in isolation. You want max muscle stimulation first, then you can isolate. Note that most full-range hip-curl-function exercises (kneeups) include synergy, which is why they should take priority over isolation moves (crunches).

4) Somehow, some way you need to emphasize the max-force-generation point, or semistretched position. Those of you familiar with our Web site know how we get it done—with X Reps. Let’s discuss that technique, one of our favorite bodybuilding topics. (It gets us jazzed because it has given us some of the greatest gains of our training careers!)
CHAPTER 3

X Reps: The Fast-Twitch Switch
Reps, as you know if you’ve read either X-treme Lean or The Ultimate Mass Workout e-books, are end-of-set partials performed at the max-force point of any exercise. That technique can make a set two to five times as effective as a standard set to failure. Why? It has to do with how muscle fibers are recruited and nerve force.

When you do a set of, say, 10 reps to positive failure—the point at which you can’t do another full rep in good form—the size principle of muscle-fiber recruitment is in play throughout that set. Here’s how that domino effect works: First the low-threshold motor units fire on the first few reps, followed by the mediums, followed by the high-threshold motor units at the end of the set. When those highs engage, end-of-set partial pulses, or X Reps, at the semistretched point can keep the fast-twitch fibers engaged, making a set much more effective.
that’s when you’re recruiting the pure fast-twitch fibers, the ones with the most growth potential. That’s why body-builders always say that the last reps in a set are the most important—it’s when those ultimate growth fibers are activated; however, if you take a set to positive failure, a combination of fatigue and nervous system fizzle stops you early every time. That means you don’t get at very many of those key fibers in any single set because of that built-in protective mechanism (thanks a lot, Mother Nature!).

To overcome that critical muscle-building limitation a lot of trainees do more sets. Each additional set gives you a bit more, or different, fast-twitch activation, as fiber-recruitment order will vary. Does that volume approach sound inefficient? You bet it does! All that time and extra up-front reps just to get at a few more fast-twitch fibers. If you don’t like wasting time and effort, then X Reps are right up your alley.

Instead of stopping a set when you can’t do another full rep, you move the resistance to the max-force point—remember, that’s where you can activate the most fibers—and pulse in a four-to-eight-inch range. That keeps the fast-twitch fibers firing, giving you one heck of a supercharged set. If you get four to eight of those partials, you’ll do as much or more to stimulate growth in the target muscle than two to four extra sets to positive failure. It’s why we call extended-set workout time-bomb training—it’s faster and more efficient.

For example, on incline kneeups, when you can no longer get your knees near your chest, the abs’ weaker contracted position, you lower and extend your legs to where your feet are about five inches off the ground, the abs strongest position, and you pulse. Just because you can’t get into a muscle’s weakest position (full
contraction) doesn’t mean you should stop. Simply move to the stronger sweet spot so you leapfrog nervous system failure and can better cope with the fatigue in order to force the muscle to keep firing.

The same goes for full-range crunches or Ab Bench crunches. When you can’t get anymore full reps, pull up just slightly out of the stretch position—where your back is still somewhat arched—and pulse, feeling your rectus abdominis firing.

We’re not going to kid you. It’s painful, like a blowtorch is being held to your lower midsection, but the results are well worth it. You’ll almost feel the new canyons being dredged into your abs as you fight the burn, pulse through your Xes and get ultimate muscle stimulation. (We’ll have more on X Reps in Chapter 5.)

Bonus: Extra fiber recruitment is only one of the benefits of X Reps. We mentioned the incredible burn. Research shows that the searing effect is a primary stimulus of growth hormone. What’s so great about GH? Well, it is somewhat anabolic in that it can spur fiber growth, but the real benefit as far as your chiseled abs are concerned is fat burning. It’s notorious for helping shed bodyfat like crazy. Keep that in mind as you X-tend your sets and chase the burn. It means faster results!—less fat and visible abs much sooner.

And speaking of burn, there’s another way to get that important effect that’s been shown to do incredible things for both muscle size and strength: occlusion, or blocking blood flow.
CHAPTER 4

Occlusion: Blood-Bath Aftermath
What the heck is occlusion (no, it's not a shocking conclusion—that would be oh!-clusion). It's blocking blood flow to the muscle, which can dramatically increase size and strength. By the way, you do want to build your rectus abdominis muscle because that will make the tendons sit deeper and give you more pronounced abs (even standing relaxed if your bodyfat is low enough). Remember, the rectus abdominis has a flat structure, so building it will not give you a big belly—just the opposite, in fact, as a stronger midsection will act as a natural girdle, thanks to the transverse abdominis, the muscle wrapping your midsection that keeps it tight.

Back to occlusion: One study showed that subjects who used a tourniquet above the forearms for two minutes prior to a set of wrist curls got an immediate 20 percent strength increase over the subjects who didn’t block blood flow prior to the set. Then there was the Japanese scientist who got an 8 percent increase in quad cross-sectional area in only two weeks with occlusion training. Is that good? Well, it took him four months to get that same size gain with conventional methods. Amazing.

The immediate strength gains may have something to do with more blood ramping up muscle energetics, while the dramatic

Stopping blood flow to the abs with continuous tension can help you produce faster results—if you use it correctly.

size increases may be the result of either fiber remodeling or getting new growth from different fibers (and being a bodybuilder, you want a big dose of all of the above in every bodypart, not just your abs). Let’s talk strength first...

If you block blood flow to a muscle for a minute or two, the moment you remove the occlusion, it’s like a damn breaking—blood floods to the bodypart like a tidal wave. That means there’s much more oxygen available to the muscle. Think about that in relation to the size principle of fiber recruitment—the low threshold motor units fire first (slow-twitch endurance fibers), followed by the mediums followed by the high-threshold motor units.

