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perfect fit

The lower body

Exercises to get your hips and legs into shape

GENERALLY speaking, most women agonise about their lower body, while men, by and large, seem oblivious to the fact that they even have one.

Women seem eternally obsessed with their hips and thighs. Peep into a gym and you'll see guys vigorously pumping their biceps, triceps, chests and abs, as if those are their only body parts they possess. Calves? Huh? What in the world are they?

Wake up and smell the coffee, guys! The girls aren't oblivious to your lower bodies! (Does that now answer many questions?)

It's always necessary to combine cardiovascular activities with strength-of-resistance training programmes in order to keep fat levels low and tone up.

Here are some highly effective, quick exercises you can perform to tone up, burn those calories and look a million bucks. You can even do these exercises in the comfort of your own home. All you need is a pair of strap-on weights and the will to make it happen. Your weights should be strapped on just above the knees. You'll notice the difference almost immediately.

If you're new to this, start slowly with one- or two-pound weights. You can gradually load up later as you progress.

Remember to always pay great attention to technique and body form. It's important to breathe correctly right through. Always concentrate on the specific muscle groups you are targeting. Try to visualise them as you work. Be consistently aware of what you are feeling, where you're feeling it and to what degree.

While you should work out at an intensity level that is challenging and difficult, it shouldn't reach an extent where it's impossible and you have to give up. You'll get the most out of



against the chair's legs and then release the contraction. Breathe out while pushing and in while relaxing. Do two sets of 10 each on each leg.

Inner thighs

Exercise A: The inner thigh lift is demonstrated in Figure 3. As shown, lie down on your side, with the outer leg brought in front of your body, so that the lower leg is free to cover space. You may want to hold it down if it doesn't stay in position, as shown. It's the lower leg that lifts and lowers, without touching the floor. Keep it straight and flexed at all times. Remember to lift from the hip and not from the knee. Make sure the upper body does not rock back and forth while doing this. Breathe out as you lift and in as you lower. Do two sets of 10 each on each leg.

Exercise B: Sit on the floor with a chair in front of you. Lean back onto your palms in order to protect the lower back while working out. Get your feet on the outside of the legs of the chair. While keeping your legs straight, push inward against the chair's legs and then release the contraction. Breathe out while pushing and in while relaxing. Do two sets of 10 each, on each leg.

Calves

Exercise A: A calf raise is demonstrated in figure 4. Stand on anything which can act as a platform, with the front half of your foot on, and the back half of your foot off, this platform. Keep your legs straight and your feet together.

It's easier to hold onto your weights during this exercise rather than strapping them on. Come up onto your toes while exhaling and back down while inhaling, allowing the heels to dip down a little bit. If you're feeling a bit unbalanced, hold onto something to support yourself. To start with, do three sets of eight to 10 each.

Exercise B: Do the above exercise while changing the position of your feet to target different parts of the calf muscle. You could turn your feet out into a V (toes out, heels turned together) and even the reverse, as in an A (toes together, heels turned out). The breathing patterns would be the same as has been described above. Begin with two sets of eight to 10 each.

A great compound exercise for the lower body is the squat. You'll target all the lower limb muscles by doing this exercise. If you don't have the time, patience or will power to go the whole



your exercises this way.

Remember to warm up and cool down adequately with every workout. Whole body moves and stretches should be included. This will go a long way towards injury prevention.

The sets and reps indicated below are appropriate for beginners. As you progress, load up. Increase your weights a pound at a time. Increase your reps and sets slowly as well.

Quadriceps (front of the thighs)

