

SOLO TRAINING 2

The Martial Artist's Home Guide to Building the Core



*Get stronger
and faster for grappling,
kicking, and punching*

LOREN W. CHRISTENSEN

The Next Evolution in Fighting Techniques and Concepts

In this follow-up to his phenomenally popular *Solo Training*, Loren W. Christensen digs down deep to come up with hundreds of more ways for you to rev up your training at home or in the gym. *Solo Training 2* kicks off with a focus on building your body's core for stronger, faster, and more effective grappling, kicking, and punching. A strong core—chest, abs, hips, shoulders, and back—is the source of your body's power, speed, and coordinated movement.

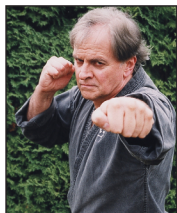
As a martial artist, having a strong core helps you to get more out of your training and to respond instantly and effectively to the fast-changing demands of competition or an explosive street encounter.

You'll also get

- Over 100 ways to work your combinations
- How to cheat speed
- Tools to improve accuracy
- Fighting from unconventional stances
- How to practice grappling without a partner
- Getting the most out of your mannequin bag

This book wraps up with eight workouts, each with a specific goal, like the free-hand power builder and the boxer workout.

If you're looking to get more out of training, *Solo Training 2* represents your next evolution in fighting techniques and concepts.



Loren W. Christensen has been studying martial arts since 1965 and has earned eleven black belts in three arts. He used his martial arts training as a military policeman in Saigon, Vietnam, and as a police officer in the Portland Police Bureau for 25 years. Loren W. Christensen resides in Portland, Oregon.

Author photo: Lisa Christensen
Design: Axie Breen



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Using This Book

Throughout *Solo Training 2*, you will find icons that highlight important sections:



Sometimes you need to take extra care during your training. The caution symbol calls your attention to these places in the text.



Get the most out of every workout by paying special attention to these workout tips.



Advice you don't want to miss. Discovering the reasons behind the drills is just as important as doing the reps.



Although this is designed to be a book about training alone, some drills can be done with a partner. When you see this symbol, call up a friend!



Streamline your training for maximum impact with these expert training tips.

Section One



Building a powerful foundation

There are a number of reasons to train in the martial arts: the enjoyment of social interaction with others, to study an Asian culture, to participate in a unique form of exercise, and to be the best you can be as a competitor or as an expert in self-defense (and as one of my comical students offered, to be the best subway mugger you can be). While possessing a powerful foundation is important in all of these motivations, it's absolutely mandatory for competition and street survival.

For our purposes, the word "foundation" refers to a powerful system of abdominals, back, legs, arms, and joints that have been developed to their optimum strength, power, speed and health. You might be able to do well in local competition without these attributes, but their optimum development is paramount when fighting in the big leagues. And you might fare well in a shoving match with the local bully without them, but should you have to defend your life or the life of a loved one, your core foundation had better be in top condition.

You have heard it said many times that the martial arts is all about the basics; that when you fight for real you're going to rely on your basic stances, basic body movement, basic punching, and basic kicking because the street is no place for fancy-smancy techniques best left for a Jackie Chan movie. However, should you want to do flowery, fancy-smancy techniques in modern forms competition or to participate in fun, over-the-top demonstrations, your basics must be solid, too. But before you can build them to their optimum, you must have a rock-solid, powerful foundation.

Most martial arts schools don't provide sufficient time to do the essential exercises needed to create this mighty trunk from which everything branches. No problem because that is why solo training was invented. When you spend quality time away from class working on building a solid foundation, you will find your progress moving forward by leaps and bounds.

1



11 Ways to Develop Powerful Fighting Abs

Let's move from what has been called "your greatest weapon," your mind, down to the center of your body, your midsection, and look at some tough and highly effective abdominal exercises. These aren't the usual crunches, but rather intense warrior exercises specifically chosen to develop abs that will dynamically assist in the delivery of fast and powerful kicks and punches, fast avoidance movements, power at your core for ground grappling, and speed to get back up in a quick hurry.

