Banish Your Belly

101 Tips to Banish Your Belly
We inspire and enable people to improve their lives and the world around them

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Eat to Burn Fat

Most people who are embarking on a new mission begin with one fundamental question: When do we eat? Good question. Most diets are all about what foods you’ll cut out. This one is all about what you’ll include. And that’s good news, because if you want to emerge with a new body, you must have the flexibility and freedom to keep yourself from getting hungry, and the knowledge that you can eat well no matter what.

The following six guidelines will help you to lose more, while eating more.

Guideline 1
Eat Six Meals a Day

This is not about deprivation. This isn’t a diet in the punitive sense. It’s a way of life. And if you fall off the wagon for a day or two, don’t worry about it—just get back on track when you can. Think progress, not perfection, and you will succeed.

We’re so used to hearing people talk about eating less food that it’s become a weight loss doctrine. The new philosophy that you want to keep in mind is “energy balance.” Researchers at Georgia State University developed a technique to measure hourly energy balance—that is, how many calories you’re burning versus how many calories you’re taking in. The researchers found that if you keep your hourly surplus or deficit within 300 to 500 calories at all times, you’ll best be able to change your body composition by losing fat and adding lean muscle mass. People with the largest energy imbalances (those whose calorie surpluses or shortfalls topped 500 calories from hour to hour) were the fattest, while those with the most balanced energy levels were the leanest. So if you eat only your three squares a day, your energy levels are all over the place. That kind of eating plan is great—if your dream is to consistently gain weight. But if you want to look slimmer, feel fitter, and live longer, then eat more often. Simply alternate your meals with snacks and you’ll keep your stomach full, which will reduce the likelihood of a diet-destroying binge.
GUIDELINE 2
Know What to Drink—And What Not To

There are many ways that alcohol can get you into trouble. It doesn’t make you feel full or decrease the amount of food you’ll eat. But it does encourage your body to burn as much as 36 percent less fat and make you store more of the fat you eat. And it can inhibit your production of hormones that help burn fat and build muscle.

Fluids can do wonders for your waistline: A recent study found that after men and women drank 17 ounces of H2O, their metabolic rates increased by 30 percent within 10 minutes and peaked about 40 minutes later. But you don’t need to drown in the stuff. A recent National Academy of Sciences report found that most women need 11 8-ounce cups of fluid a day—but it doesn’t all have to be water.

Okay, so water isn’t exciting, but drinking about eight glasses of it a day has a lot of benefits. It helps keep you satiated (often what we interpret as hunger is really thirst). It flushes the waste products your body churns out when processing protein or breaking down fat. And it transports nutrients to your muscles to keep your metabolism clicking. Otherwise, the best drinks you can have are low-fat milk and green tea (or, if you must, no more than two glasses of diet soda a day).

Surprisingly, booze counts toward your daily fluid quota, meaning you can consume alcoholic beverages in moderation if you are not at risk for certain types of hormonal cancers (check with your doctor). “I do not encourage nondrinkers to drink, but I also do not encourage women who enjoy a glass of alcohol a day to stop, because it may actually be good for your heart,” explains cardiologist Holly S. Andersen, MD, an assistant professor of medicine at Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York City. She enjoys a glass of wine with dinner, but sternly reminds her patients that there’s no benefit to more than one a day: “And you can’t have all seven drinks on a Saturday night.”

GUIDELINE 3
Focus on the Power Foods

These tips encourage you to focus on (not restrict yourself to) a generous market basket of food types to fulfill your core nutritional needs. These foods are so good for you, in fact, that they’ll just about single-handedly exchange your fat for muscle (provided you’ve kept your receipt). Just as important, the Power 12 have been designed to include thousands of food combinations. The more of them you eat, the better your body will be able to increase lean muscle mass and avoid storing fat. Just follow these simple guidelines:

■ Include two or three of these foods in each of your three major meals and at least one of them in each of your three snacks.

■ Diversify your food at every meal so that you can get a combination of protein, carbohydrates, and fat.

■ Make sure you sneak a little bit of protein into each snack.

1. Almonds and Other Nuts
(eat them with skins intact)

Superpowers: Building muscle, fighting food cravings
Fight against: Obesity, heart disease, muscle loss, cancer

These days, you hear about good fats and bad fats the way you hear about good cops and bad cops. One’s on your side, and one’s going to beat you silly. Oreos fall into the latter category, but nuts are clearly out to help you. They contain the monounsaturated fats that clear your arteries and help you feel full.

All nuts are high in protein and monounsaturated fat, but almonds are the best. Eat as much as 2 handfuls a day. If you eat 2 ounces of almonds (about 24 of them), it can suppress your appetite—especially if you wash them down with 8 ounces of water.