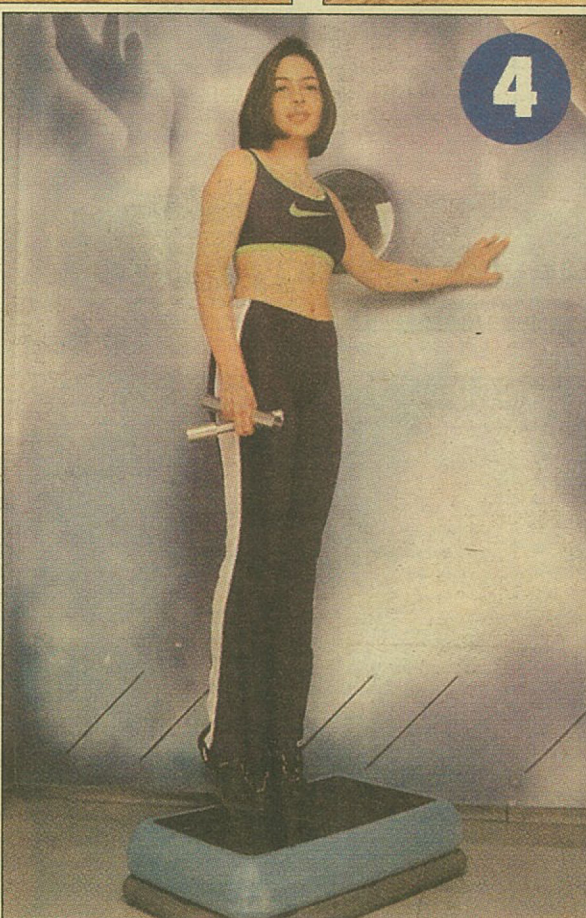
Exercise A: As demonstrated in figure 1, sit on the floor with some support for your back to lean against. Make sure your lower back is a good distance away from this back support. Keep one leg bent and the other straight and flexed. Lift the straight leg up and down, without allowing this leg to touch the floor, and cover a distance of only about six to eight inches. Exhale while lifting and inhale while lowering the leg. Make sure your moves are slow and even. Start with two sets of 10 each on each leg.

Exercise B: Take some wall support. While standing straight, bend one leg and lift the knee up to waist level, then lower it six to eight inches. Keep the standing leg slightly relaxed at all times. Breathe out as you bring the knee up to waist level and breathe in as you lower it. You can begin with two sets of 10 each, on each leg.

Outer thighs and hips

Exercise A: As demonstrated in figure 2, lie down with the lower leg bent and the upper leg straight and flexed. Make sure you're exactly on your side; the pelvic area shouldn't tilt or fall back. Lift and lower this upper leg without covering more than eight to 10 inches. Do not let it lower till it's more than parallel to the floor. Exhale upon lifting and inhale as you lower. Make sure the upper body does not rock back and forth while doing this. Begin with two sets of 10-12 each on each leg.

Exercise B: Sit on the floor with a chair in front of you. Lean back onto your palms so that the spine is reclined in order to protect the lower back while working out. Get your feet inside the legs of the chair. While keeping your legs straight, push outward



hog, then just do this one.

Stand with your feet about shoulder distance apart, feet parallel to one another. Bend your knees and squat down, bringing the quads parallel to the floor. Keep the back straight and lean forward slightly while doing this. Inhale while moving down and exhale while coming back up into the standing position. Don't let your toes go beyond your feet while squatting down. Sit back instead, as you would on a chair. Be careful not to lock the knee joint back while standing up. Start with two sets of 10 each.

Make sure all your moves are performed precisely, in a fluid and controlled manner. Sudden, jerky moves would be harmful to you. Technique and body alignment can't be emphasised enough.

Remember: What was performed with great difficulty yesterday will be easier today, and a piece of cake tomorrow. This is known as the procedure of adaptation.

Having reached this stage, it's important to challenge yourself further by overloading, or you won't improve any more. You'll just stagnate.

All your exercises need to be challenging and difficult, but not impossible. If you're in agony and feel the need to stop immediately, you're working too hard. Slow down!

If on the other hand, you find that what you're doing is too easy, then you're not getting anything out of the programme anymore. Step it up! Some simple ways of doing this is by varying the number of reps and sets, and by switching over to heavier or lighter weights, or even by increasing the number of times you work out each week.

Have fun. Enjoy the exercise high. The results will take care of themselves!

For all previous columns by this author, go to the columns section on www.chalomumbai.com

FIG 1: A seated quadricep lift to work the front of the thighs

FIG 2: Side-lying leg lifts for the outer thigh and hips

FIG 3: Inner thigh leg lifts

FIG 4: Calf raises to tone and strengthen the calves