It could be that with so much more oxygen-carrying blood in the muscle, the slow-twitch endurance fibers (low threshold) and the fast-twitch fibers with more endurance capacity (medium threshold) carry more of the load early in the set, sparing more fast-twitch recruitment for later. That would result in more reps, i.e. impressive strength, and more fiber stimulation all around. Interesting stuff.

Bodybuilders tend to focus on the pure fast-twitch fibers because they’ve had it hammered into their heads that those are the ones with the most growth potential. That’s true, but growth in the slow-twitch fibers and more endurance-oriented fast-twitch fibers will obviously improve the size of a bodypart as well, especially an endurance-oriented muscles like the forearms, calves, quads and abs.

Did you get that? Occlusion appears to do great things for endurance-oriented fibers, and the abs are dominated by those types, much like the forearms. That means your rectus abdominis is tailor made for the occlusion blood-bath technique—more blood, more oxygen, better endurance-fiber recruitment.
You should know that even conventional heavy resistance training will build both type 1 (slow-twitch) and type 2 (fast-twitch) fibers (Kraemer, Patton, et al. 1995) but it obviously favors the type 2s. Occlusion may favor type 1 growth, as well as endurance-oriented type 2s—and therefore give you greater overall muscle increases much quicker. Remember, lots of fiber types growing at once translates into more muscle in record time.

It sounds good so far, but how do you block blood flow to your abs? The answer is continuous-tension sets for the target muscle. When it comes to your midsection, a good choice is full-range crunches, with no rest at the top or bottom of any of the reps, or Ab Bench crunches.

We’re getting ahead of ourselves again. Let’s back up and discuss the best ab exercises, and then we’ll outline some X-traordinary Ab routines that include occlusion from X Reps as well as from higher-rep continuous-tension exercises to get your abs into the chiseled-granite category fast.
CHAPTER 5

Ultimate Ab Exercises
As we said, on-the-floor crunches and hanging kneeups are lame ab exercises. Not ineffective, just inefficient (and unfortunately we made some of our previous ab programs less efficient by including hanging kneeups in our other e-books—sorry about that). Remember, scientists say that the most effective muscle-training point, or the optimal fiber-recruitment spot, is where the muscle can produce the most force. That’s the place on an exercise’s stroke where the target muscle can generate peak power. We call it the sweet spot.

To reach it on standard crunches, your torso has to somehow go slightly below floor level. Otherwise you miss it—no stretch against resistance occurs in your abs. On hanging kneeups the max force point is where your legs are down away from your torso, your lower back is slightly arched and your rectus abdominis is semistretched. Again, it’s near the bottom where there’s very little resistance on your abs. Lack of overload at the semistretched point is bad news if you’re looking for best results. Or, to put it another way, lame.

We need to tweak those inefficient moves so that you can somehow, some way train the semistretched point with resistance. It’s a matter of getting more resistance at that key point where the target muscle is somewhat elongated. Let’s take the freehand crunch first. To make it better, you should do the movement on a bench press bench with your upper back hanging off the end and your feet up on a bar placed on the uprights. From that position you can get that important back arch, reaching semistretch prior to pulling up into a full contraction (see the start/finish photos on the next page).

You can also do full-range crunches on a couch if you train abs at home (or in a hotel lobby if you’re on vacation and want to freak people out). Position yourself so your
back is on the seat cushion and your legs are bent with your heels on the back of the couch. You’ll look like you’re sitting in a rocketship preparing for takeoff. Your upper body should be hanging off the edge of the seat so you achieve some back arch at the start of each rep (see the photos below).

How about the hanging kneeup? If instead of hanging you do the exercise on an incline—head at the top of a slant board—you will maintain resistance at the low point, that all-important max-force spot. Beginners can start by doing kneeups on the floor. The move should look like a leg lift at first, and then morph into a hip roll so that your knees are slightly bent and end up over your chest with your feet high and over your face. Don’t let your feet move

You can do full-range crunches on a couch, although getting into and out of position may be tricky.
over your head or you’ll lose tension on your abs. Keep your hands flat on the floor at your sides for leverage.

Don’t use momentum on either of those exercises. For example, don’t jerk your head with your hands or throw your head forward on crunches, and don’t swing your feet up on kneeups. You want to keep tension on your abs throughout the set on both exercises. That means you should maintain a fairly slow cadence—say, two seconds up and two seconds down. Hold the contracted position for a count on both exercises, but don’t pause at the stretch point. Simply reverse your movement without hesitating.

On-the-floor kneeups is a good hip-curl exercise for beginning and early intermediate trainees. Your feet should come down a little lower than the photo at left— to a point where your heels graze the floor.

Semistretched position.

Kneeups on an incline provide more resistance, but as your strength increases, you’ll have to add resistance via cables or attached weight.
Make Good Exercises X-traordinary

All right, you’ve got a couple of good starter exercises—full-range crunches and lying or incline knee ups. But what if you’re more advanced and can do 30 reps on those with no sweat? You don’t want to just keep adding reps, you need to add resistance.

The obvious way to do that on full-range crunches is to hold a barbell plate behind your head or high on your chest. As you get stronger, that’s going to get more and more uncomfortable, however, not to mention dangerous (jostling a 45 over your face is a recipe for dental surgery). A better solution, if you—or the owner of the gym at which you work out—can afford it, is the Ab Bench.

The Ab Bench is an ingenious machine that allows you to add resistance to full-range crunches. You get full-range movement because you sit with your lower back against a rounded pad. That allows you to arch and move through that key semistretched position on every rep, comfortably and smoothly. You get resistance from a cable that runs back behind the seat over a pulley and down to a barbell-plate holder (see the photos below). You hold the handles, which are at the top end of the cable, on your chest, and as you crunch forward the movement of your chest lifts the plates off the floor. Full-
range crunches never felt so good—until the severe burn starts, that is.