For a quick popcorn alternative, spray a handful of almonds with nonstick cooking spray and bake them at 400°F for 5 to 10 minutes. Take them out of the oven and sprinkle them with either a brown sugar and cinnamon mix or cayenne pepper and thyme.
2. Beans and Other Legumes
(including soybeans, chickpeas, pinto beans, navy beans, kidney beans, lima beans)

**Superpowers:** Building muscle, helping to burn fat, regulating digestion

**Fight against:** Obesity, colon cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure

Beans are a healthy way to add protein to your diet, as well as potassium, folic acid, and iron. But which ones should you stuff in your burrito? The darker the beans, the better, conclude researchers at the University of Guelph in Ontario. Their study found that beans are loaded with the same heart-healthy, cancer-preventing compounds found in red wine, berries, and tea. But black beans had the most, followed by red, brown, yellow, and white. For comparison’s sake, ½ cup of black beans had the same anthocyanin content as two glasses of red wine. But don’t discount good-for-you yellow legumes such as soybeans. They’re all low in fat, and they’re packed with protein, fiber, and iron—nutrients crucial for building muscle and losing weight.

3. Spinach and Other Green Vegetables

**Superpowers:** Neutralizing free radicals (molecules that accelerate the aging process)

**Fight against:** Cancer, heart disease, stroke, obesity, osteoporosis

You know vegetables are packed with important nutrients, but they’re also a critical part of your body-changing diet. Spinach is great in particular because one serving supplies nearly a full day’s vitamin A and half of your vitamin C. It’s also loaded with folic acid—a vitamin that protects against heart disease, stroke, and colon cancer. Dress a sandwich with the stuff, or stir-fry it with fresh garlic and olive oil. Or there’s broccoli, high in fiber and more densely packed with vitamins and minerals than almost any other food.

If you hate vegetables, hide them. Puree them and add them to marinara sauce or chili. The more you chop, the less you taste, and the easier it is for your body to absorb nutrients.

4. Dairy Products
(nonfat or low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese)

**Superpowers:** Building strong bones, firing up weight loss

**Fight against:** Osteoporosis, obesity, high blood pressure, cancer

Dairy is nutrition’s version of a typecast actor. It gets so much good press for strengthening bones that it garners little attention for all the other stuff it does well. Just take a look at the mounting evidence that calcium is a prime belly-buster. A University of Tennessee study found that dieters who consumed between 1,200 and 1,300 milligrams of calcium a day lost nearly twice as much weight as those taking in less calcium. Researchers think the mineral probably prevents weight gain by increasing the breakdown of body fat and hampering its formation.

Low-fat yogurt, cheeses, and other dairy products can play a key role in your diet. But milk is recommended as your major source of calcium. Liquids take up lots of room in your stomach, so your brain gets the signal that you’re full. Sprinkling in chocolate whey powder can help curb sweet cravings.
5. Instant Oatmeal
(unsweetened, unflavored)
Superpowers: Boosting energy, reducing cholesterol, maintaining blood sugar levels
Fight against: Heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, obesity

Oatmeal can propel you through sluggish mornings. You can also down a bowl a couple of hours before a workout to feel fully energized by the time you hit the gym or yoga mat, or at night to avoid a late-night binge. It couldn’t be easier to prepare—just add water. Buy the unsweetened, unflavored variety and use other Powerfoods such as milk and berries to enhance the taste.

Oatmeal contains soluble fiber, meaning that it attracts fluid and stays in your stomach longer than insoluble fiber. It also works like a bouncer for your body, showing troublemakers the door. For example, soluble fiber helps remove LDL (bad) cholesterol from your circulatory system.

6. Eggs
Superpowers: Building muscle, burning fat
Fight against: Obesity

For a long time, eggs were considered pure evil, and doctors were more likely to recommend tossing eggs at passing cars than throwing them into omelette pans. That’s because just two eggs contain enough cholesterol to put you over your daily recommended value. Though you can cut out some of that by removing part of the yolk and using the white, more and more research shows that eating an egg or two a day will not raise your cholesterol levels. In fact, we’ve learned that most blood cholesterol is made by the body from dietary fat, not dietary cholesterol. That’s why you should take advantage of eggs and their powerful makeup of protein.

7. Turkey and Other Lean Meats
(lean steak, chicken, fish)
Superpowers: Building muscle, improving the immune system
Fight against: Obesity, mood disorders, memory loss, heart disease

A classic lean muscle–building nutrient, protein is the base of any solid diet plan. Turkey breast is one of the leanest meats you’ll find, and it packs nearly one-third of your daily requirements of niacin and vitamin B₆. Beef, another classic lean muscle–building protein, is the top food source of creatine—a substance your body uses to make new muscle fibers. Look for round or loin cuts (code for extra-lean); New York strip is less fatty than prime rib.

