

MISSION ABDOMINALS

TOP SECRETS

TO SIX PACK ABS!

THE TRUTH ABOUT

**DIET SCAMS &
RIP OFFS!**

CONFIDENTIAL

**MUSCLE BUILDING
MANEUVERS!**

TOM VENUTO, CSCS, CPT

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Editing and Layout: Lee Allen Howard (lee_allen_howard@yahoo.com)

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Mission: Abdominals

David Grisaffi, the "Abs Guru," Interviews
Tom Venuto, the "Fat Loss Guru"

*This special report is an excerpt from Tom Venuto's ebook,
The Fat Burn Files: 10 Revealing, Uncensored Interviews
with the World's Most Honest Fitness Guru.*

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MISSION: ABDOMINALS

David Grisaffi Interviews Tom Venuto

DAVID GRISAFFI: Tom, before we get started, I just want to say thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule for this interview.

TOM VENUTO: Always a pleasure, David.

DAVID GRISAFFI: Let's jump right in and talk about a very popular topic in today's fitness news—abdominal fat. Many products claim to reduce abdominal fat. A few years back there was Cortislim, and today we see new products on TV, like Relacore, that talk about reducing abdominal fat. Would you tell us your thoughts on this subject?

TOM VENUTO: There are all kinds of products claiming to reduce belly fat through all kinds of physiological mechanisms including controlling insulin, reducing appetite, increasing thermogenesis, and others. The two products you mentioned claim to reduce abdominal fat by suppressing the hormone cortisol.

No matter what the mechanism involved, I can't put it any softer than to say this whole concept of "take a pill to lose your belly" is the wrong approach and a great way to burn your money, get taken advantage of, and end up frustrated, discouraged, or even harming yourself. If pills really worked in the long term, they would have stood the test of time, but instead, there's a new miracle product every year. That's how the marketing machine works—they keep hooking you with the "next big thing."

People get bombarded with so much advertising that they're conditioned—or I guess brainwashed is a better word—to think that a pill is the answer. But if you look at the history of the diet pill market, it's been one bomb, one scam, and one fraud after another.

The products you mentioned are perfect examples. In 2004, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) filed lawsuits against the makers of Cortislim and Cortistress, charging them with making false and unsubstantiated claims that their products can cause weight loss.

The last news I heard, which was in late 2005, the defendants were paying \$4.5 million in damages to settle, and they were banned from making certain claims in their advertising and from misrepresenting the results of tests or scientific studies. They were also prohibited from using what the FTC called “deceptively formatted television and radio advertisements.”

What I want to point out about all this is that Cortislim is still for sale and so are about a dozen or more copycat products. These companies were not banned from *selling* their products, they were only banned from making certain *claims* about their products.

You’ll notice a lot of them will say something like this: “Cortisol has been scientifically linked to abdominal body fat. Stress causes cortisol release. Therefore, stress causes belly fat. Our product contains ingredients that have a calming effect and reduce stress.” Some of the ads do not necessarily close this loop by saying, “Therefore, taking our product shrinks belly fat,” that claim is simply implied as the next step in the chain of causation. Others are still making fraudulent claims; the FTC just hasn’t caught up with them yet.

One of the things that really bothers me about the advertising in one of the current crop of products is that their ad says, “Excess tummy flab is not your fault.” Oh really? Well whose fault is that belly of yours? Your husband’s? Your kids’? Your neighbors’? McDonalds? Krispy Kreme? Your parents’? Yeah, maybe it’s all genetics. A glandular problem? Yeah, it’s a glandular problem all right—your mouth gland is malfunctioning several times a day, eating too many calories and too much junk food.

Taking 100% responsibility for your body and your health is one of the most important concepts I teach. Most people are happy to take the praise and credit whenever they succeed or produce a positive result, but they won’t accept the blame when they fail or produce a negative result.