The next-best torso-curling solution is cable crunches with low-back support (pictured above). Get a preacher curl bench with a seat and drag it over to the cable crossover machine. Place it like you’re going to do preacher curls on the low cable, but set the preacher pad low enough so that when you sit on the seat backward, the pad is against your lower back. Grab a rope attachment that’s connected to the high cable, face away from the machine and sit on the seat. Hold the ends of the rope on your chest and crunch forward. Hold for a count, and then release back. As you lower the weight to the start, allow the resistance to pull your torso into an arched-back position, over the pad, on each rep. Notice that you’re mimicking the Ab Bench’s full-range action.

On to kneeups. This one can be a bit tricky when it comes to adding resistance. The best way in the beginning is to secure a light dumbbell to your feet. Some people may have the coordination to hold the dumbbell between their feet, but a Velcro strap will help to keep the weight secure (a recommended dental-surgery-avoidance technique). Or you can get some ankle straps with hooks.
to connect your feet to a low cable on the crossover machine. Using a cable can be a bit awkward, but if you have a smooth-riding weight stack, you’ll quickly get the hang of it and be able to attack the sweet spot with plenty of resistance as you gain strength. Ankle weights can also work.

Speaking of the sweet spot, keep in mind that you want to overload the max-force point for best results—so you don’t have to do a lot of sets. Remember, once you hit positive failure, you still have power left at the strongest point on the stroke—the semistretched point. If you like the idea of getting the best ab-etching results with a routine that lasts about 10 minutes, then you’ll want to use that extra power to turbocharge your workouts with extended sets.

**X-tended Sets to X-elerate Results**

Doing a set till you can’t get anymore full reps is the way you activate the most fast-twitch fibers possible. Well, not quite. As we explained in Chapter 3, you can get more out of any set if you go past failure with partial reps. Let’s review why end-of-set partials are so important for faster results.

According to the size principle of fiber recruitment, you start a set with your low-threshold motor units firing. Then, after a few reps, you bring in the mediums, and at the end of the set, when the reps are difficult, you recruit the high-threshold motor units. Those last reps are when the fastest-growing fast-twitch fibers are firing, and they are what bring forth your rippling abs—eventually.

There’s a problem, however. On any set to positive failure, your nervous system craps out early, before you can get at a lot of the key fibers. What does that mean? Just as you start to activate those important fast-twitch
fibers, your nervous system loses power and you can no longer fire through the full range. What do you usually do when that happens? You stop the set. But when you stop at that positive-failure point, you’ve trained very few fast-twitch fibers—some scientists estimate it to be as low as 30 percent.

So one set to failure doesn’t even get at a third of the key fibers. Can you just do more sets? That may work, as you tend to get a different recruitment pattern, and bring in a few more fresh fibers on each additional set. But think of all that energy you waste—all those preliminary reps just to get at a few more fibers toward the end. A better, more efficient way is to extend the set so you continue to blast fast-twitch fibers after full-range failure.

As you saw in Chapter 3, the best way to extend a set to make it exponentially more effective is with partials at the max-force point. That area of the stroke is important to stress throughout the set for fiber recruitment, but it becomes crucial at the end after full-range failure. Why? It’s where the muscle is the strongest, so when you can’t get anymore full reps, you can override nervous system weakness and contracted-position failure by powering out partials at that key semistretched point. That means much more muscle stimulation.

Here’s how you crank up the anabolic acceleration on any set: When you reach positive failure, move to the sweet spot and continue with partial reps to keep fast-twitch fibers firing. Simply pulse in a five-to-eight-inch range. That’s much more efficient than doing set after set (the way most bodybuilders train). Each X-Rep set—X because they extend the set and make it exponentially more productive—is about three to five times as effective as a standard positive-failure set. Very efficient! All that extra grow power is due to turbocharging fast-twitch fiber
recruitment at the back-end.

Okay, let’s get specific. It’s full-range crunch time, and you’ve reached positive failure—you can no longer pull your torso into the weak contracted position. Don’t stop the set! Instead, move to the point at which your back is slightly arched—the strong semistretched position—and pulse up and back in about a five-inch range (if you use an Ab Bench it will be less awkward, more controlled and more comfortable). The same goes for kneeups. When you reach the point in the set that you can’t get your legs up into the fully contracted position, hold your feet off the ground, knees almost locked so your rectus abdominis is engaged in the semistretched position, and pulse your feet up and down. Raise them to the point at which your hips could start coming off the bench or the floor. (Incidentally, old-time bodybuilders, including Zabo “Abs” Koszewski, used to do straight sets of those X-Rep leg lifts, stressing the max-force point with long tension times. That could be a big reason Zabo won so many best-abs awards back in his day—semistretched-position overload.)

If you have trouble getting enough X Reps at the back end of a set of kneeups, or you just want to extend the set further, you can immediately move to a flat bench and continue with sitting V-ups, which are really exaggerated X Reps. Sit on a flat bench with your hands gripping the sides, torso angled back at about 45 degrees and your feet on the floor. With a slight bend in your knees raise
your legs as high as you can—till your knees are at about chest level. You’ll be in a V position. Lower and repeat. Keep pumping, no pauses at the top or bottom, till you can’t raise your feet off the floor. These will really set your abs on fire, especially if you do them immediately after a set of incline kneeups (see the photo on the previous page).

On a personal note, we both used those end-of-bench exaggerated X Reps, or V-ups, during our final ripping phase last year, and our lower abs were more sliced than ever. Jonathan has had trouble over the years getting that last low-ab line, but X-ing at the max-force point did the trick. They sliced and diced his abs top to bottom.

