

Fit Facts™

FROM THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EXERCISE®

Exercise and Cellulite

CELLULITE. WE ALL KNOW WHAT IT looks like, but misconceptions prevail.

The first thing you should know is that, in the true medical sense, cellulite is simply plain old fat. Yet it does have one defining characteristic—a dimpled, cottage-cheese, orange-peel look. Here's why: Everybody has connective tissue that separates fat cells into compartments. While men tend to have horizontal or crisscross patterns to those compartments, women's compartments have a honeycomb appearance, giving fat a greater chance to protrude or bulge, hence the cottage-cheese effect.

As a result, women are more likely to develop cellulite than men, mainly around the hips and thighs. However, men can develop the condition, too. Although cellulite becomes more noticeable with age, largely because the skin gets thinner over time, it generally strikes individuals in their 30s.

Of course, not everybody will develop cellulite in their lifetime. That's because genetics determines where your fat cells are and how many fat cells you have. Activity level is another crucial factor associated with cellulite. If you exercise regularly, you'll decrease your odds of developing cellulite, or if you do, the dimpled look won't be quite as pronounced.

Beware of the Quick Fix

Unfortunately, too many people still hang on to the idea of quick and easy fixes. Beware of cellulite cream makers, medical procedures like liposuction or cosmetic treatments like body wraps. They don't work. No cream applied to the skin can penetrate the skin and rearrange the fat cells beneath the surface. Liposuction is designed to remove excess deposits of fat, but it won't change the appearance of fat. As for body wraps, the effect is only temporary. Fat is compressible, so when you do the wrap, it will smooth your skin, but by the next day, your skin will be back to normal.

Another misconception is that dieting alone can zap fat. Although there are diets that make you lose weight, at least one quarter of the weight lost is muscle, which lowers your metabolism. If you return to your usual eating habits, you'll likely



regain more weight than you lost because your metabolism is slower.

The Cellulite Solution

So what can you do to diminish the appearance of cellulite? Experts recommend daily cardio exercise combined with two to three strength-training sessions a week and a healthy diet.

The good news is that there's actual proof that this approach works. Wayne Westcott, Ph.D., fitness research director at the South Shore YMCA in Quincy, Mass., and author of *No More Cellulite* (Perigee, 2003), designed a cellulite-reduction program that includes 20 minutes of strength training with five exercises for the upper body and five for the lower body, and 20 minutes of treadmill walking or jogging, staying at about 70 percent to 80 percent of maximal heart rate. This program is followed three days per week, although participants can always do more cardio.

Participants in an eight-week study of Westcott's program lost about 1 pound per week or about 10 pounds after two months. When participants combined the exercise program with good eating habits (a food pyramid-based diet consisting of either 1,600, 2,220 or 2,800 calories), they doubled the

fat loss, losing 9.1 pounds of fat (compared to 4.5 pounds without the nutritional component).

In another study led by Westcott, 72 men and women did three 30-minute workouts for eight weeks. The group that did only aerobic exercise, cycling for 30 minutes at a time, lost 4 pounds of fat but gained no muscle, which only slightly improved body composition. Yet when subjects did aerobic exercise (15 minutes of cycling) and strength training, they dropped 10 pounds of fat and added 2 pounds of muscle, which resulted in a greater improvement in body composition.

How to Get Started

An exercise program doesn't have to be complicated to be effective. For strength-training exercises, any tool is fine, including dumbbells, elastic bands, body weight and machines. If you prefer machines, leg presses, seated leg curls, hip adduction and abduction, and overhead presses are recommended. And effective free-weight exercises include the dumbbell squat, band hip adduction and abduction, bodyweight trunk extension and trunk curl.

Still not sure where to start? A session or two with a certified personal trainer can help get you started on the right track. And while results won't happen overnight, a consistent program of regular exercise combined with a sensible diet can go a long way toward not only improving your appearance, but your overall health as well.

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