To cut down on saturated fats even more, concentrate on fish like tuna and salmon. You should eat at least two servings of fish a week because it’s one of the best sources of omega-3 fatty acids, fats that help reduce the risk of heart disease. “The potential health benefits of fish can outweigh the risks of mercury toxicity if you eat a variety,” explains Barbara Olendzki, RD, nutrition program director at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

Yet many women fear mercury and PCB contamination in some species, which may lead to birth defects in children (therefore, pregnant and childbearing-age women need to be especially vigilant). The good news is that if you stick to smaller “prey” fish—loosely defined as fish that are more likely to be eaten by other fish than to hunt them—you’ll avoid unhealthy exposure. The reason? Long-lived fish tend to grow bigger, so toxins have more time and tissue in which to accumulate.

Here’s a list of fish—in order of lower to higher contamination—that health experts say you can eat: scallops, clams, crab, oysters, shrimp, sardines, sole, tilapia, cod, haddock, mahi mahi, canned light tuna (limit albacore, which has higher mercury levels), salmon, pollock, and catfish. “There is preliminary evidence suggesting that diets rich in tropical fruits and vegetables may help prevent the uptake of mercury in the body,” Olendzki adds. Alcohol and wheat bran in your diet may also reduce mercury absorption.

Olendzki also recommends trimming away the skin and fat where much of the contaminants are stored. “When I eat fish, I enjoy it grilled or broiled without added fat,” she adds. Alas, fish-and-chips lovers, fried fish doesn’t count. University of Washington researchers reported that fried-fish eaters had none of the heart-health benefits of people who ate grilled, baked, or broiled fish—in fact, their risk for heart attack increased. Frying fish is tantamount to drowning veggies in butter—the unhealthy fats negate the protective ones.
The news on protein is that an amino acid—namely leucine, found in meat, poultry, dairy, and fish—is essential for developing lean muscle mass and regulating hormones that control your appetite and help you burn calories. And the amount you get matters. The old thinking on protein was that if you were getting enough calories, you were getting enough protein, period. The new thinking is much more specific: While most Americans get double the protein they need, others get too little. You should be getting a 2- or 3-ounce serving (the size of a deck of cards) twice a day. Studies support protein’s slimming benefits: Researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign found that women who ate more protein—but the same number of calories—lost more weight and retained more lean body mass compared with those on a lower-protein diet. Here’s the catch: Eating larger amounts of protein backfires, big time. Too much won’t allow your body to use protein’s amino acids efficiently, and if that big steak dinner (some restaurant cuts are 32 ounces!) pushes you over your calorie count for the day, that excess protein is more likely to be stored as extra fat than as muscle. Take-home message: More than about 6 ounces of protein a day is protein without purpose.

Eat two servings of protein a day

For optimal heart function and overall good health, get rid of trans fats and keep saturated fats, found in meat and dairy, to a minimum. The majority of your daily fats should come from polyunsaturated and monounsaturated sources, although most of us get enough polys through processed foods made with corn, soybean, or safflower oils. Make an effort to consume more monounsaturated fats such as flaxseed and olive oils, which pack more heart-healthy lignans than other oils. This will help reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and eye disorders; enhance bone health; and even make your skin more supple. But we’re not talking about drowning your bruschetta in olive oil. Limit yourself to about 1 ½ tablespoons of these healthy fats out of a total of 4 ½ tablespoons per day.

9. Olive Oil
Superpowers: Lowering cholesterol, boosting the immune system
Fight against: Obesity, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure

Olive oil and its brethren will help control your food cravings; they’ll also help you burn fat and keep your cholesterol in check.

10. Whole Grain Breads and Cereals
Superpowers: Preventing your body from storing fat
Fight against: Obesity, cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease

There’s only so long a person can survive on an all-protein diet or an all-salad diet or an all-anything diet. You crave carbohydrates because your body needs them. The key is to eat the ones that have all their heart-healthy, belly-melting fiber intact.