While these exercises will give you a powerful midsection, to get a showy six-pack, you have to reduce your body fat to a low level. To learn how to do that using an intelligent eating plan and your martial arts training get a copy of *The Fighter's Body* by Wim Demeere and me, available through Turtle Press. That said, know that working for a six-pack isn't as important as is ridding yourself of unnecessary fat. A fighting warrior shouldn't have excess. Sorry, there is no argument to that.

So are you ready for some gut pain? Let's get started.

Abs-a-fire



This exercise looks weird, feels weird, but it attacks the front, sides and back of your midsection in areas normally not hit by a single ab exercise. And as a free-of-charge bonus, it strengthens your knees, too. Warning: Don't do too many of these at first because you will wake up the next day coughing up chunks of your stomach. Okay, that won't happen, but you will wake up super sore. One set is plenty for the first week or so, then add a second set, and after a couple more weeks, add a third. Here is how you do the (cue up echo chamber) Abs-of-fire, fire, fire, fire.

- Grip a dumbbell with your right hand, 5 or 10 pounds is plenty at first, and stand up straight with your feet about shoulder width apart, the dumbbell down at your side.
- Bend your right knee and lift your right foot a few inches off the floor.
- Bend down to your left and touch the dumbbell to the outside of your left foot.
- Stand up and lift the dumbbell, with a slightly bent elbow, straight up, over, and behind your right shoulder, bending your knee as you twist to your right.
- Pause for a moment – your body should be leaning back 45 degrees with your arm and leg in alignment - then lower the dumbbell back to the outside of your left foot. Do 9 more reps.
- Then do 10 reps with the dumbbell in your left hand, touching it to the outside of your right foot, then lifting it back over your left shoulder.



Do 1 set of 10 reps on each side 2 times a week for the first week. If you feel like adding a second set on both sides the following week, do so. If one set is still tough, do it one more week and then see if you're ready to add a second set on the third week. There is no hurry to add. Don't listen to that nagging internal clock that thinks you have been doing one set for too long. Let your muscles develop at their pace and add additional sets only when your body tells you it's time.

HIGH REPS OR LOW REPS?

No, high reps aren't going to slim you down and no, slow reps with weight resistance aren't going to give you a thick waist. Both are good for your midsection and ultimately for your martial arts.

High reps attack your smaller, endurance-oriented, slow-twitch muscle fibers, and low reps with heavy resistance stimulate the fast-twitch muscle fibers.

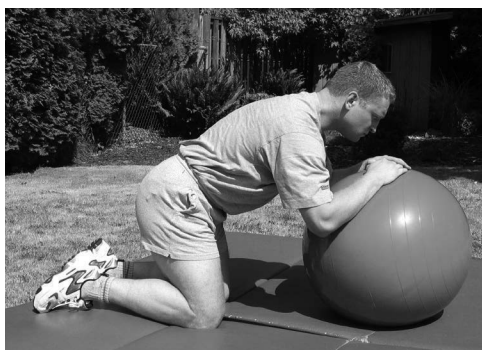
Do both.



Praying Mantis

This is a tough exercise that not only targets your abs most acutely, but also strengthens your shoulders, lats and pelvic area, all critical to optimum martial arts performance.

- Kneel before a Swiss ball and place your forearms on top of it, your elbows pointed outward. Place the tops of your toes on the floor with your knees together. Keep your back straight.
- Roll the ball forward, without moving your feet, and allow your hips, upper body and arms to move forward with it.
- Roll as far as you can without your back sagging.
- Hold for 5 seconds to enjoy the pain.
- Slowly pull back to the starting position.



Do 1 set of 10 reps 2 times a week for 1 week. Add another set the second week and a third set the third or fourth week. Anytime you're not ready to add a set, don't, and don't fret about it. Allow your muscles time to strengthen before you add another set.

Deep contractions



Just because you're not bending, crunching and twisting doesn't always mean you're not working your gut. Here is an exercise where all you do is lay there, sort of. It attacks those deep abdominal muscles that help stabilize your hips and lower back for power kicks, punches and throws.