### X-traordinary Ab Exercises

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hip curl/Synergy</th>
<th>Torso curl/Isolation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• On-the-floor kneeups</td>
<td>• Full-range crunches on bench press bench</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Incline kneeups</td>
<td>• Full-range cable crunches with lower-back support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Weighted incline kneeups</td>
<td>• Ab Bench crunches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6

X-traordinary Ab Workouts
Before we outline the best programs to get your abs sliced and diced, here’s an important reminder: Do your hip-curl exercises first most of the time. Why? It has to do with fatigue and getting the most bang for your effort buck (it’s that efficiency thing again). Because hip-curl exercises require synergy, or muscle teamwork, you’re able to train the rectus abdominis harder and get more of the muscle involved.

Studies indicate that most hip-curl exercises, like incline kneeups, train the entire rectus abdominis hard with an emphasis on the lower section. Torso-curl exercises, on the other hand, are more isolated and tend to train less of the muscle, mostly the upper section, but are necessary because of that upper-area focus.

If you got all of that, you should realize that if you do full-range crunches first, you’ll fatigue your upper abs, with less total muscle involvement. That means when you get to your kneeups, your upper abs will be fatigued and you won’t be able to do justice to your so-called lower abs. You’ve therefore lessened the effectiveness of the more important exercise and de-emphasized lower-ab delineation.

To put it another way, your upper rectus abdominis can work somewhat independently of the lower part of the muscle; however, when you work the lower portion with a kneeup exercise, your upper rectus abdominis always comes into play.

So the rule is: Always work the lower area first, which actually brings both upper and lower sections into play—more muscle activation. Hip-curl exercises are more important, so kick off your ab workouts with one of those synergistic movements—which is just what we do with our first basic X-traordinary Ab Program:
Basic X-traordinary Abs Program

On-the-floor kneeups 2 x 10-15
Full-range crunches 2 x 10-15

Nothing complicated—and no X Reps yet. This is more of a beginning program or a workout you can use to break back into training your abs after a layoff.

Once you get over the initial soreness and can do 15 reps on each set, move to the next workout:

Basic X-traordinary Abs X-Rep Program

Incline kneeups
(X Reps in the low position at the end of the second set) 2 x 10-12
Weighted full-range crunches
(X Reps in the low position at the end of the second set) 2 x 10-12

This is more of an intermediate ab routine, and you add X Reps at the end of the second set of each exercise to turbocharge fast-twitch fiber recruitment. Why only the second set? Because the first set primes your nervous system to fire more efficiently—acting as an intense warmup. You can do X Reps on both sets; however, we’ve found that can be too taxing for most intermediate trainees.
X-traordinary Abs Superset Program

Incline kneeups (with resistance if necessary) 1 x 10-12
Superset
   Incline kneeups (X Reps in the low position) 1 x 10-12
   Bench V-ups 1 x max
Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches 1 x 10-12
Superset
   Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches (X Reps near stretch position) 1 x 10-12
   Full-range crunches (on bench press bench) 1 x 10-12

Notice that you do one straight set of the key exercise for your lower abs first. You rest for 2 1/2 minutes, then you follow with a superset, two exercises back to back, that includes X Reps on the first exercise. You then do the same for your upper abs.

The above program ups the tension time on each ab area with supersets, which can be very important. Because the rectus abdominis supports your torso all day long, it contains a lot of endurance-oriented muscle fibers. Doing sets back to back is a great way to attack that characteristic and ignite delineating results. (We say ignite because you’ll feel the burn!)
Advanced X-traordinary Abs Tri-set Program

Tri-set
Incline kneeups (with resistance; X Reps in the low position) 1 x 10-12
Bench V-ups 1 x max
Incline kneeups or on-the-floor kneeups (X Reps in the low position) 1 x 10-12

Tri-set
Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches (X Reps near the stretch position) 1 x 10-12
Full-range crunches (on bench press bench) 1 x max
Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches (less weight than on first set; X Reps near stretch) 1 x 8-10

Don’t jump right into this one; you have to have at least six months of previous training experience or you’ll fatigue too fast and diminish the program’s effectiveness. Notice that you do three movements in rapid succession—and you include X Reps on the first and last exercise in each tri-set (three exercises back to back). If you get to the last exercise and can’t muster any partials at the end, do a static hold till failure. You should be able to pulse eventually.

Tri-setting, like supersetting, is an excellent strategy for abs due to the muscle’s high-endurance capability—lots of slow-twitch and intermediary fast-twitch fibers. Once you’re able to tolerate tri-sets and you need something
more, move on to the powerful occlusion technique.

**Advanced X-traordinary Abs Occlusion Program**

Incline kneeups (with resistance)  
Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches*  
Superset  
Incline kneeups (X Reps in the low position)  
Bench V-ups  
Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches  
Incline kneeups or on-the-floor kneeups*  
Superset  
Full-range cable crunches with low-back support or Ab Bench crunches  
(X Reps near stretch position)  
Full-range crunches  
(on bench press bench)

*Occlusion exercise used to block blood for an extended time to produce unique fiber recruitment. See Chapter 4.

This is a fairly extensive routine, but it still should take less than 15 minutes—if that. You do a straight set of the key exercise, rest, then do a high-rep, continuous-tension exercise for occlusion, rest, then do a superset with X Reps for the section you’re blasting to take advantage of the extra blood in the muscle and ramp up fiber activation.

Keep in mind that X Reps produce an occlusion effect no matter what exercise you use them on.
CHAPTER 7

Midsection-Perfection

Q&A
Q: Have you heard from anyone who’s used one of those electronic ab stimulators? Do they work? To be honest, I bought one, used it, and the next day I didn’t feel any soreness or anything, which to me is a sign that maybe it doesn’t work.

A: Electronic muscle stimulators are just that—mild muscle stimulators. They can provide a bit of hardness because they do contract the muscle, but not enough to build an appreciable amount of tissue. If anything, they’re an adjunct to weight training in that they can increase neuromuscular efficiency in the target muscle, but that’s about it. In other words, you could use the machine on days that you don’t train your abs with conventional exercise to enhance recovery and build the muscle’s contraction capability—which can increase the effectiveness of your regular ab workouts. As a stand-alone training device, however, the electronic stimulators aren’t even as good as freehand exercise. Most of them just don’t provide enough intensity.