Whole grain foods include oatmeal, whole wheat bread, brown rice, and wheat germ. Many processed cereals are made with whole grains, but check the package ingredients list to be sure. Best rule of thumb: “Whole grains contain at least 2 g of fiber per serving, and you can find that on the label,” says Joanne Slavin, PhD, a professor of nutrition at the University of Minnesota. Whole grains may also be slimming—especially if you up your intake of fiber to at least the recommended 25 to 35 g a day. According to Tufts University researchers, weight loss potential is higher in people who eat whole rather than refined grains, probably because high-fiber foods keep you feeling full longer. There are other benefits as well: “Dietary fiber accounts for 80 percent of the health protection you get from whole grains,” says James Anderson, MD, a professor of medicine and clinical nutrition at the University of Kentucky, adding that fiber is emerging as both a preventive and a treatment for diseases such as diabetes and obesity.
12. Raspberries and Other Berries

**Superpowers:** Protecting your heart, enhancing eyesight, improving memory, preventing cravings

**Fight against:** Heart disease, cancer, obesity

Depending on your taste, any berry will do (except Crunch Berries). One cup of raspberries packs 6 grams of fiber and more than half of your daily requirement of vitamin C.

Blueberries are one of the most healthful foods you can eat. They beat out 39 other fruits and vegetables in the antioxidant-power ratings. And strawberries (along with grapefruit, peaches, apples, and oranges) contain another valuable form of fiber called pectin that can make you feel fuller for hours.
GUIDELINE 4
Stop Counting

Though calorie burning is paramount to losing fat, calorie counting will make you lose focus and motivation. The great news is that when you zero in on our Powerfoods, you’ll be healthy and won’t feel hungry as often. Plus, the most energy-efficient foods are almost like doormen: They’re not going to let any of the riffraff in without your approval.

GUIDELINE 5
Drink Smoothies Regularly

A blender may be the ultimate weight loss assistant. Smoothies—blended mixtures of milk, low-fat yogurt, whey protein powder, ice, and other good stuff—can act as meal substitutes and as potent snacks. They require little time; the berries, flavored whey powder (you won’t even taste it), or peanut butter will satisfy your sweet cravings; and their thickness takes up space in your stomach. A University of Tennessee study found that people who added three servings of yogurt a day to their diets lost 61 percent more body fat and 81 percent more stomach fat over 12 weeks than people who didn’t eat yogurt. Researchers speculate that the calcium helps the body burn fat and limits the amount of fat your body can make. So drink an 8-ounce smoothie for breakfast, as a meal substitute, or as a snack before or after your workout. Try the following two recipes at home. They’ll take less than 5 minutes and taste like a five-star dessert.

Ultimate Power Smoothie
Number of Powerfoods: 5
1 cup 1 percent milk
2 tablespoons low-fat vanilla yogurt
¼ cup instant oatmeal (nuked in water)
2 teaspoons peanut butter
2 teaspoons whey chocolate powder
6 ice cubes, crushed

Makes 1 serving
Per serving: 440 calories,
24 g protein, 58 g carbohydrates,
9 g fat (3 g saturated), 7 g fiber,
240 mg sodium

Summer Berry Smoothie
Number of Powerfoods: 4
¾ cup instant oatmeal, nuked in water or skim milk
¾ cup skim milk
¾ cup mixed frozen berries
2 teaspoons whey powder
3 ice cubes, crushed

Makes two 8-ounce servings
Per serving: 144 calories,
7 g protein, 27 g carbohydrates,
1 g fat (0 g saturated), 4 g fiber,
109 mg sodium

GUIDELINE 6
For One Meal a Week, Forget the Guidelines

You should cheat with these guidelines. Take one meal during the week and forget everything about good carbohydrates and good fats. Have whatever it is—pizza, chocolate cake—that you miss the most. Think of this cheat meal as the carrot at the end of a good week of eating. Enjoy your meal of gluttony, but please, don’t make the carrot literally a carrot.

Keep up that energy

Don’t waste your money on supposed energy boosters such as guarana and ginseng. “Any food will give you energy,” says Tara Geise, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association and a nutrition counselor in Orlando. The trick to maintaining a full charge all day is choosing the right foods.
1. Jump-Start the Day
The most important way to energize yourself is by starting off the day with breakfast. Pair complex carbohydrates with a little protein for staying power—have a bowl of high-fiber cereal with milk or an English muffin with peanut butter.

2. Order à La Carb
Welcome carbs back to the fold. Carbohydrates are what give you energy on a physiological level. When you don’t have them, your body has to work extra hard to get energy. And that defeats the purpose, doesn’t it? Go ahead and have the sandwich for lunch, just make sure it’s on whole grain bread and mayo-free.

3. Buzz Off
Can’t give up the caffeine? That’s okay; a cup of coffee—one 8-ounce cup—will give you a little boost. Better yet, add some 2 percent milk, and you’ll get more benefit from protein and calcium.

4. Count Calories
Artificially flavored, calorie-free sweet nothings are just that—nothings. If a food or drink has no calories, it won’t feed your body.

