

# STRENGTHEN & FIRM YOUR CORE FOR GREAT ABS

BY LEE COTTON, HEALTHY CHEF & PILATES INSTRUCTOR

Achieving a strong core and flat abdominals is more than skin deep. The Florida climate beckons us to look swimsuit ready, but in addition to a youthful appearance a strong core allows for flexibility, less chance of injury, and reduced risk of heart disease and diabetes.

At my Pilates And Your Palate studio, I teach students how to gain maximum benefit from a combination of core-targeting Pilates moves and optimum nutrition. The right foods can reduce inflammation, boost metabolism and naturally shrink your waistline.

Some of my flat-ab food suggestions are commonplace while others seem more exotic. Once incorporated into your diet, you'll feel less need to consume unhealthy foods, and you'll enjoy how your body looks and feels.

Try substituting standard semolina pasta and wheat bread for my favorite healthy grain, Quinoa. Quinoa is a "super food" packed with fiber and protein, creating less need for animal protein and encouraging your body to eliminate waste and bloat. Quinoa is also gluten-free. Green leafy vegetable, like iron-rich kale or romaine lettuce, are packed with vitamins and improve fat and carbohydrate metabolism. An apple a day really does keep the doctor away! Apples are filled with fiber and will help to keep you full, cutting down the need to grab unhealthy snacks. Pineapples are another superstar food for slimming down. They're full of enzymes, promoting efficient digestion and eliminating bloat. Cucumbers act as natural diuretics to help flush your system of unwanted toxins, and vegetables like Kale, Romaine Lettuce and Cucumber can all be juiced for maximum nutrient absorption.

Chia seeds are a little known nutrient-rich treasure that can be purchased at most health food stores. Chia seeds contain fiber and Omega 3 fatty acids. Eating foods in their natural state, whenever possible, also helps to streamline digestion, minimize toxins and flatten abdominals.

Pilates is an effective, low-impact form of exercise that specifically targets abdominal muscles. Some highly effective Pilates exercises that I teach my students include the following:

#### **SINGLE LEG STRETCH:**

Lay on back with legs in tabletop (legs in the air with knees bent at a 90 degree angle), place both of your hands on right knee and pull into your chest as you extend your left leg. Alternate legs.

#### **DOUBLE LEG STRETCH:**

Put both legs in tabletop position (see above), while laying on your back. Gently lift head and shoulders placing hands on both of your knees. Extend arms by your ears as legs shoot out to 45 degree angle. Bring knees back into your chest as hands go in back of knees.

#### **SCISSORS:**

Laying on your back, extend both legs to 90 degrees. Gently lift head, neck and shoulders as legs are extended, both hands under hamstrings. Double pulse one leg, and then alternate.

#### **LOWER END LIFT:**

Laying down with legs at 90 degree angle. Place hands behind head and neck to cradle. Gently lift your head, neck and shoulders, and gently flex feet and lower legs. Keep back from lifting off of your mat to engage your core, keeping a neutral spine. Don't let your legs touch the floor, then raise and lower again. Do sets of 8 to 10.

#### **CRISS CROSS:**

Great for oblique muscles! Lay on your back, bringing legs to tabletop position. Gently lift and cradle your head. Put chin to chest, bringing left elbow towards your right knee to crisscross your body, and then switch (right/left).

#### **OTHER QUICK TIPS:**

\*Start each morning with warm water mixed with lemon juice to rev up your fat burning capabilities.

\*Juicing every day significantly reduces inflammation.

Lee Cotton is founder and owner of Pilates And Your Palate. She works closely with clients to deliver Pilates instruction, raw foods cuisine instruction, and overall health education for a balanced mind and body. Lee received classical Pilates training by Power Pilates. She is certified for Pilates for golf. Lee Cotton received her culinary education from the Matthew Kenney Academy, an accredited raw vegan school. As a Hippocrates Health Educator, she provides necessary fundamentals to educate others on a healthier lifestyle. Pilates And Your Palate is located in Stuart, Florida. Visit [www.pilatesandyourpalate.com](http://www.pilatesandyourpalate.com).

