

► FLATTEN  
YOUR

# belly

## the plan

### Ball basics

Do these moves as a group, or incorporate them selectively into your current fitness routine, 2-3 times a week. It may take beginners 6 weeks or more to feel completely stable and balanced on the ball. Once you've mastered all 6 exercises, mix and match them for variety.

### Warm-up

Begin by doing easy pelvic tilts: Lie faceup on ball with back – from shoulder blades to tailbone – in contact with ball and hips dropped toward floor, knees bent, feet flat. Lift and lower hips 4-6 times. Next, keep hips lifted and shoulder blades in contact with ball as you do 4-6 arm circles.

### Cool-down

Stretch your major muscle groups, holding each stretch for 30 seconds without bouncing.

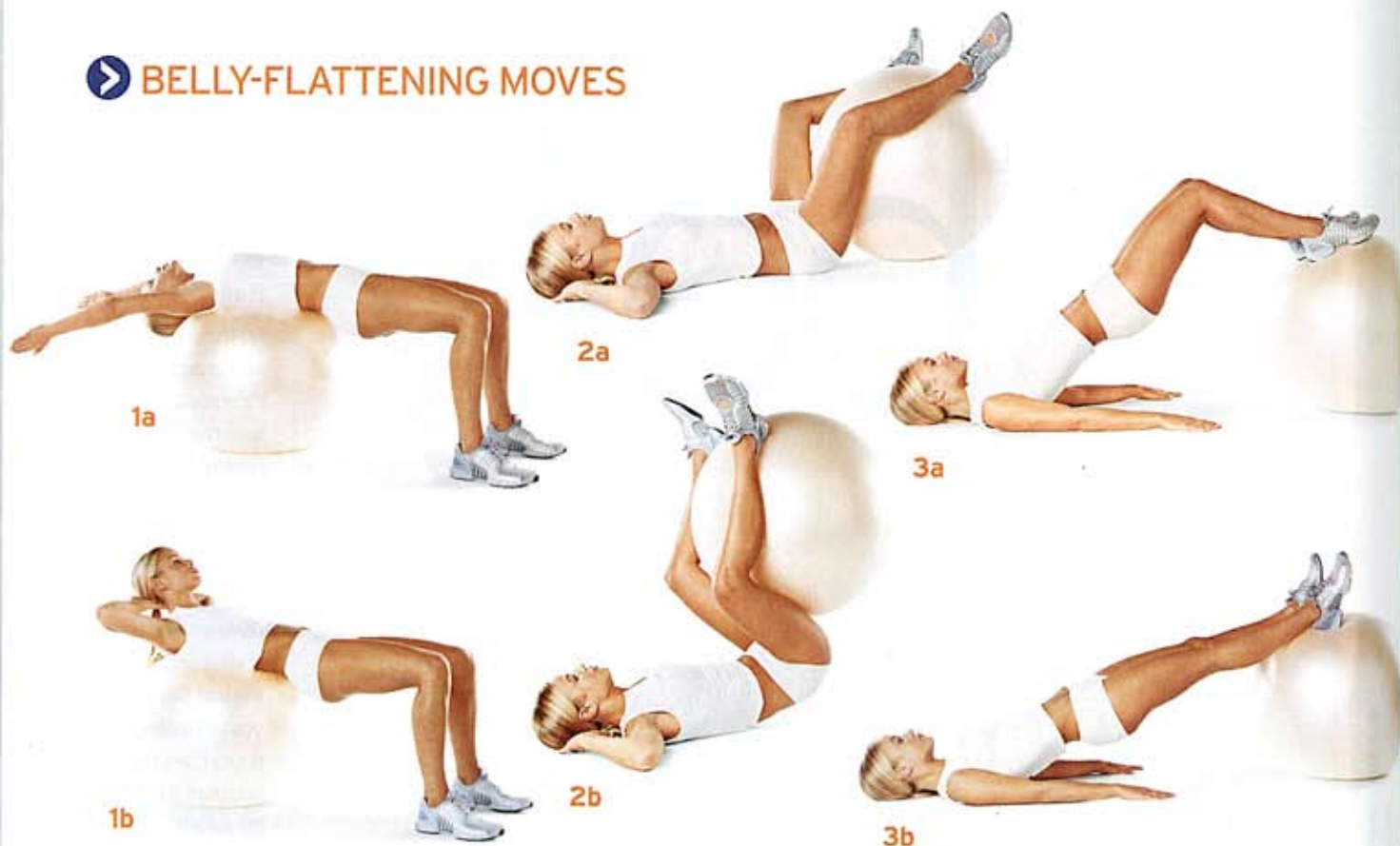


**Great abs start at the core.** That's why we asked Toronto-based certified Stott Pilates instructor Colleen Craig to create a plan that engages the deep stabilizing muscles of the abdomen – which are often ignored in traditional strength training – throughout your ab training. Derived from her book *Abs on the Ball* (Healing Arts Press, 2003), Craig's program melds the core-strength-training principles of Pilates with the balance challenge of the stability ball, which will force you to put almost every muscle to work to complete the exercise using correct form. "Even when you're emphasizing other body parts, your core works to stabilize your position – so your abs, spine extensors and pelvic muscles get a workout," Craig says. Not only will these moves flatten your belly, but they'll also improve your posture, which will make you look slimmer all over. So, hop on the ball and make these six moves mandatory!

