

# How to Do Curl Ups

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Curl ups are a great way to strengthen your core, and you can easily do them at home without any equipment! Below we break down how to do curl ups using the proper form so you can start incorporating them into your workouts. Plus, we've included some more advanced modifications you can try and tips that will help you get the most out of your workouts.

## Method 1

### Method 1 of 3: Beginning Curl Ups



**1 Lie on your back.** On a mat, or directly on the ground, lie on your back with your arms crossed over your chest. Bend your knees slightly until your feet are flat on the floor and about a foot away from your buttocks. Have a partner or weight hold down your feet so that you keep consistent form.<sup>[1]</sup>



**2 Raise your upper body.** Contract your rectus abdominis muscles to raise your upper body off of the ground. Your shoulders should be around 30 degrees off the floor. Your rectus abdominis is the main muscle used in curl-ups. It is the muscle that begins on the lower portion of your ribs, travels down the center of your stomach, and attaches to your pelvis. When contracted, the distance between your ribs and hips shortens, resulting in a curl up.



**3 Stop when your elbows reach your thighs.** Lower your upper body back down, letting gravity help you. When you are going back down, you don't need to keep your abdominals flexed. The entire curl up should take approximately 3 seconds.[2]



**4 Repeat with pace.** Try going for a minute straight. If you have proper form, you should be able to do 20 curl ups without a problem. You should do the same amount in your first 30 seconds as in your last 30 seconds. Often, beginners start out too fast and cannot finish the time with strength which results in bad form.[3]

- With regular practice, a pace of 40-50 per minute is attainable.

## Method 2

### Method 2 of 3: Advancing to Modifications



**1 Extend your arms.** Although the standard curl up only requires you to have your arms crossed over your body, if you are looking to add difficulty and increase muscle activation, you can extend your arms above your head. Lift them as if you are pushing your hands through the ceiling when you do your curl up. This form activates the greatest contraction in the rectus abdominis.[4]

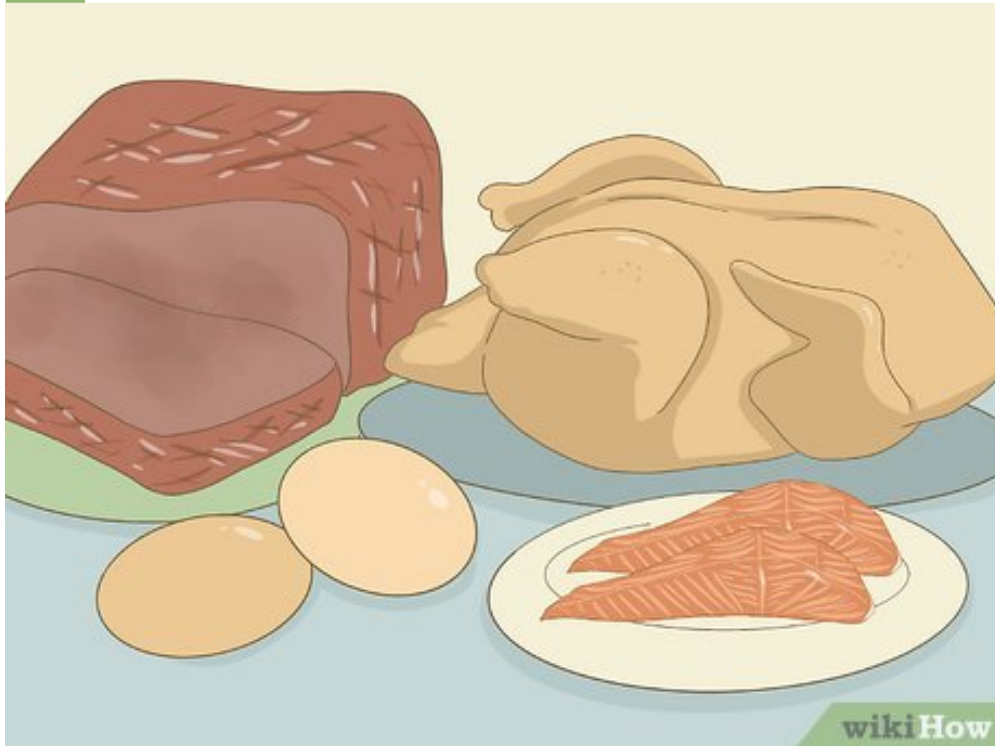


**2 Straighten your legs.** This will help target your lower abdominals and hips. Perform the curl up exactly the same as you would if your knees were bent. If you switch your form, you won't target the correct muscles and could hurt yourself.



