

This Month's Focus: Abs

For comfort, students may lay on a towel, blanket, or yoga mat for these exercises.

1. Partial Roll-Down. Students should sit with their legs in front of them and knees bent. Have them do the following as a sequence, or choose one for them to do depending on their ability.

- A. Lightly hold behind the knees. Begin by sitting up tall. Contract the back while pulling the abs in and breathing out. Roll through the spine and sit tall while breathing in. Be careful not to release the ribs. The abs should still be engaged while sitting tall. Complete 10 reps.
- B. Same as A, but instead of using their arms to help them, students hold the arms in 1st position as they contract and then 5th position as they sit tall. Complete 10 reps.
- C. Same as B, but when they sit tall, they twist to face the diagonal on one side. Alternate sides, completing 20 total (10 on each side).

2. Toe Taps. Have students lay on their backs with their legs in a table top position at 90 degrees. Students can place their hands on their lower abs to make sure their lower abs remain in and long. They should not pouch upward during the movement. Keeping the legs at a 90 degree angle, tap the toes of one foot to the floor, and bring it back to table top. Repeat with the other leg. Repeat for a total of 20 (10 with each leg).

Additional Options:

- Repeat with the legs in a parallel attitude position (so the knee is less bent). This will engage the abs in a slightly different place.
- Repeat with the legs in a turned out attitude position. This will also engage the inner thighs and can help students think about the shape of their feet as they reach the pinky toe down to the floor with each tap.

3. Butterfly Crunches. This one is simply crunches, but with the legs in a butterfly position. Having the legs in this position will help students with not engaging their hips as they come up in a crunch. It will also help to relax and give the upper legs a slight stretch after toe taps.

4. Around the World Crunches. Students may complete this one in a standard crunch position, or with the legs in butterfly like in #3. Lift the upper body slightly off the floor. Crunch to the right *leaning* (not twisting) to the right. Come back to center keeping the upper body lifted off the floor. Crunch twisting to the right. Come back to center keeping the upper body lifted just slightly off the floor. Regular crunch. Lower while keeping the upper body lifted just slightly off the floor. Crunch twisting to the left. Come back to center keeping the upper body lifted just slightly off the floor. Crunch to the left *leaning* (not twisting) to the left. Come back to center keeping the upper body lifted off the floor. Lower the upper body. Rest for just a moment. Repeat to the left. Complete up to 8 alternating sets total (4 starting right and 4 starting left). If needed, allow students to work up to 8

sets. 2 sets may be plenty for a young group who hasn't done much ab strengthening work to start out with.

Additional Option:

Lift the upper body just off the floor (1), lean to the right (2), come through center and lean to the left (3), return to center with the upper body still just off the floor (4), crunch twisting to the right (5), return to center with the upper body still just off the floor (6), crunch twisting to the left (7), return to center lowering the upper body to the floor (8).

5. The Roll-Up.

Option 1. Hold a small exercise ball or a yoga block between the knees. Keep the knees slightly bent and in front of you. Feet are on the floor. Begin lying on your back with the arms overhead. Roll up through the spine, reaching for your knees. When you come to sitting, reach the arms up high. Roll back down to the starting position. Complete 4 to 8 sets.

Option 2. For this option, do a traditional Pilates roll-up, but hold a small exercise ball, yoga block, or exercise band in your hands while you do. Complete 4 to 8 sets.

Don't Forget!

Remember to stretch out the abs after doing all of your ab strengthening work!