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Speed Up Your Metabolism

It’s simple: To show off your abs, you have to burn fat. To burn fat, you have to fire up your metabolism by toning your muscles. Replacing just 1 pound of fat with sleek muscle will force your body to burn up to an additional 50 calories a day, every day. This workout emphasizes chest, back, legs, and abs, but without adding bulk.

The 10-Step Workout
DIRECTIONS: Do this workout three times per week. Complete one set of each abs exercise, then complete the rest of the circuit twice. On other days, do light cardiovascular exercise such as walking. For each exercise involving weights, find a weight you’re comfortable with—not too easy, but not one that tortures your body, either.

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1. Bridge
Get in a pushup position, but bend your elbows and rest your weight on your forearms instead of your hands. Your body should form a straight line from your shoulders to your ankles. Pull your abdominals in; imagine you’re trying to move your belly button back to your spine. Hold this for 20 seconds, breathing steadily. As you build endurance, you can do one 60-second set.

2. Modified Raised-Feet Crunch
Lie on your back with your knees bent and your hands behind your ears. Raise your feet just a few inches off the floor, and hold them there. Crunch up, then lower your torso back to the floor, keeping your feet suspended throughout the movement.

3. Oblique V-Up
Lie on your side with your body in a straight line. Fold your arms across your chest. Keeping your legs together, lift them off the floor as you raise your top elbow toward your hip. The range of motion is short, but you should feel an intense contraction in your obliques.

4. Squat
Hold one dumbbell in each hand, palms facing your thighs. Set your feet shoulder-width apart, and keep your knees slightly bent, back straight, and eyes focused ahead. Slowly lower your body as if you were sitting in a chair, keeping your back in its natural alignment and your lower legs nearly perpendicular to the floor. When your thighs are parallel to the floor, pause, and return to the starting position.

5. Traveling Lunge
Hold dumbbells at your sides, with your feet hip-width apart; you need room to walk about 20 steps. Step forward with your right foot, and lower your body so that your right thigh is parallel to the floor and your left thigh is perpendicular to the floor (your left knee should bend and almost touch the floor). Stand and bring your left foot up next to your right, then repeat with the left leg lunging forward.

6. Bent-Over Row
Stand with your knees slightly bent and shoulder-width apart. Bend over so that your back is almost parallel to the ground. Holding a dumbbell in each hand, let your arms hang. With palms facing in, pull the dumbbells toward you until they touch the outside of your chest. Pause, then return to the starting position.

7. Military Press
Hold one dumbbell in each hand, about level with your ears. Press them straight overhead so that your arms are almost fully extended, hold for a count of one, then bring them down to the front of your shoulders. Repeat.

8. Pushup
Get in pushup position with your hands about shoulder-width apart. Press down, keeping your back straight, until your chin almost touches the floor, then push back up.
3 On, 3 Off
Powerful lungs mean longer endurance. To increase your body’s ability to utilize energy, run hard for 3 minutes (an 8 on a 1 to 10 intensity scale), then recover by walking or jogging for 3 minutes (intensity level 3). Start with four reps, build to eight.

Calisthenics
Alternating strengthening exercises and running conditions helps the body to keep moving even when it’s tired. Alternate 3 minutes of calisthenics (intensity level 8) with 3 minutes of moderate jogging. Do one set each: pushups, walking lunges, jumping jacks, ab crunches, and jump squats (jumps from a squat position) for a 30-minute workout.

Stair Repeats
Running up and down the relentless pitch of stairs builds both lung and leg power. Find a long flight of stairs (office building, stadium). Ascend hard by stepping fast or taking two steps at a time (intensity level 8). Descend in a slow, controlled manner. Start with 20 minutes; build to 50.

9. Biceps Curl
Stand while holding a dumbbell in each hand, palms facing out, with your hands shoulder-width apart and your arms hanging in front of you. Curl the weight toward your shoulders, hold for a second, then return to the starting position.

10. Step-Up
Use a step or bench that’s 18 inches off the ground. Place your left foot on the step so that your knee is bent at 90 degrees. Your knee should not advance past the toes of your left foot. Push off with your left foot, and bring your right foot onto the step, keeping your back straight. Now step down with the left foot, followed by the right. Alternate the leading foot, or do all of the repetitions leading with one foot and then alternating. Once you’re comfortable, add dumbbells.

I f you want to up your running (or walking) pace, try interval training—a method that alternates brief, intense exercise with recovery periods. Intervals will help you go farther. Do two workouts a week, with at least one day of recovery between. Warm up and cool down with 10 minutes of jogging and stretching.
Good posture means maintaining the natural curves of your spine, as well as keeping your knee, hip, and shoulder joints stacked on top of each other. Here's what you should see in the mirror when you stand sideways.