- Put on your favorite music CD and lie on the floor, knees bent and feet flat.
- Place both your palms on your stomach, your thumbs touching your upper abs and your fingers spread over your lower abs.
- Blow out all your air, pull in your stomach as far as you can, and hold for 10 seconds *as you continue to breathe*.
- **Important difference:** This exercise is typically done by blowing

out the air in your lungs, sucking in your gut, and holding it in until you have to take a breath. This variation is more effective. You blow out your air, suck your gut way in, and then breathe normally while still holding in your stomach. The struggle to breathe while holding the contraction is what makes this variation so intense and effective.

- Relax and do another rep.

Do 1 set of 10 reps on each side two times a week for 1 week. Add a second set the second week and a third set the third or fourth week.

Since this is one that will sneak up on you and give you some serious soreness the next day, consider contracting your abs only 80 to 90 percent the first few workouts. After two or three weeks, kick it up to 100 percent contractions. Don't say I didn't warn you.



BEST CRUNCHES: FLOOR OR BALL?

So what is the answer to the often debated question: Is it better to do crunches on a Swiss ball or on the floor?

According to a study done at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, Canada, the Swiss ball wins. They found that the rectus abdominis, AKA, the six-pack muscles, worked over twice as hard on the ball, and the obliques (those muscles under your love handles) worked four times as hard.

So get on the ball.



Backfist crunches

Here is a 2-in-1 exercise that benefits your abs and your backfist strike. I've written in the past as to how you can increase the impact of your backfist by suddenly tensing your abdominals when your fist is about 12 inches from the bag. This is still true, and when done repetitiously the technique also serves as an excellent ab exercise. Actually, you get three benefits from this drill: You work on delivering a strong backfist, you work your stomach muscles by flexing them hard as you strike, and you learn how to coordinate contracting your powerful midsection with your blows.

- Begin in your on-guard position, hands up.
- Launch your backfist at the bag (it doesn't matter if you're close enough to hit it or you have to step in). About a foot or so from impact, crunch your abs hard. You want to actually sink your upper body into them a couple of inches.
 - It might take a few reps to get the timing, but when it's there, you will appreciate a greater degree of impact on the bag as well as the positive impact on your abs.
 - **Tip:** To feel this even more, do two or three of the other stomach exercises in this chapter first, and then finish your session with backfist crunches. You will feel every backfist in your stomach muscles, which is good because that means you're on target.



Do 3 sets of 10 reps crunching your abs with each backfist.

Brace

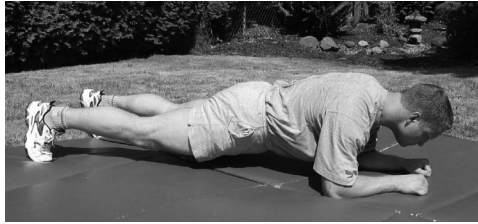
This is an intense exercise that will have you trembling like an autumn leaf, which is okay since that makes you stronger, especially your abs, obliques and lower back. After a couple of sets – sets that consist of only 1 little rep – you will be convinced that your stomach is flatter and tighter. For sure you will know that it hurts.

Warning: If you have a bad lower back, do this for only 5 or 10 seconds per single rep and progress slowly with additional seconds over the weeks. If you experience a lot of pain in your lower back, delete this exercise from your regimen until it feels better.



- Get into a push-up position, resting on your forearms rather than your hands.

- This is key: Your body must be absolutely straight from your ankles to your shoulders because your abs won't benefit if you raise your back or butt.
- Tighten your abs to help hold your body straight and stiff.
- Hold for 20 seconds then relax by lowering your knees to the floor.



Braces are sneaky little critters that can leave you with a painful stomach. In just a few workouts, however, you will be ready to bump up the intensity. Here is a good way to add on to this popular exercise:

- Do 1 set of 1, 20-second rep, say, Monday and Thursday the first week. Always rest two days between workouts.
- The second week increase the time to 1, 40-second rep each ab day.
- The third week increase the time to 1, 60-second rep.
- If you want to add a second rep the fourth week, do the second one for 20 seconds and then increase the seconds progressively as you did with the first rep.
- If you do several sets of other ab exercises and finish with this one, 1 set of 1 rep will probably be plenty.