If you want a great body, you have to be able to say, “The shape I’m in right now is totally my doing; it’s a result of the choices I’ve made up to now, and that’s the great part. Because I make my own choices, I have control to make different choices today and in the future, and so I have the power to change.”

Not a lot of people are willing to say that. Instead they make excuses or blame it on something else like genetics or lifestyle factors that they perceive to be out of their control—such as stress—and stress is what these new products are hanging their hats on. Clever marketing hook too, because who doesn’t feel at least a little stressed in this day and age we live in?

With products like these, there is usually a thread of scientific truth woven into a fabric of lies, and that’s what makes it difficult for the average lay person to separate the two.

In this case, there’s a scientifically proven correlation between the stress hormone cortisol and intra-abdominal body fat. But that doesn’t mean taking a pill that suppresses cortisol will remove body fat that is already deposited. It takes a calorie deficit through proper diet and exercise to do that.

Pop all the pills you want and suppress cortisol all you want, but if you’re eating more than you’re burning, you’re going to keep gaining even more body fat. There are also plenty of people with high cortisol who are losing weight because they’re burning more calories than they eat.

To avoid legal or FTC issues, some companies are making it a point to emphasize the importance of nutrition and exercise in addition to taking their pill. This is a good thing, but on the other hand, it also complicates matters because, if you’re working out and dieting, then there’s no way to tell whether the weight loss you achieve is a result of the pill or the exercise and nutrition. Most likely, it’s 99% the exercise and nutrition, if not 100%, and between 0% and 1% the supplement.

Something else I find very deceptive is that some of these companies are making their herbal and vitamin product packaging look like pharmaceuticals. The bottles mimic drug packaging, the

label says “XYZ laboratories,” and the pills aren’t tablets, they’re two-color capsules that look like drugs.

There’s some serious advertising psychology going on here. Not only does this imply that the product is a drug or is as powerful as a drug, if only unconsciously in the consumer’s mind, it also gives greater perceived value. Some of these products are \$50, \$75, even \$100 or more a bottle for a 30-day supply. That’s an insane markup for a few vitamins, minerals, and herbs.

If you’re under a lot of stress, you don’t need a pill to suppress the cortisol produced by the stress, you need to reduce stress! That’s obvious to the point of “DUH,” but people always seem to want the magic pill, don’t they?

I’d recommend taking up a stress reduction program that could include meditation, time in nature, yoga, deep breathing exercises, vacation time, daily and weekly timeouts to decompress and relax, and high quality sleep. You also need to balance your training stress properly with the right amount of recovery.

My advice: Never waste your money on a pill that claims to reduce fat or belly fat. Exercise and proper diet are the way to go if you want permanent results. When you combine those with a proper balance of work and rest, training and recovery, stress and relaxation, then you have everything you need for great health and amazing abdominals.

By the way, I published a free report about cortisol, stress, and body fat, including almost three dozen research references. You can read it online or download it for free. The web address is:

www.BurnTheFat.com/cortisol_stress_belly_fat_information.html

DAVID GRISAFFI: What about hoodia gordonii? The ads say, “It’s the newest phenomenon and most exciting fat loss product available, as seen on *60 Minutes*,” and so on. What are your thoughts?

TOM VENUTO: I have never seen so much hype as this hoodia thing, but I guess that’s what *60 Minutes* and BBC prime time will do. Not to mention millions of spam emails. I usually don’t like to generalize because there are exceptions to almost every rule, but I’m going to

do it anyway and say once again that pills are a total waste of time and money.

If hoodia does anything, it's a quick fix. At the very best, if it contains what it says it contains, and does what it claims to do, it might suppress appetite so you eat less. That might be of value to some people some of the time, but I don't believe suppressing appetite is the right strategy to begin with. Suppress your appetite so you can starve yourself and slow down your metabolism and lose muscle? Great logic there. You need to feed your muscle, not starve it, and burn the fat with exercise.

It's also totally senseless to take pills that you are completely uneducated about. Many people are taking hoodia because of the hype, but they don't even have any idea what it is or what it's supposed to do.