![Good posture diagram](image_url)

Imagine if your belly always looked as good as it does when you turn sideways in the mirror and suck it in. Ab exercises can help, but 5–or even 50–minutes of crunches won’t do any good if you’re letting it all hang out for the remaining 23 hours of the day. One of the abdominal muscles’ biggest jobs is to hold our bodies upright, and research shows that rampant poor posture puts these muscles to sleep, leaving Americans in a constant belly-bulging slump. It’s a particularly pesky problem for women who’ve had children. Stretched ab muscles and carrying kids can make it difficult to stand up straight for years after delivery.

The good news: “Correcting poor posture can make you look 5 pounds slimmer instantly,” says Deborah L. Mullen, a certified strength and conditioning specialist in San Luis Obispo, CA. To keep that trim profile 24/7, you need to retrain and strengthen those belly-slimming, stand-tall muscles, so Prevention went to the nation’s top posture pros for their best advice.

**A Wake-Up Call for Flatter Abs**

In a recent Australian study, researchers zeroed in on exactly what your muscles do while you’re hunched over your computer. They tested 20 people as they sat slumped in chairs and stood with their backs arched and bellies pooched out, and then again when they stood and sat erect. Not surprisingly, key posture muscles in both their bellies and backs were slack when they slouched; those muscles jumped to attention when the volunteers straightened up.

“The less we use our muscles, the weaker they become,” says posture researcher Thomas Cowan, MD, a neurologist at Millard Fillmore Hospital in Buffalo, NY.

The fix: Strengthen and reinforce your ab and back muscles with Pilates, suggests a 6-month pilot study of 18 chronic back pain sufferers. “After 30 sessions, 15 of them got phenomenal relief,” says Cowan, who conducted the study. “They had the strength and flexibility to support proper posture.”

**Back Straight, Head Up, Tummy In**

Ballerinas make it look easy, but maintaining good posture can be a battle. “All of our senses are in front of us; we lean forward to look, eat, smell, touch, even hear,” says John Friend, founder of Anusara Yoga, a style that focuses on alignment. “And all that forward leaning tightens the muscles in the front of the body and weakens those in back.”

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**Sit Pretty**

Even if you start the day with perfect posture, it’s a hard position to hold when you’re at a desk for 8 to 9 hours, says Vert Mooney, MD, professor of orthopedics at the University of California, San Diego. “Prolonged sitting is deceptively difficult.” The result: After hours of tapping on a keyboard, driving a car, and sitting in front of the TV, your shoulders round, your chin juts forward, your lower back collapses so you’re sitting back on your butt—and your belly sticks out.

Studies show that taking short breaks during your workday—even just a few seconds to stretch—won’t decrease your productivity and can keep you sitting taller and looking slimmer.
Shrink Your Belly

As you age, hormonal changes encourage excess calories to make a beeline for your belly, where they are stored as—you guessed it—fat. A bigger belly, however, isn’t inevitable, and tummy-toning exercises can help. Pilates training is your secret weapon because it works all of your abdominal muscles: the six-pack rectus abdominis, which runs down your center; the waist-defining obliques, which wrap around your sides; and the deep transversus abdominis, which is often missed in traditional ab workouts, says LA-based Pilates instructor Michelle Dozois, who designed this routine. For maximum results, flatten your belly by pulling your navel toward your spine during each rep. Do these exercises three times a week, every other day to strengthen the muscles in your back and belly so you’ll stand taller and look slimmer.

1. Toe Dip (a) Lie on your back with your legs up and bent at 90 degrees—thighs straight up and calves parallel to the floor. Rest your hands at your sides, palms down. Keep your abs contracted and press your lower back toward the floor. (b) Inhale and lower your left leg for a count of two (“down, down”), moving only from your hip and dipping your toes toward the floor (without letting them actually touch it). Exhale and raise your leg back to the starting position for a count of two (“up, up”). Repeat with your right leg and continue alternating until you’ve done 12 reps with each leg.

2. Leg Circle (a) Lie on your back with your legs extended along the floor. Raise your left leg toward the ceiling, with toes pointed and hands at your sides, palms down. Hold for 10 to 60 seconds. (If this position is uncomfortable, you can bend your right leg and place your right foot flat on the floor.) (b) Make a small circle on the ceiling with your left toes, rotating your leg from your hip. Inhale as you begin the circle and exhale as you finish. Keep your body as still as possible—no rocking—by tightening your abs. Do six circles, then reverse direction for six more. Repeat with your other leg.