You may want to try the electronic stimulator on your off days to increase recovery and neuromuscular efficiency. Keep in mind, however, that no matter how muscular your midsection gets, you won’t see a damn thing if you have a layer of fat, so be sure to follow the fat-loss guidelines in X-treme Lean.

Q: I think the diets in the X-treme Lean e-book make a lot of sense, and I’m ready to give the program a try. My question is, How do I customize my
diet so that it’s geared more toward my taste preferences yet stays true to the macronutrient percentages of the X-treme Lean diets? Also, how do you develop the mind-set to eat the same foods every day until you achieve your goals?

A: When we decide to get lean, our mind-sets change from a live-to-eat attitude to an eat-to-live one—actually, it’s more of an eat-to-etch attitude. You have to think of everything you put in your mouth as a contribution to your muscle-building, fat-burning goals. That’s in contrast to our winter diets: We loosen up and eat more of what we want (within reason), and, yes, we do put on some fat; however, we try not to let it get out of hand (Jonathan is better at it than Steve because Jonathan doesn’t have kids who stock the pantries with cookies and candy). We try to maintain visual contact with our abs—although sometimes it takes just the right light to see ridges. We know that come spring, however, we’ll buckle down, which means eating pretty much the same thing every day.

We do vary our last meal of the day every so often—at least until the final few weeks of our peaking phase. Also the mandatory cheat day on the weekends helps keep us sane and our bodyfat melting away due to stable leptin levels (that’s all explained in X-treme Lean). Those strategies help ease our bodyfat down to around 5 percent. Keep in mind that the extreme, rigid diet the last few weeks is not how a person should always eat; it’s meant to achieve extreme results, namely, very low bodyfat.
As for your diet, you don’t have to be so worried about hitting the macronutrient totals we list in X-treme Lean. Just try to keep your protein a little higher than carbs and fat in the 20-to-30-percent range, getting it mostly from good fats, such as are found in nuts and other EFA-containing foods. Also, if you can, try the Carb-Stacking approach that’s explained. It puts most of your carbs in the morning and around your workout, which is when they’re less likely to have in impact on bodyfat storage.

If you want to use different foods, simply substitute similar items. For example, you could have yogurt instead of cottage cheese, turkey or even beef jerky instead of chicken, oatmeal instead of cold cereal and so on (there are meal substitutes listed in X-treme Lean). Even a small amount of variety can help you stick with the six-meals-a-day plan, not go hungry and have you dropping fat like a bad habit. Just keep in mind that bad habits take work and persistence to break, so keep your willpower stoked. Chant “eat to etch” before every meal.

Q: Bodybuilding magazines write a lot about growth hormone release, but how important is it really to muscle hypertrophy? Many people think it’s insignificant.

A: GH alone is probably insignificant to muscle hypertrophy; however, it synergizes with other anabolic hormones, like testosterone, to make them much more potent. It’s the reason pro bodybuilders often stack GH, anabolic steroids and insulin. GH tends to amplify the effects of other anabolic hormones.

On another note, GH is very significant for fat burning and seems to have a strengthening effect on tendons and ligaments. So it does do good things for bodybuilders. That’s one reason there are drop sets in most of our programs—raising lactic acid levels in the blood promotes
GH release and therefore enhances fat burning, not to mention anabolic hormone reactions. X Reps at the end of a set also amplify the burning effect of any exercise, so you’re getting more fiber recruitment and fat burning.

Q: My main goal is to lose the fat around my stomach. I’ve read that not eating before a workout causes you to burn more fat—that is, as opposed to eating an hour before. But won’t I lose muscle if I fast that long before a workout?

A: Always eat a protein-dominant meal about an hour before you train, as that will get aminos circulating and help prevent catabolism, a muscle meltdown that shuttles that tissue into the energy furnace. We like a few scoops of Muscle-Link’s Pro-Fusion, but you can use any micellar casein-whey combination protein. You want a mixture of fast and slow protein so you have aminos circulating during your entire workout.

Keep in mind that weight training doesn’t burn a lot of fat, as glycogen is the primary fuel for anaerobic activity; however, it does stimulate the metabolism to burn more fat after the workout—more so than aerobic exercise. If you want to burn even more fat, do cardio immediately after your weight workout. Because you’ve removed a lot of blood sugar during your weight training, your body will tap into your fat stores much quicker during your postworkout cardio.

Q: You guys use supplements. I’m on a budget and can’t afford much of anything. Can I still get results?

A: Absolutely! You can make amazing progress simply spreading out your meals over five or six smaller feedings a day—without taking a single supplement. If you’re using one of the diets in X-treme Lean, choose appropriate substitution meals to replace the protein shakes in that
diet. For example, when a meal replacement is listed, you can use one of the X-treme Lean Meal Options on page 42 of that e-book instead. You could eat the soup with a few slices of cheese as a midafternoon snack or turkey jerky and raisins (only a few; they are high in carbs) or an apple. Even a couple of fast-food chicken tacos can work in a pinch, as listed in the e-book, or a chicken or tuna salad. Always be sure there are at least 20 grams of protein (more is preferable), no more than 20 grams of carbs (10 grams is better) and the total calorie count for the meal is around 300. Those should be your guidelines for every meal (except the one right after your workout; more on that in a moment).

Powders are mainly for convenience. Most people don’t have time to heat up soup, for instance, or even scrounge up some turkey jerky and fruit. It’s easier to rip open a packet of powder with the right protein, carb and fat percentages and blend up a shake (Steve takes his to work premixed in a thermos, so all he has to do is shake and drink—quick and easy).