Hoodia is a plant from Africa that has reputedly been used by the Kalahari bushmen to suppress appetite while they went on long hunting trips. In 1997 it was licensed to a British pharmaceutical company called Phytopharm. Then Phytopharm sold the rights to Pfizer, the maker of Viagra. Pfizer's intention was to develop a synthetic version and sell it as an obesity drug. Nothing came of it, and they sold the rights back to Phytopharm—that's interesting because it makes you wonder if Pfizer saw no potential in it.

Phytopharm did one in-house study with a small group of subjects, but so far *there is not one single independent study in a peer reviewed journal that proves hoodia is effective for helping with weight loss*. All this hype is based on anecdotal evidence and a couple of reporter's personal testimonials broadcast to millions of people.

There are a lot of experts—and I'm talking about educated and respected professionals—who say that controlling appetite with various compounds (drugs or natural supplements) is a completely acceptable and effective way to help people lose weight. That may be true if you're talking about temporary weight loss and if you're okay with using drugs, and a lot of people are. Personally, I think that's short term thinking, especially when you figure that you can control appetite just by eating properly and avoiding the types of

junk food and refined sugars that make your blood sugar go haywire.

I believe that if you're not thinking about long term permanent fat loss, then ultimately you're wasting your time. We don't have a problem with people losing weight. The problem is the inability to keep weight off. 95% of the people who lose weight gain it back within a year. That's because 95% of the people who lose weight are losing weight the wrong way—with pills, crash diets, and other quick fixes. The right way is burning the calories with exercise and supporting your workouts with good nutrition.

One last thing worth mentioning is that this *hoodia gordonii* plant is apparently quite rare, and there is a limited supply and a large demand. As a result there has been at least one case of a company selling phony hoodia, and I read one statistic that estimated that two-thirds of the hoodia on the market is phony. That's just one more reason not to bother.

DAVID GRISAFFI: Good information, Tom, thanks. Why don't we stay on this subject of hyped weight loss products. Another one of the new ones is the diet patch. What is your opinion of this product?

TOM VENUTO: The diet patch just makes me laugh even before I analyze the ingredients it supposedly delivers, because like a pill, a patch is not addressing causes, it's just another weak attempt at treating a symptom. What about fixing the cause—inactivity and poor diet—with exercise and good nutrition?

Usually when I say that, someone says back to me, “Yeah, Tom, I will diet and exercise while I'm using the patch,” and over and over again I will keep saying, not only do *none* of these approaches work without diet and exercise, if you ate right and exercised right, you wouldn't need them even if they did work and you could save your money! Spend it on better food and a gym membership or home gym equipment.

But let me play devil's advocate and let's go ahead and look objectively at the facts, assuming it's possible that there might be something valid here, because patches are a legitimate method to deliver drugs transdermally, which means through the skin.

Examples include scopolamine for motion sickness, the nicotine patch for smoking cessation, and the testosterone patch for low male hormone levels and the problems that come with that, and there are quite a few other drugs approved for transdermal drug delivery.

The over-the-counter diet patches of course are not delivering weight loss drugs, but simply claim to contain all kinds of over-the-counter ingredients including guarana, lecithin, L-carnitine, *sida cordifolia*, and others that claim to increase your metabolism or decrease your appetite.

You have two questions to consider here. First, are any of these ingredients scientifically proven to help you lose weight to begin with? Second, does the over-the-counter patch effectively deliver the ingredients through the skin the same as the prescription drug patches? I would say in almost every case the answers are no and no.