Relax Your Tummy Away

In the pursuit of a belly worth baring, muscle strength and flexibility are only part of the battle. The other part is relaxation, says Hope Gillerman, who teaches the Alexander Technique, a bodywork therapy focused on reducing muscle tension and balancing the body, in New York City. “The stress of daily life puts us in constant ‘fight or flight’ mode,” she says. “That causes our neck muscles to contract and shoulders to hunch, pulling our head toward our spine. We’re constantly tensed up as if we were walking on ice.”

To shed built-up stress, Gillerman recommends a daily 10-minute floor stretch: Lie on your back, knees bent and feet flat on the floor, with a telephone book under your head. Place your hands on your ribs, and breathe deeply and evenly. Visualize your neck falling toward the floor and the top of your head floating away from your shoulders. Allow gravity to pull your back flat and relaxed. “It’s a subtle stretch, but it releases tension.”

Shoulder stretch

Think of something pleasant; it helps relax your shoulders. Stand with your chest lifted and your shoulder blades down and back. Bend your left arm behind your back. Place the back of the left hand on your back, and slide it up between your shoulder blades. Extend your right arm overhead, and bend the elbow, reaching your right hand between your shoulders to touch your left hand. Clasp fingers if possible. If your shoulders are too tight, place a small rolled towel in your right hand and use that to connect your hands. Stretch your elbows in opposite directions, breathing evenly for 30 seconds. Then release, switch arms, and repeat.

Seated arch

Sit straight on the edge of a chair, and place your hands in a comfortable position on the back of your pelvis. Squeeze your shoulder blades together, gently push your abs forward, and lift your chest toward the ceiling. Carefully drop your head backward as far as comfortably possible. Hold for 10 seconds, breathing deeply throughout.

Stress-relief moves

Perform these stretches twice a day—once mid-morning and once midafternoon—to help prevent that stress-induced hunch and belly pooch.
3. **Crisscross**  
(a) Start as in the Toe Dip but with your hands behind your head, elbows out to the sides. Curl up to raise your head, neck, and shoulders off the floor.  
(b) As you inhale, rotate your torso to the right, bringing your right knee and left shoulder toward each other and extending your left leg toward the ceiling in a diagonal line from your hips. As you exhale, rotate to the left, bringing your left knee toward your right shoulder and extending your right leg. That’s one rep. Do six reps.

4. **Leg Kick**  
(a) Lie on your left side with your legs straight and together. Prop yourself up on your left elbow and forearm, lifting your ribs off the floor and your head toward the ceiling. Raise your right leg to hip level and flex your foot so your toes are pointing forward.  
(b) Exhale as you kick, swinging your right leg forward as far as comfortably possible and pulsing for two counts (“kick, kick”). Inhale, point your toes, and swing your leg back past your left leg. That’s one rep. Do six reps without lowering your leg. Then switch sides and repeat.

5. **Back Extension with Rotation**  
(a) Lie on your stomach with your forehead on your hands, palms on the floor. Separate your feet to hip-width. Pull abs in.  
(b) Raise your head, shoulders, and chest off the floor. Rotate your upper body to the right and back to the center, then lower. Repeat to the left side and continue alternating until you’ve done six rotations to each side.

6. **Side Bend**  
(a) Sit on your left hip with your left leg bent in front of you and your left hand beneath your shoulder. Place your right foot flat on the floor just in front of your left foot so your right knee points to the ceiling. Rest your right arm on your right knee.  
(b) Pull your abdominals in, press into your left hand, and lift your hips off the floor. As you come up onto your left knee, straighten your right leg and raise your right arm over your head so you form a line from your fingers to your toes. Hold for 10 to 30 seconds. Lower and repeat on the other side.

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**Dress Slimmer**

Imagine getting dressed in the late 19th century. You wrap whalebone around your waist, suck in your stomach, and hang onto the bedposts while your maid tightens your corset until you get the fashionable 14-inch waist. Luckily, we don’t need bones and strings to look thinner in today’s world. Nor do we have to wait until we actually lose as much weight as we want to enjoy the benefits of looking thinner.

**Clothes That Slim**

Start with your mirror. Stand at least a body length away from a full-length mirror in a well-lit area—totally naked. “It's like being in a museum,” says Laurie Krauz, an image consultant in New York City. “You get to see the entire artwork.”

Are you tall or short? Broad or narrow? Is the line from your shoulder to your hip straight or curvy? “Instead of trying to fix your body,” she says, “you need to learn about your body. Understand the line of your body so you can select clothing that agrees with that line.”

To do that, you need to determine your body shape. There are four body shapes: pear, hourglass, apple, and rectangle. To narrow your choices, check out your waist.