Do keep in mind that whatever you eat costs money, even if it’s soup and cheese. Does it add up to the cost of a meal replacement packet? Well, we use Muscle Meals, and it costs about the same as most meal replacements: Each packet is about $2, but you get 40 grams of protein with various vitamins, minerals and immune system boosters. Does the time, effort and ingredients of a solid-food meal you have to whip together cost less? You’ll have to determine that. We think protein supplements should be included in your grocery bill because they are food and you use them to supplement your other meals. That means the quantity of solid food you eat should go down if you use powders, which will significantly reduce your grocery bill and make room for at least a few protein
supplements.

As for postworkout shakes, they can get pricey. Serious bodybuilders have no problem shelling out a few bucks for a quality postworkout powder because they know it's their most important muscle-building meal. After a workout is when the anabolic window is wide open, so you need to get enough of the right nutrients. If you simply can’t afford something like our X Stack (which is RecoverX and CreaSol titrated creatine, available at www.X-Stack.com), here's a good alternative, the Postworkout Power Shake:

- 8 ounces lowfat vanilla yogurt (you can use any flavor)
- 1 medium banana
- 1 cup of milk (2 percent fat)
- 1 raw egg
- ice cubes for texture (optional)
- water to thin (if necessary)

That will give you about 500 calories, 70 grams of carbs, 30 grams of protein and 9 grams of fat. The drawback is that it's somewhat slow getting nutrients into your bloodstream. Postworkout powders have fast carbs, fast protein and zero fat, which is best for optimizing that prime grow time. There's more on that at www.X-Stack.com.

Q: I need to get ripped fast. Your diets in X-treme Lean decrease calories every few weeks. That appears to be the most sensible way. How fast can I expect to lose this unsightly baggage if I go that route?

A: When it comes to weight loss, anything more than about 2 1/2 pounds per week tends to dip into muscle tissue. If you value your physique, you’ll be patient and try
to stay in that range. That means if you have about 20 pounds to lose, figure to stay strict for about 10 weeks, if everything goes well. Notice that Steve’s diet that’s listed in X-treme Lean is a little higher in carbs percentagewise than Jonathan’s throughout the ripping phase, although Steve’s carbs do come down as he reduces his calories. He ends up at about 150 grams, which is about 30 percent of total calories from carbs. Steve’s metabolism appears to be less carb sensitive than Jonathan’s, which just goes to show you that you have to experiment to figure out your own best strategy.

Remember, lower-carb diets work because they can keep insulin output to a minimum, but that’s not the only reason. The glucose from carbs is your body’s number-one fuel source. If you don’t provide a lot in your diet—or if the amount you do provide is only enough to fill up your muscles’ glycogen stores after an intense workout—your body is forced to burn bodyfat for fuel. That can speed the leaning out process as you gradually reduce your calories.

Q: I’m 52 and have worked out on and off since I was a teen. These days every time I try to put on mass, it all goes to my midsection. My arms and chest seem to show only small amounts of growth. I’ve been working out seriously five days a week for the past seven months and have lost a lot of bodyfat. I have about 200 pounds of solid muscle on my 225-pound frame. My midsection started at 45 inches, went down to 37 and then blew back up to 41 when I tried to add some muscle size. The results are always the same, whether I’m eating 2,000 calories a day or 4,000. Help!

A: Steve’s noticed that as he’s gotten older (45), it’s
become much harder for him to lose bodyfat, especially around his midsection. That’s the last place it leaves. A slower metabolism means it’s most important to do everything right, very little deviation. Here are a few tips:

• Gradually reduce your calories. Start at 3,500 per day in the winter, and move down to around 2,000 over the course of three months (a good New Year’s resolution you can keep).

• Be sure you’re eating six times a day, small meals with at least 20 grams of protein in each one.

• In the spring gradually ramp up your cardio. Steve likes walking, while Jonathan prefers an exercise bike. Steve starts at one day a week, running or walking about 1 1/2 miles. By the time summer arrives, he’s walking or jogging about 2 1/2 miles four or five days a week, and Jonathan is often riding his exercise bike twice a day.

• Weight training is the best metabolic stimulator, so training five days a week is best. In the winter, however, you may want to reduce it to three or four so you’re sure to recover optimally and build more muscle while you have a calorie surplus. (The more muscle you can build, the more calories your body burns at rest.)

• When your calories get to around 2,500, be sure to increase your carb intake one day a week. That helps keep leptin levels stable so you continue to burn fat and don’t get uncontrollable cravings. (There’s more on our cardio programs, leptin and proper ripping cycles in our e-book X-treme Lean, available at www.X-tremeLean.com.)

Q: You say to cheat on my diet one day per week to keep leptin levels normal and the fat burning moving forward. I’m very disciplined, and that seems to be difficult for me. Do you have any suggestions on how I can have a cheat day without too much guilt.
A: The first thing you can do is eat a fairly substantial breakfast on your cheat day. We like to include oat-bran pancakes and syrup to get the carbs up. Then a few hours later have a meal replacement drink that contains carbs. If you follow your normal diet for the rest of the day after that you will have accomplished your goal of pushing up your carbs to a higher level. Another thing that helps us cope on cheat day is to always include some cardio activity. It helps your mental state to know that you’re burning off some of those excess carbs.

Q: Which is the better fat-burning activity, treadmill or cycling?

A: Let’s go to the research to answer that question. Twelve men engaged in exercise on either a treadmill or an exercise bike. According to the researchers, the treadmill produced a higher level of fat oxidation than cycling, but the intensity at which fat oxidation was maximized was the same for both forms of exercise. Maximum fat burning occurred at the level of 61.2 percent of VO₂MAX during the cycling and 59.2 percent during the treadmill exercise, which consisted of uphill walking. (Achten, J., et al. [2003]. Fat oxidation rates are higher during running compared...
with cycling over a wide range of intensities. Metabolism. 52:747-52.)