**3 Hold for more time.** If you want to make curl ups a bit more difficult, hold your upper body up at the peak of your curl up for an extended amount of time. Just adding 3-5 seconds to each curl up will give you the difficulty you're after.

### Method 3 of 3: Getting the Most of Your Curl Up



**1 Eat right.** If you're doing a lot of curl ups, your abdominals will be sore. Be sure to help your muscles heal by eating a proper amount of protein. This will help promote muscle growth and aid in recovery.[5]



**2 Add cardio.** If you're doing curl ups to get noticeably more defined abdominals, pair them with cardio for faster results.



**3 Practice with consistency.** Doing curl ups once won't affect your body. If you're looking to get better at them, you need to practice them consistently. Make mini goals to reach a few times during the week and you'll notice that they get easier the more that you do them.

- Doing 10 minutes of abdominal exercises each day will help strengthen your core. Each week, you'll be able to make the exercises more difficult.<sup>[6]</sup>



## Expert Q&A

### Question

Is it OK to put your hands behind your head when doing curl ups?



**Danny Gordon**  
Certified Fitness Coach  
Expert Answer

Yes, but keep your elbows back and your chin up. If your elbows are forward, it gives you the illusion that you're coming up more than you are.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 1

### Question

What should I be doing with my feet?



**Danny Gordon**  
Certified Fitness Coach  
Expert Answer

Make sure your feet are flat on the floor, and press through your heel as you curl upward. Having your feet on the floor helps stabilize your core.

Helpful 5 Not Helpful 1

#### Question

**What if I do this daily, but it does not work?**



Community Answer

Keep at it. It could take a few weeks or even a few months for you to see results. Try to slowly increase the amount of weight you're lifting. Don't give up!

Helpful 6 Not Helpful 6

#### Question

**How can I get better at curl ups?**



Community Answer

You should practice curl ups regularly, but you should also incorporate some other exercises into your workouts to improve your abdominal strength, like planks, cable crunches, etc.

Helpful 5 Not Helpful 7

#### Question

**It is ok to do curl ups while I am pregnant?**



Community Answer

It's fine in the first trimester as long as it feels fine for your body. It may even be ok after that, within reason, but be careful about lying on your back (not always recommended during later stages of pregnancy) and always stop if you feel pain.

Helpful 4 Not Helpful 5

#### Question

**How do I do curl ups?**



Community Answer

Use free weights of between 3-10 lbs depending on your size and experience level. Hold one weight in each hand, palms up. With the weights at your sides, bending at the elbows, curl them up to waist or chest level. Do 3 reps of 12 counts.

Helpful 3 Not Helpful 6

## VideoRead Video Transcript

<https://www.wikihow.com/video/6/68/Do+Curl+Ups+Step+0.1080p.mp4>



### Warnings

- Do not exercise while injured without consulting a physician.
- Do not put your hands behind your head and pull by your neck. This can result in injury.

## References

1. ↑ <https://www.military.com/military-fitness/fitness-test-prep/proper-technique-for-curl-ups>
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## About This Article



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This article was co-authored by **Danny Gordon**. Danny Gordon is an American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Certified Personal Trainer and Owner of The Body Studio for Fitness, a fitness studio based in the San Francisco Bay Area. With over 20 years of physical training and teaching experience, he has focused his studio on semi-private personal training. Danny received his Personal Trainer Certification from the California State University, East Bay and the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM). This article has been viewed 164,100 times.

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