If you have an indentation, you’re classified as a pear or an hourglass. If you don’t, you’re an apple or a rectangle. Here’s how to tell where you fit.

**The Pear**
- You have an indentation above your hips.
- Your waist is 10 to 12 inches smaller than your hips.
- Most of your weight is distributed below your waist.

**The Hourglass**
- You have an indentation above your hips.
- Your weight is evenly distributed between your bust and hips.

**The Apple**
- You don’t have an indentation above your hips.
- Your waistline is the widest part of your body.
- You have thin arms and legs.

**The Rectangle**
- You don’t have an indentation above your hips.
- Your hips, bust, and waist are in proportion to each other.
Shop Till You Drop
Now comes the fun part: choosing the clothes that most flatter your body type.

Frame your face
“One of the kindest things we can do for ourselves is to wear a collar,” says Judith Rasband, an image consultant in Orem, UT, and author of *Fabulous Fit* and *Wardrobe Strategies for Women*. It lifts people’s attention to our faces instead of our bodies.

Choose a V-neck collar because the vertical line is very slimming to everyone, says Claudia Kaneb, wardrobe head at NBC’s *Today* show. Or wear a chain with a small pendant or a knotted scarf draped down like a necklace over a shirt with a high collar for the same effect.

Waist not, want not
Your body type will determine the clothes you choose to minimize your waistline. Follow these guidelines.

**Pear**
Keep patterns and textures above your waistline and solid colors below. “Anything loud or bulky below the waist adds dimension,” says Catherine Schuller, a fashion retail editor and author of the *Ultimate Plus-Size Modeling Guide*. Wear skirts and pants without pleats.

**Hourglass**
You’re evenly proportioned, says Schuller. You can wear the same clothes as a pear-shaped woman, and you can wear patterns below your waistline.

If you have a flat stomach, try a fluted trumpet skirt. Its long, straight style, flaring out from midcalf to ankle, is very slimming, says Princess Jenkins, an image consultant at Majestic Images International.

**Apple**
Look for clothes with an overall downward taper ending at the end of the garment—whether it is at the bottom hem of a blouse, skirt, or even a sleeve, says Schuller. You are as wide as your widest line, wherever that falls. Avoid horizontal stripes—they add dimension there and make you look wider.

**Rectangle**
Schuller suggests choosing column dresses—those that go straight up and down and don’t taper—made of fabrics like velveteen, matte jerseys, and heavy silks that move as your body moves, creating fluidity.

Get hip
Avoid horizontal lines at the hips, such as tops with patch pockets and side-ways stripes, Jenkins says, because they add weight to every shape. Clothes that slim your hips include A-line skirts, long jackets that cover the hips, loose-fitting tunic tops, and slightly padded shoulders.

Scale the fashion heights
Unless you’re under 5 feet 4 inches tall, pantsuits with longer jackets that cover your hips and thighs will make you look taller and slimmer.

Find the right fabrics
Anyone carrying extra weight should avoid fabrics such as fleece, tweeds, leather, metallics, and nubby knits, which add visual pounds, Jenkins says, as well as busy patterns such as large floral prints, checks, and polka dots.

Here are some of her general guidelines for specific body types.

**Pear and hourglass**
Choose softer fabrics, such as thin wools, cotton jerseys, and lightweight silks.

**Apple and rectangle**
Choose stiffer, thicker fabrics, such as crisp cottons, stiff silks, and lightweight linens.
Make Sure It Fits
The right fit helps those fabulous clothes hang well on your body
and do what they were meant to do—create an illusion of thinness.

■ Give yourself enough room
  No matter what your figure type, don’t wear clothes that cling.

■ Shop for separates
  Women’s tops and bottoms are not the same size—buy each
  size separately.

■ Search different departments
  Don’t be afraid to go between the juniors’, misses’, and women’s
  departments for the clothes you need.

■ Give it the fit test
  Once you’ve found clothes that seem to fit well, put them to
  the test. Check that the buttons and zippers are not pulling
  at the hips.

■ Get it tailored
  You might have to take measures beyond the department store
  for a good fit. Once you own a piece of clothing that fits perfectly,
  you’ll never want to wear another ill-fitting garment again.

■ Raise your shirt
  Do not let your pooch hang over your jeans. Buy a pair that
  leaves some give at the waist. (It’s called buying the next size
  up.)

■ Choose the right color
  Solid colors from head to toe give a more slimming appearance.
  Wearing blocks of different colors cuts you in half and brings
  attention to your waistline. If you want to add color to your outfit,
  do so with accessories, like a purse, scarf, or new pair of shoes.

■ Buy the best
  Higher-quality fabrics hang better on your body, flowing where
  they should and hugging your curves just right.