

VOGUE

FITNESS NOW



As skirt lengths rise, so do leg "reshaping" promises. Here, what's possible, what's not

BY SHARI MILLER SIMS

For back/inner thighs Lying on side, knees bent, touch top knee to floor as shown; then touch foot to floor behind other foot.



For top/back of thighs Lift top leg to a comfortable height as shown; extend leg with foot flexed; point toes and hold two counts. Lower leg and rest two counts.



For inner thighs In position shown (use towels or a pillow), lift



under leg up, hold for one count, then lower without touching ground.

For thighs, calves, buttocks In pelvic tilt (stomach in, buttocks tight), "bicycle," aiming to touch one knee to head as you stretch/point other leg.



Fast leg toners

The twenty minute stretch/strengthen plan, left, put together by NYC exercise pro Stephanie Herman, should be done three to five times a week (along with basic aerobics). Begin with eight to ten repetitions (one set) on each side; aim for three sets each leg. Key: technique not speed (maintain proper body alignment and a comfortable pace) and remember to breathe with each repetition.

shape-up: legs

Women may have become more sophisticated about exercise since the days when they regularly did leg lifts by the hundreds in (fruitless) efforts to slim legs; but has enhanced fitness knowledge made that goal more achievable? The answer today, say experts, is a qualified "yes"—through a three-part effort of a healthful low-fat diet, aerobic exercise (to burn off fat), and targeted toning exercises.

Experts stress that how much change is achieved depends on body shape; each of us is genetically programmed, so to speak, to "hold onto" body fat (women's hormonal profiles dictate that thighs and hips are often most resistant to fat loss). "While bone structure contributes to overall width of ankles and calves, leg contour depends primarily on muscle tone and the amount of fat over your muscles," explains Valery F. Lanyi, M.D., clinical associate professor of rehabilitation medicine, NYU Medical Center.

"A sensible weight-loss diet combined with regular aerobic exercise (three to four times a week) can help you to lose overall body fat; but there's no way to isolate fat loss from legs. It is exercising leg muscles—for a firmer, smoother line—that makes the biggest difference."

"Spot" reducing? Contrary to popular myth, working an isolated body area cannot produce localized fat loss. It can, in some instances, result in more mus-

cle—and leg—bulk. In a study of young women who thought their legs were "fat" and who participated in a supervised program of exercises on weight machines, Grant Gwinup, M.D., chief of the division of endocrinology and metabolism at the University of California at Irvine's Medical Center, found that resistance exercise actually produced an increase in leg circumference. Similarly, high-repetition ballet work can, in some women, lead to stronger, larger calf muscles.

"While women have less of a tendency than men to 'bulk up' from weight workouts, over time exercises requiring a burst of muscle energy—whether against resistance or during a sport such as bicycling or ice skating—tend to produce larger muscles, making these activities a good choice for a woman who feels her legs are too thin," said David Balsley, R.P.T., director of the Sports Medicine Performance and Research Center, The Hospital for Special Surgery, NYC.

"Activities that require a great deal of jumping can also produce a slight increase in leg circumference. A woman who is aiming for a longer, more sinewy leg line should concentrate on slower-paced aerobics (walking, swimming, cross-country skiing) combined with low-resistance strength work using very light weights or the resistance of her own body. Low-impact aerobics programs that emphasize smooth rather (Continued on page 340)