



Crunches vs. Planks

March is one of our favorite months here at Sweat City because we finally start to get some sunshine. Daylight savings time kicks in on March 10th, which means we'll finally have sunlight past 7pm. For all our bootcampers, that means you'll no longer be hiding in the dark during class. And what that means is that, WE CAN SEE YOUR ABS!

As important as having good-looking abs is to many of you, it's even more important for young athletes to have a strong core section. When we run, change directions, jump, swing a bat/lacrosse stick, throw/kick a ball, tackle, swim, or even just walk, we are engaging our cores. Every athletic movement we make begins and ends with our core.

So now that I've got the attention of the athletes/coaches on this list and also from all of you that stare at your stomachs in the mirror, I'd like to drop some knowledge on different ways to train your core/abs and the advantages and disadvantages to each method.

Planks vs Crunches

Benefits of the Plank

- Planks use more muscle groups than crunches if done correctly. If you stay on the balls of your feet and keep your back flat (where you can balance a cup of water without spilling on it), you will activate over 20 muscles.
- Planks build muscle endurance in the core, which is what athletes need when playing at a high level for hours at a time. A tired core leads to compromised form, which increases risk for injury.
- Planks are great for toning the midsection without bulking up any of the muscles. If you're looking to tighten your midsection, this is the best way to pull all those small muscles in together.
- Planks strengthen your legs, hips, butt, back, stomach, obliques, shoulder and chest.
- Most importantly, it strengthens and stabilizes your spine, which is vital to your health.

Drawbacks of the Plank

- Without proper form (if you sag your lower back or your joints aren't aligned), you compromise the effectiveness of the plank.
- While it provides muscle tone, it doesn't provide as much muscle definition.
- Your "six-pack" doesn't get worked as rigorously.

Benefits of Crunches

- Crunches build more muscle definition and can get your abdomen muscles very pronounced (aka a six-pack).
- Crunches allow you to contract your muscles, creating more power and fast-twitch muscle fiber strength.

- Crunches are far more beneficial for someone trying to look great rather than for athletic purposes
- There are dozens of variations on crunches. Not only can you move differently, but you can hold weight to add resistance to it.

Drawbacks to Crunches

- Crunches do not engage your back or spine. In fact, if you only do crunches, you are encouraging a slouching posture and an unbalanced core.
- Crunches only target about 6-7 muscles, whereas planks target upwards of 20.
- Crunches may help you look better, but they don't help us as athletes nearly as much.

In Summary

Crunches target the front of your core and can really get you those washboard abs you want to show off at the beach. However, if you don't combine crunches with planks, you are going to have a core muscular imbalance and put yourself at risk for lower back and spine problems. Planks will help tighten your core and strengthen all those little muscles that you need as athletes and in your everyday movements. Planks help your posterior chain (back, glutes, hamstrings) and also your muscular endurance. In conclusion, do them both and you'll be a superstar athlete and a beach-body sensation!

Watch our [Top 5 Core Exercise videos](#) starring yours truly (add in some planks!),

Chris Chinn

President | Performance Science

650-759-2390

www.thepstila.com