Here are some even more enlightening facts:

- In 1988, The FDA seized a supply of Appetoff patches, which were nothing more than circular band aids that instructed users to place a drop of supposed fat-burning liquid on it. The patches were tested and found to contain no active ingredients. If you're wondering whether anyone would be dumb enough to buy such a thing, then consider that \$22 million worth of these patches were seized when the FDA busted down the doors.
- In March 2004, Peel Away the Pounds settled with the FTC, agreeing to pay back more than one million dollars to ripped off consumers after being charged that they made false and unsubstantiated claims about their weight loss patch, such as three to five pounds per week in weight loss.
- In November 2004, Illinois attorney general Lisa Madigan filed a lawsuit against a Nevada corporation, Diet Patch, Inc., for luring consumers to their website with false claims and free trial offers for their diet patch. They were charged with multiple violations of the consumer fraud and deceptive business practices act.
- In December 2004, the Canadian equivalent of the FTC ordered a diet patch company to pay full refunds for purchases of diet

patches Zyapax and Dyapax, and they were banned from making further false claims about the product.

- In March 2005, The FTC ordered the shutdown of “The Amazing Diet Patch” after massive numbers of consumer complaints flooded in about the product not working as advertised and about unauthorized billing of their credit cards after agreeing only to a free trial.
- In January 2006, A Michigan man was sentenced to two years in jail after being charged with sending millions of spam email messages to sell phony diet aids including the Avatar diet patch. (FTC vs. Phoenix Avatar.)

This is only a tiny portion of the cases, and all this information is available on public record for anyone who cares enough to do their homework before spending their money.

This is not one of those products that might work or could work or needs more research—it’s a scam. One of the FTC’s red flag criteria for weight loss scams is if the product claims to produce weight loss by wearing it on or rubbing it into your skin. The FTC says that diet patches have never been shown to be safe or effective and never received FDA approval.

There have also been some very shady companies involved in all kinds of deception and illegal activities ranging from unsubstantiated claims, spam email, use of shell corporations, and unauthorized credit card billing, where they keep refilling your supply every month and keep whacking your credit card forever and make you jump through hoops to get them to stop billing you.

I get boiling mad when I start looking into just how bad this is and how many millions of dollars are wasted because overweight people say, “Well, I’m just going to try it anyway,” because they’re desperate. Unless you like making scammers and spammers rich, stay away from diet patches.

DAVID GRISAFFI: Interesting. So what, if any, rules or regulations should be attached to dietary supplements to help stop these scams?

TOM VENUTO: This is a tough question because we have so many scams. It would be good to get some kind of control over this for the sake of

consumer protection, but on the other hand I'm a very strong believer in an individual's freedom to choose and in a business's freedom to sell what they want to sell as long as it's done legally and ethically.

Even if I don't believe in a particular product, as long as there is no serious danger and companies are not breaking the law, then I don't think the government or any regulation agencies should step in and take away our freedom to choose. I don't think it was necessary to pull ephedrine off the market, for example.

I think we simply need more fitness professionals to stop selling this crap for the sake of the quick buck and start being role models and providing nutrition and exercise education and the proper warnings.

DAVID GRISAFFI: Let's move on and start talking about abdominal training. I've written an abdominal training book called *Firm and Flatten Your Abs*, which of course, I know you are very familiar with because you wrote the foreword for me—thank you again, by the way. The book explains my philosophy of functional training for your abdominals and your entire core. I come from a sports training and functional training background, and I'd be interested in hearing which abdominal exercises you would recommend since you come from a bodybuilding background. Also, from a bodybuilder's perspective, I'm wondering what you see as the difference between training for function and training for form.

TOM VENUTO: This is a really important question because much of what we do in bodybuilding for cosmetic goals and building muscle mass is different from what athletes do in their training for performance and function goals. But no matter what you're training for, you have to train smart so you stay injury free, and I think functional training has a lot to do with avoiding injury.

When we say “function” or “functional,” we are talking about how you perform on the playing field and in day-to-day activities without dysfunction. When we say “form,” we're talking about how you look.

Bodybuilding is a unique sport with unique training needs and requirements. In bodybuilding, we are not judged on performance, we are actually judged on form or looks. It doesn't matter how much I lift, how fast I run, how hard I hit, or how high I can vertical jump. As a bodybuilder, my purpose is to look better on stage.