Side brace



This is a great ab exercise to strengthen the sides of your abdomen as well as your lower back, muscles that assist in fast avoidance movements, kicking, getting up from the ground, and a host of other fighting applications.

- Lie on your side with your elbow directly under your shoulder, your forearm pointing outward to balance you.
- Lift your body until your top hip is in perfect alignment with the rest of your body: chin tucked, head and spine in a straight line, your top leg on top of the other.
- Slowly lower your hip until it lightly touches the floor, and then go back up again.
- Hold the top position of each rep for 2 seconds.



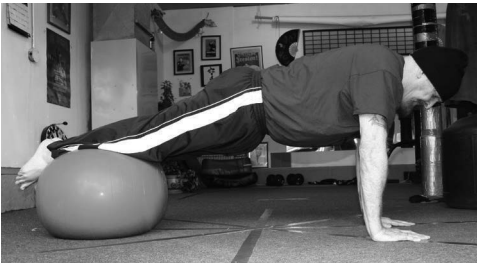
Perform 1 set of 10 reps, then flip over to the other side and do 1 set of 10 reps. If these are new to you, stick with 1 set for a week or two, then add a second set of 10 reps.

Rolling jackknives

The big difference between this exercise and braces is that this one is more dynamic, especially in the way your hips and upper thighs are drawn toward your abdomen, similar to when you chamber a front kick. It's a great exercise that involves several pertinent muscles for fighting.



- Get in a push-up position with your hands in line with your shoulders, but slightly wider for support.
- Place your shins on top of a Swiss ball with your back flat and your body - from your shoulders to your ankles - absolutely straight.
- Using the power of your abs, hips and thighs, pull the ball toward your hands as you raise your hips as high as you can.
- Hold for 2 or 3 seconds and then lower your hips as you push the ball slowly away until your body is once again straight.



Do 1 set of 6 reps for the first week, add 2 reps the second week and 2 more reps the third. One set of 10 reps should be plenty when the exercise is done in conjunction with other ab work. If you really want to torture yourself, begin a second, 6-reps set the fourth week, progressing by 2 reps for the next 2 weeks.

A jackknife variation



This variation also duplicates the chambering motion of a front kick as well as a front knee strike. So not only are you zapping your abs, you're stimulating the very muscles that add power and speed to these specific leg strikes. The last exercise, the rolling jackknives, is fairly static, but this variation is done nonstop in a rhythmic motion. Don't think about sets and reps; think in terms of time.

- Get in a push-up position with your hands in line with your shoulders, but slightly wider for support.
- Place the tops of your feet on top of a Swiss ball, keeping your back flat and your body straight from shoulders to ankles.
- Using the power of your abs, hips and thighs, contract your gut and pull the ball as close to your chest as possible.
- Pause, then roll the ball back to the starting position, again using the power of your ab muscles.

Depending on the condition of your abs, do these nonstop for 40 to 60 seconds. Depending on your strength and endurance, you might do 1 rep per second or 1 rep every 3 seconds. It's all good as long as you keep pumping in a smooth tempo.

MUSCLE SORENESS

I've been warning you about taking it easy with many of these exercises because they are different than the usual crunch motion that you might be used to. Since many of them require that you contract your abs differently and more intensely than how they contract with regular ab exercises, you will likely be sore. With your ab muscles nestled in the middle of your body, major soreness there can ruin your day.

Start out slowly and progress wisely.

PS 1: There are no supplements at this writing that help prevent muscle soreness.

PS 2: Anti-inflammatories might ease the pain, but they limit post-exercise muscle growth.

Everything in moderation, Grasshopper.



Old fashion sit-ups with resistance

This is a good power developer that hits the abs and the hip flexors. Since you're using resistance, you don't have to do many, and you only have to do them once or twice a week. If you do other ab exercises, do these only once a week.

- Sit on the floor with your knees bent and your feet pinned under something.
- Pick up a barbell bar and cradle it in the crooks of your arms. Choose a weight you can handle for 3 sets of 10 to 15 reps.
- Slowly lift your upper body until it's *nearly* vertical, almost straight up and down. By stopping short of vertical you keep continuous tension on your abs.
- Pause for a 3-count and then lower your upper body back to the floor. Don't crash down, but lower yourself to the floor with control.

