

# Pilates Chest Lift

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Chest Lift may look like the familiar abdominal "crunch", but there are some important differences between this ab exercise and the way most people do a crunch. *See the "tips" below Chest Lift instructions for details on the differences.*

Once you build abdominal strength and understand the lengthening move that chest lift can be, you will have a good basis for working with many of the forward flexion Pilates exercises like the Single Leg Stretch and The Hundred

## Here's How:

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Make sure that your legs are parallel - lined up so that your hip, knee and ankle are in one line and the toes are pointing directly away from you.

You are in neutral spine position with the natural curve of the lower spine creating a slight lift off the mat.

2. Keep your shoulders down as you bring your hands behind your head with the finger tips touching.

Your hands will support the base of your skull.

Your elbows will stay open throughout the exercise.

3. Take a few deep breaths. Use this time to make a little survey of your body. Be sure your body is balanced side to side. Check that your neck is relaxed and your ribs are dropped.

You may want to review the instructions for Imprinting.

4. Exhale: Slowly pull your belly button down toward your spine and keep going, allowing your spine to lengthen out and the lower back to come down to the mat. Simultaneously, tilt your chin slightly down and from the top of the head, with a long neck, *slowly* lift the upper spine off the mat until the base of the scapula is just brushing the mat.

There is a deepening feeling under the bottom ribs as you lift.

\*Remember, the work is in your abs, which are in a deep concave position. Your neck and shoulders stay relaxed, and the movement does not create tension in the legs.

5. Pause at the top and inhale. Draw the abdominals in deeper.
6. Exhale: Keep the abdominals drawn in as you slowly lower back to the mat.
7. Inhale: Release the abdominals and return to neutral spine.
8. Repeat 6 - 8 times

## Tips:

1. Chest lift creates a deep curve of the abdominals down toward the mat. The result is flat abs. In most crunches, there is a shortening of the rectus abdominis (the long superficial muscle that runs down the front of the abdomen) that often causes the abs to pop up on the contraction. This will not create the flat abs people are looking for.
2. Chest Lift is done very slowly with the breath. There is no momentum being used.
3. The tail bone and hips do not start to curl up off the floor as is often seen in crunches.