If that's true, then I could say that anything I do that helps me look better and keeps me free of injury so I can train for looking better is functional. All training that leads to injury is faulty, non-functional training, and bodybuilders are often guilty of mistakes in program design and exercise performance that get them injured. To add insult to that injury, it's self-inflicted because there's no physical contact with another player as there is in other sports.

A common bodybuilder mistake is training for your ego and being only interested in how much you can lift regardless of your exercise form or the effect on your physique. Another mistake is using machines exclusively. There are functional training experts that say you should never use machines, and I would say if we're talking about bodybuilding, they are mistaken. Whether machines are appropriate depends on the context. It may be wrong to put their athletes on machines in favor of free weights, but machines are an extremely valuable tool for bodybuilders and those with bodybuilding goals.

There are machines that can work a muscle group from an angle that free weights cannot duplicate due to gravity and resistance curves. Bodybuilders should train lots of different angles and lots of different exercises to fill in "holes" in muscular development or to target certain small areas to improve symmetry and proportion. The body *can* be reshaped with bodybuilding training and careful selection of exercises. For example, the lateral deltoid or the rear deltoid is incredibly important to enhance the illusion of the V-taper and a small waist, but when does a football player need to worry about his lateral or rear delt development?

The trouble is not the use of machines but the use of machines in an inappropriate context or the overuse or exclusive use of machines. If you're a bodybuilder and your program is back squats, barbell dynamic lunges, and hack machine squats, your

routine isn't faulty or non-functional just because you included one machine. That's a well designed bodybuilding routine, and hack squats are an important exercise for bodybuilders.

A routine is also not faulty just because you train in split routines and focus on individual body parts. There's a reason bodybuilders think in terms of body parts and split routines, and that's because the repeated effort, volume, and variety methods are an important part of hypertrophy training. Multiple sets and multiple exercises on a single body part take time, and there is only so much time you can spend per workout before it becomes unproductive.

An important part of your split routine and body part training is that you balance the workload and strength development between the muscle groups. For example, bodybuilders often blast their quads, then do hamstrings last when they have no energy left, and they end up with three or four half-assed sets of lying leg curls. They should be balancing their hams with their quads not just for proper physique development but to prevent muscle imbalances that can lead to injury or joint instability.

It's the same thing with abdominal training. You see a lot of overuse of the crunch exercise and crunch variations. If you do absolutely nothing but floor crunches without working your lower back and using variety in your exercise choices, you may be setting yourself up for problems. So you balance your spinal flexion movements with spinal extension movements like hyperextensions and spinal stabilizer exercises.

Many people believe weak abs are a major cause of lower back pain, and lack of abdominal and core strength are factors, but a lot of people with lower back problems simply have weak backs and spinal stabilizers due to sheer neglect. Look at the average training program of anyone training for bodybuilding and general fitness, and I can almost guarantee there are far more reps of ab crunches and flexion being done than lower back and extension work.

Having said all this, I like to mix the traditional bodybuilding ab exercises with the core exercises that are so popular today, not relying on one or the other. I've heard so many times trainers saying, "Crunches are totally worthless," but there is a place for all kinds of ab exercises. The key is balance and variety.

Here are some of my favorite abdominal exercises:

- Crunches (various types)
- Weighted crunches (various types)
- Kneeling cable rope crunch (straight on or with an elbow-to-knee twist)
- Twisting crunch (elbow to opposite knee)
- Side crunch
- Reverse crunch
- Reverse crunch on incline slant board
- Hip lift (toes to sky)
- Hanging knee-ups from ab slings
- Hanging leg raises from ab slings

In recent years I've added a lot more core work, stability ball work, and rotational work such as:

- Stability ball crunches
- Stability ball reverse crunches
- Stability ball side crunches
- Stability ball jackknives
- Side planks
- Planks
- Upper body Russian twists on the Swiss ball, holding plate or medicine ball
- Lower body Russian twists, bent knee or straight legged (aka windshield wipers)
- Cable woodchoppers

I didn't throw out the staple exercises I depended on for all those years, I just balanced my routine. I have to admit, I was stubborn at first about adding the new stuff.