By Stacy Whitman   Photography by Willie Maldonado



## ➤ BELLY-FLATTENING MOVES



### 1 extension crunch

Sit on ball, then walk feet forward until only head, neck and middle back are supported, feet hip-width apart, knees bent and over ankles. Lift hips, tightening buttocks so hips are in line with shoulders and knees. Extend arms overhead and behind you toward floor [A]. Placing hands, unclasp, behind head and contracting abs, lift head, neck and shoulder blades off ball [B]. Return to starting position. Repeat 8-12 times. *Strengthens abdominals*

### 2 reverse crunch

Lie faceup on floor, placing calves on ball, legs wider than hips, then bend knees, squeezing ball with backs of thighs and using heels to hold it in place. Place hands, unclasp, behind head, elbows bent [A]. Inhale, then exhale as you bring knees in toward chest, lifting hips a few inches off floor [B]. Pause, then exhale, releasing hips to floor, keeping abs engaged. Repeat 8-12 times. *Strengthens abdominals*

### 3 bridge and pull

Lie faceup on floor, knees bent close to 90 degrees, feet resting near top of ball slightly apart, arms relaxed at sides. Inhale, press feet into ball, then exhale, engaging abdominals as you curl tailbone, then rest of spine, off floor until shoulders, hips and knees form a straight line, knees bent [A]. Hold ball steady for 5 breaths; lower and repeat 5 times. Then, lift up again, extend legs and roll ball away from you, balancing on heels [B]. Bend knees and pull ball back to starting position, hips still lifted. Repeat 6-8 times before lowering to floor. *Strengthens hamstrings and buttocks; abdominals and spine extensors act as stabilizers*

**selecting a stability ball** If you're less than 5 feet 8 inches tall, you'll most likely need a 55-centimeter ball. If you're taller, opt for a 65-cm ball. When you sit on top of the ball with your feet flat on the floor, knees over ankles, your thighs should be parallel to the floor, with your hips bent as close to 90 degrees as possible. You can let air out of the ball to make balancing easier, or pump it up to make it tougher. A stability ball costs \$20-\$30 at most sporting-goods stores and online retailers such as [spriproducts.com](http://spriproducts.com), [balldynamics.com](http://balldynamics.com) and [resistaball.com](http://resistaball.com).





4a



4b



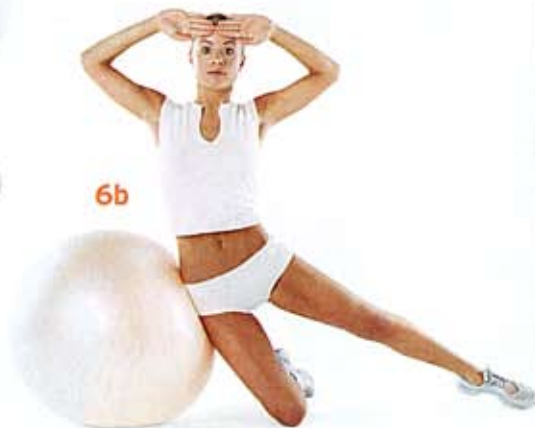
5a



5b



6a



6b

## 4 bend and extend

Lying faceup on floor, prop yourself up on forearms, palms down, elbows under shoulders, knees bent in line with hips, squeezing ball between ankles. Lift chest, press shoulders down, contract abs and lengthen spine to prevent slouching [A]. Inhale, then exhale as you straighten knees to extend legs to a 45-degree angle (or higher if necessary to maintain torso alignment) [B]. Inhale and bend knees back in to starting position. Repeat 6-8 times. *Strengthens abdominals, inner thighs, upper hips and quadriceps*

## 5 ball push-up

Drape yourself facedown over ball. Walk hands forward until ball is under thighs (or shins for more of a challenge) and wrists are in line with shoulders, hands slightly wider than shoulder-width. Squeeze thighs and ankles together, pulling abdominals up and in so torso forms one straight line from head to heels [A]. Maintaining torso position, bend elbows until they align with shoulders, bringing chest toward floor [B]. Push up to starting position without locking elbows. Repeat 8-12 times. *Strengthens chest, front shoulders and triceps; abdominals, spine extensors and buttocks act as stabilizers*

## 6 side raise

Kneel and press the right side of your body against ball so lower ribs and hips are leaning into it. Extend left leg out to side, big toe touching floor. (If that's too difficult, keep both knees bent and down.) Place tops of fingers on forehead, palms forward, elbows bent and wide [A]. Inhale, then exhale as you lift torso up off ball as high as you can, keeping abs firmly pulled in and right hip in contact with ball [B]. Slowly return to starting position. Repeat 5-8 times, then switch sides. *Strengthens obliques and deep hip muscles*

*Freelance writer Stacy Whitman uses a Body Bar, BOSU and stability ball to work out at home.*