

the abs SIX-PACK

How possible is it to get those defined, rock-hard ab muscles? ... and more of your questions answered here.

Q Is it easier for a man to get six-pack abs than for a woman to?

A Yes, says Glenn Gaesser, Ph.D., an exercise physiology professor at the University of Virginia. The appearance of defined, rock-hard ab muscles is possible only if the abs are highly trained and there is very little fat on top of them. "On average, women have more total body fat than men, and proportionally they have more subcutaneous fat in their bellies," Gaesser says. What's more, it's easier for men to lose body fat than it is for women, partly due to hormonal differences. "If you put men and women on the same exercise and diet program, men will lose more weight on average," Gaesser says. Of course, not every man will lose more fat than every woman will. There are exceptions: Some women can achieve a six-pack without tremendous work, and some men have no chance of ever having sleek abs.

The bottom line, Gaesser says: Don't get frustrated if you can't achieve that six-pack. It may not be a matter of lacking willpower. It could be just a matter of genetic and gender destiny.

Q I have very big calves and can't get them any smaller no matter what I do. I'm not even sure if they're mostly fat or muscle. What exercises should I do to make my calves smaller?

A There aren't any exercises you can do to shrink the size of your calves (or any other specific area of your body). If you are overweight, you can lose

overall body fat by combining cardiovascular exercise and strength training with a sensible nutrition plan. Some of the fat should come off your calves. However, if you're already lean, chances are you simply have muscular calves. "There's just no way around that," says Los Angeles trainer Ken Alan, a spokesman for the American Council on Exercise. You may be able

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to make your legs appear more proportional by building up your quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteals in the weight room. But rather than dislike your large calves, Alan says, "try to think of them as a positive. You have a great genetic advantage for certain athletic activities. Be a sprinter or a volleyball player."

Q I have a friend who does a 5- to 10-minute warm-up on a treadmill, then lifts weights, then does 20

If rock-hard abs are unattainable for you, know this: It's not because you lack willpower.