I remember the first time I ever saw the plank exercise years ago. I was working out with a female friend of mine. She showed me the plank and I laughed at her and said, "What the heck is that—that doesn't do anything for your abs!" It was my typical crunches for six-pack abs bodybuilder mentality at the time. I was the same way about the Swiss ball at first—I wouldn't have been seen on one of those things if you paid me. Now I know what these

exercises can do, and it's more than just about six-pack abs—it's also about keeping a strong and stable spine and core so I can do my bodybuilding exercises like squats and rows safely.

Changing your exercises and using a lot of variety helps your development and also prevents you from getting bored, because as you said in your book, there are hundreds of exercises and variations you can do for your abs. But most people just keep doing the same old thing—crunch, sit-up, and leg raise, and that's it.

DAVID GRISAFFI: While we're on the subject of bodybuilding training, I'd also like to know how much cardio and weight training you would recommend for burning fat and for getting chiseled and defined abs like you have.

TOM VENUTO: Getting chiseled and defined abs is mostly nutrition. If your diet isn't in place, then you can't support your training or maintain a healthy metabolism. If your diet is a mess, put the most focus on fixing that first. The second factor is the exercise. You need specific abdominal exercises to develop the six-pack look, but most people also need a good amount of cardio to burn the fat off so you can see the six-pack. You could have awesome abs that are completely covered up with a layer of flab.

I look at cardio as fat burning exercise and weight training as muscle building or maintaining exercise. Lately, there's been a lot of talk about weight training being great for fat burning, and it is. You could use weight training exclusively to burn fat, but the more you turn your weight training into circuit training for fat burning, the less strength and muscle growth you'll get and the further you're getting away from bodybuilding.

There's a happy medium for people with weight loss and general fitness goals, where weight training can kill two birds with one stone. You can get fat loss and some muscle development, but for bodybuilding purposes, I separate cardio for fat burning from weight training for muscle building.

My weight training program is a four-day split routine on a two days on, one day off rotation. That means that each major muscle

group is trained once every six days. My abs and my calves are the only body parts I train twice a week. I think some people could benefit from training abs every other day, but not daily.

I would recommend this type of split routine to any serious bodybuilder, or anyone with muscle growth goals, although it's not the way athletes would train, and it's only one of many ways that average people with health, fitness, and fat loss goals could train. Each person has to adjust his training frequency to his own body and personal goals.

As for cardio, that varies a lot. I don't recommend a single prescription for cardio—it's variable, and I do as little as I can get away with but as much as is necessary. Cardio is a fat burning tool for me and I use it to burn calories. I prefer to burn more calories as a fat burning strategy on a fat loss program rather than to cut calories. I focus on the calorie deficit, of course, but I also focus on the total calories burned as the primary factor. A 500-calorie deficit at an intake of 3000 calories is in no way the same 500-calorie deficit at 1500 calories a day. At 1500 calories a day, you're getting half the vitamins, half the minerals, half the phytonutrients, half the macronutrients, and half the thermogenic effect of a 500-calorie deficit at 3000 calories per day, without the benefits that come from the exercise.

People have different body types and vary how much cardio they need, so I could tell you what I do, but it may not be the same for you. We all know some mesomorph, which is the genetically gifted body type, who does zero cardio and has shredded abs all year round. Most people need cardio to get lean and see defined abdominals—at least three days a week, and you increase from that point based on results.

For me and a lot of other people, three days is only maintenance. If I stop doing cardio, I gain enough fat so the abs are gone no matter what I eat. That's just the way my genetics and body type are. That's why I do my cardio all year round, but I cycle the amount, type, frequency, duration, and intensity, so when I increase the volume during a cutting phase, my body responds to it.

I usually do cardio daily for 30–45 minutes before contests or whenever I want to get really lean. If I have to, I'll even do two

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