Treadmill exercise leads to a greater level of fat burning because while you’re doing it, the adrenal glands release stress hormones, or catecholamines, such as epinephrine and norepinephrine. The catecholamines mobilize fat from fat cells by: 1) suppressing insulin release and 2) promoting cyclic AMP, which then begins a cascade in fat cells that leads to the release of fat into the blood.

The greater the amount of muscle mass trained, the greater the level of catecholamine release and consequent fat oxidation during aerobics. Standing on the treadmill uses more muscle mass than seated cycling, so you burn more fat. It’s as simple as that. So if you’re interested in the most fat-burning bang for your energy buck, choose the treadmill over the stationary bike. If you hate the treadmill, however, as Jonathan does, stick with the bike—or at least mix it up.

Q: It seems like no matter what body part I work, one tri-set [three exercises back to back, one sequence] isn’t enough. Can I do two rounds?

A: You may have low neuromuscular efficiency, or nerve-force ability. Or maybe you’re just very motivated and want to do more. Either way, you can do two rounds, going through the tri-set a second time after a rest of about two to three minutes; however, we suggest doing the second tri-set without any X Reps. The reason is that you’re moving into volume-training territory.

The two extremes of muscle building are high-intensity extended-set training and volume training. When you use X Reps along with supersets and/or tri-sets, you’re using more of a high-intensity approach. If you do lots of straight sets, stopping short of failure to pace yourself, you’re using a volume approach.
In the bodybuilding world Mike Mentzer and Dorian Yates used the high-intensity method, pushing their work sets past failure with only about four to six work sets per bodypart. Bill Pearl, one of the legends of the sport who won the Mr. Universe in his 40s, was at the other extreme. He used about 20 straight sets per bodypart, none of which were to failure.

That’s a long-winded explanation to tell you that if you use more high-intensity methods, you need fewer work sets. If you add more volume, as you’re wanting to do, you should back off the intensity. So, once again, if you do a second tri-set, don’t include X Reps on any of the exercises in that second sequence.

Q: Can I do full-range crunches on a Swiss ball?

A: Yes, that may be more comfortable than hanging your upper back off the end of a bench. Hold a weight plate on your chest or behind your head to add resistance. Keep your feet flat on the floor and your hips stationary throughout the set.

Q: Does having a six-pack really make a difference in how others look at you?

A: Absolutely. Once they see your six-pack, they’ll want to be your drinking buddy. Oh, you mean six-pack abs (sorry, when you’re dieting a cold beer pops into your mind when you hear six-pack).

When you’re out at the beach or lake and shirts come off, be prepared for lots of attention. All eyes will focus on your chiseled midsection and mouths will be ajar—at least for a few seconds. You’ll get lots of compliments—sometimes from total strangers—and loads of questions about ab workouts and diet (please mention this e-book).

Oh, and people will still want to party with you, but usually just the opposite sex.
CHAPTER 8

Top 9 X-traordinary Ab Myths
As we’ve said throughout this book, there’s something about a ripped set of abs that grabs onlookers by the throat and rivets their eyeballs. Sure, big arms get a few lingering glances and can make some women’s hearts skip a beat, but there’s no comparison to a chiseled midsection. Awesome abs can put ladies into a trance (“Oh, can I touch those?”—those being your rolling ripples of rock-hard ruggedness. What did you think we were talking about?). Hell, you can have big arms, but if they’re hanging next to a bloated belly, you won’t get the longing looks that a tight midsection attracts. Let’s face it, the abs have got it going on!

By now you don’t need convincing that your midsection has the power to attract like a shiny new Porsche (well, almost). What you do need are a few more facts and some review of ones we’ve already covered to seal the deal and get you on the road to abs that stand out like dense cubes of polished granite, even when you’re standing relaxed. (Doesn’t that sound exciting!) So let’s close this book by exploding a few myths so you can speed toward that six-pack.

Myth 1: The abs are a bunch of knotted muscle masses. We touched on this earlier, but it bears repeating so you can better visualize the muscle you’re training. What’s commonly known as the abs is one muscle, the rectus abdominis. It runs from the bottom of your ribcage down to your pelvis. The reason it looks like a six-pack of muscles is that vertical and horizontal tendons create sections. The tendons are the dividing lines you see—well, maybe you don’t see ’em yet, but you will soon!

Myth 2: You need to do hundreds of reps to get great abs. Nope. The rectus abdominis is a muscle like the biceps, pecs, delts and so on. To get a deep, etched
midsection, you have to build it. Yes, we said build, but don’t panic. You won’t get a peaked paunch from a belly full of muscle because the rectus abdominis is relatively flat, and it’s held tightly by those tendons mentioned above. Nevertheless, to get those tendons to sit deeper so you have unmistakable delineation, you have to build enough ab muscle that it rises above the tendons. And how do you build muscle? With progressive resistance—adding weight to your ab exercises whenever possible—and getting eight to 20 reps per set. Oh, and don’t forget the X reps.

Myth 3: For best results train your abs every day. Again, the rectus abdominis is a muscle just like chest, lats and so on. If you train your abs intensely through a full range of motion, they need rest to recover and regenerate. Never train abs more than three nonconsecutive days a week—and two may be better if your intensity is high.

Myth 4: The standard crunch is the best abdominal exercise. By this point in the book you should know that’s not the case. That’s like saying the leg extension is the best quad exercise. Sure, it isolates the target muscle, but most bodybuilders know that isolation exercises aren’t the best movements for adding muscle. In the quads’ case that means squats. As for the abs, the best exercises that provide muscle teamwork are on-the-floor hip rollups and incline kneeups.