Do 3 sets of 10-to 15 reps.



WHEN A HARD GUT ISN'T A GOOD THING

Do you know someone who has a beer gut and is always trying to convince people that it's muscle?

"Just feel it," they say. "It's hard as a rock."

Indeed it is, but the bad news is that a big, hard gut is actually reason for alarm. In fact, some experts in the medical field say it's more dangerous than high cholesterol and smoking.

A big, hard belly is the result of an accumulation of visceral fat packed between organs in the abdominal cavity, lard jammed in so tightly that the belly can't jiggle. The other kind of big belly, one that jiggles, is a result of subcutaneous fat located close to the surface of the skin. Both types are dangerous.

To get rid of that visceral fat, you need to drop 5 to 10 percent of your body weight. So if you weigh 200 pounds and you have such a belly, trim off 10 percent, 20 pounds, and see how you look and feel at 180. For sure your martial arts will improve.

Russian twists

These are a favorite among boxers who recognize the necessity of having powerful midsection muscles for greater punching speed and power. Like other exercises in this chapter, Russian twists can aggravate existing back problems. So if you have one, approach this cautiously. You can do them empty handed, while holding a towel or belt, or you can add resistance by holding a medicine ball or weights in each hand.



- Lay on the floor with your knees bent and your feet pinned under a stationary object.
- Extend your arms above you to a point slightly below your chin. Touch your hands palm to palm or, if your ab muscles are especially strong, hold a single weight - 5 to 25 pounds - with both hands.
- Lift your upper body off the floor 12 or 15 inches. Your straight arms move with you so that they extend in front of you at an upward angle.

- Rotate your shoulders to the right side until your arms are pointing 90 degrees to your side. Hold your hips rigid so that all the twisting is happening in your waist. Don't snap your upper body to each side, but twist at a medium pace.
- Now rotate your shoulders to the left side until your arms are pointing 90 degrees to that side.
- Return your arms to straight ahead and lower yourself to the floor. All of that counts as one 1 rep.



Do 2 sets of 20 reps, 10 to each side.

Arm-stretched, weighted sit-up



Caution

This works the entire midsection, strengthening all the muscles needed for fast body evasion, for whipping out hard kicks, and for driving in powerful punches. Know that this exercise requires strength. If your abs are weak, do this one first without resistance, or hold off doing it until you have built some power from the other exercises listed in this chapter. It's better to have enough strength to do the move properly than struggle awkwardly and hurt something.

- Lie on your back on a Swiss ball with your arms stretched out behind you and level with your upper body. Hold a weight in your hands.
- Lift your head, shoulders, arms, and upper body as one unit until you're sitting all the way upright.
- Pause for a couple of seconds and then descend slowly back to the starting position.



Workout
Tip

Don't think about sets or reps, but think in terms of time. Depending on the condition of your abs, do these nonstop for 40 to 60 seconds. You might do 1 rep per second or 1 rep every 3 seconds. It's all good as long as you keep pumping in a smooth tempo.

Many of the ab exercises in this chapter are quite tough. Do they hurt? Yes. Will you develop a powerful midsection from them? Yes. Will that improve the overall quality of your martial arts techniques? YES.

Remember, while your ab muscles don't have to be ripped into a finely etched six-pack for the martial arts, they have to be strong. Like most people my abs fluctuate in their appearance. Sometimes if the bathroom light is juuust right, I can see the beginnings of a six-pack on my midsection. Other times – right after a vacation, right after the holidays, or right after a weekend chocolate binge – my gut begins to look like the Pillsbury Doughboy's. But no matter how it looks, it's always strong, because I stay consistent with the ab work.

So am I saying it's okay to look like the Pillsbury Doughboy? No. I'm saying that it's okay to be human and relax a little and enjoy good chow from time to time. But stay consistent with your ab training as you do. Then when the fun time is over, trim off the extra weight so that you enjoy better mobility, better endurance, better health and a better appearance. In the end, you will have a strong gut no matter how it looks.