Myth 5: Leg-raise exercises don’t work the abs, only the hip flexors. We believed this for years, but once we analyzed muscle-fiber activation, we realized it’s not true. Yes, the hip flexors do come into play, but so do the abs, in a big way—right where the rectus abdominis’ fibers line up perfectly for maximum force. We call it the semistretched position, and it’s very important and why
we recommend V-ups on the end of a bench to complement incline kneeups. V-ups are like exaggerated X Reps right through the semistretched point. And leg raises are what you do at the end of a set of incline kneeups when you can no longer get your knees near your chest. The leg raises are X Reps that turbocharge fiber recruitment—with a little help from your hip flexors.

Myth 6: The standard crunch is a full-range exercise for the rectus abdominis. We talked about this earlier too. If you’re doing crunches on the floor or a flat bench, you’re only training the top two-thirds of the abs’ range of motion. To train the other one-third of the stroke—and the important semistretched point for optimal fiber activation—you have to arch 30 degrees to the rear of center to place your rectus abdominis in its stretch position. Your upper torso can’t move down through the floor, so you have to do the crunch exercise with low-back support that allows your upper torso to arch back. That’s the premise behind the Ab Bench, with its rounded back pad. The cable pulls your back over the pad, so your low back is slightly arched and your rectus abdominis is stretched. From there you can pull forward into a crunch and get a total ab contraction. Almost everyone who tries a full-range crunch on an Ab Bench can’t believe how different the exercise feels from the standard crunch. It’s all in the stretch. Also, the Ab Bench makes it a lot easier and more comfortable to add weight as you get stronger.

Remember, you’re after progressive resistance to build muscle. If you don’t have an Ab Bench, you can simulate the exercise with full-range crunches on a bench-press bench or cable crunches done with low-back support (see Chapter 5).

Myth 7: Training abs consistently with a perfect, efficient program will eventually give you...
the six-pack you desire. Not if you have a layer of fat blanketing your midsection. So lay off the six-packs if you want to get a six-pack. If your bodyfat is above 12 percent, your abs will be hidden no matter how developed the rectus abdominis muscle is. You have to diet away bodyfat in order to see your developed abs. (Our e-book X-treme Lean has all the details. For more information visit www.X-tremeLean.com.)

Myth 8: Side bends will help etch aesthetic abdominals. Heavy side bends, performed with a dumbbell in one hand, will build the oblique muscles on the sides of your waist, which will do nothing but make your waist look wider and give the illusion of narrow shoulders. Eek! Not what a bodybuilder wants. Of course, if you’re after functional ab strength for a sport and don’t care how your physique looks, by all means add heavy side bends to your routine. You’ll get more power in your trunk rotation, just what a football lineman needs.
Myth 9: Training abs with more sets and high reps will burn bodyfat to reveal a perfect six-pack. While we’ve explained why you don’t need a lot of sets to build your abs, there is evidence that increasing blood flow to an area can help the fat-burning process. The most efficient way to do that is with a combination of X Reps, supersets and tri-sets, as our programs in Chapter 6 demonstrate. But you also have to diet strictly and/or do cardio work to burn fat all over. Don’t 100 situps count as calorie-burning cardio? Barely. Those 100 reps burn fewer calories than are contained in one small apple. It’s better to hit the road (go for a walk).

Remember, with persistence, the right training routine, like the ones in this book, and a methodical calorie-reduction plan, X-traordinary abs can be yours—along with more than your share of admiring stares.

Contact Jonathan Lawson and Steve Holman through www.X-Rep.com. We’re dedicated to your physical transformation.
The Ultimate Mass Workout, featuring X-Rep Training. You may think you’ve tried it all to build muscle, but until you ignite the anabolic fuse with The Ultimate Mass Workout and X Reps, you haven’t experienced explosive growth. This program maximizes all the elements your body requires for an extreme hypertrophic response—the single best exercise for each muscle, optimal-recovery split with precision workouts, neuromuscular target training, capillary-expansion tactics, anabolic hormone activation and maximum fiber-recruitment techniques like X Reps. It’s all here, waiting for you to light the fuse and create your own ultimate muscle-size-and-strength X-plosion.

X-Treme Lean Fat-Burning and Nutrition Guide. Nothing grabs attention like an etched set of abs. If you’re ready to shed your excess bodyfat and build some muscle at the same time, then this is your answer. It’s time to stop talking about it and start working on it. You want those etched abs? We’ll give you the diet info to let ‘em rip! Includes the amazing X-treme Lean High-Definition full-body Workout that features X Reps and the occlusion phenomenon to build muscle as you burn fat. Ready to kick-start the fat-burning machine? You’re going to get X-treme Lean!
The Ab Bench is scientifically designed to help etch and harden your midsection faster than ever. The secret is full-range resistance, something you can’t get with most conventional ab exercises.

Take the standard crunch, for example. It only works half of the abdominal muscles’ range of motion, missing that all-important max-force point, or semistretched position, when the lower back is arched.

Notice that when you do a crunch, you’re forced to stop the movement when your back is straight. Not good if you’re after maximum abdominal stimulation. For that you need to continue the movement to the rear through the floor. That’s right, full-range abdominal work starts from 30 degrees to the rear of center—with your back arched—to straight, then to 25 degrees forward in a crunch position.

The semistretched (back-arched) position is vital because it allows you to produce more force—which translates into far better results with a lot less work. With half-movement exercises like crunches, you have to do endless sets and reps to see even a fraction of the results. It’s just inefficient because, well, it’s only half an exercise.

When you do a set on The Ab Bench, on the other hand, the curved back increases the range of motion and helps you generate more force and an intense contraction with every rep. Just think of the dramatic results you’ll get with full movements as opposed to the half movements you’ve been doing—and with fewer sets. (And don’t forget the X Reps!) Finally you can train your abdominal muscles with full-range resistance and in complete comfort. If you want shredded abs in a lot less time, this midsection machete is your answer. Get The Ab Bench and watch your midsection transform into an awesome display of ripped ruggedness in record time.