

FitFacts®



So, You Want To Spot Reduce? Here's How

BESIDES LAUNCHING MILLIONS OF SIT-UPS, LEG LIFTS AND TORSO TWISTS, THE DESIRE FOR A TONED AND TAUT PHYSIQUE HAS LED TO THE PURCHASE OF A LONG LINE OF EXERCISE DEVICES OF DUBIOUS WORTH. COUNTLESS INVENTIONS, SUCH AS VIBRATING BELTS AND “GUT-BUSTING” CONTRAPTIONS, HAVE CLAIMED TO MIRACULOUSLY TIGHTEN AND TONE CERTAIN TROUBLE SPOTS.

But the miracles people were expecting never materialized, and those “spots” remained “unreduced.”

WHAT'S WRONG WITH SPOT REDUCTION?

Where did we go wrong? In the effort to tone their bodies, people neglected the most important factor: fat. Exercises such as crunches or leg lifts improve the tone and endurance of the muscles, but they don't burn fat. On the other hand, when you do exercises that elevate the heart rate, such as bicycling, walking or aerobic dance, the body will draw upon its fat stores for energy.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Eating a low-fat diet and following an exercise program that combines aerobic activity and strength training is the key to changing the shape of your body.

In addition to burning calories through aerobic activity, strength training will increase the amount of muscle, which burns even more calories. But many people shun the idea of intensive exercise, scared off by the idea of five-mile runs, barbells or aerobic classes.

Thankfully, any aerobic activity that elevates your heart rate can help you burn fat and take off unwanted pounds. Many experts recommend doing at least three sessions of 30 minutes of aerobic activity per week. Ideally, for long-term weight control, you should perform a 60-minute aerobic exercise session most days of the week.

For example, these enjoyable alternatives to traditional aerobic exercise are effective fat burners:

- [Mountain biking](#)
- [In-line skating](#)
- [Walking](#)
- Country line dancing
- Hiking
- Martial arts
- Boxing
- Cross-country skiing
- Downhill skiing
- Water sports

In addition to these activities, which can be done solo or with friends and family, you should take advantage of the wide variety of fitness tapes currently on the market. You can learn everything from martial arts to swing dancing. Choose an activity because it interests you, not because it is touted as a great

workout. Remember, the most effective exercise is the one you will stick with for the long haul.

A few things to keep in mind when starting any new activity:

- Don't start out too hard or too fast or you may injure yourself or quit before seeing any benefit.
- Always concentrate on enjoying yourself, rather than on what a particular exercise might do for you.
- Keep your exercise comfortable and only increase intensity after your body becomes accustomed to new activity levels.

Finally, always check with your doctor before beginning any exercise program, especially if you're a male over 45 or a female over 55, or have cardiovascular risk factors, such as smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes or a family history of heart disease.

A FINAL WORD ABOUT TONING EXERCISES

Just because exercises like leg lifts and crunches won't budge the fat does not mean that they are not beneficial. Unlike some aerobic activities, these exercises can strengthen and tone specific muscles of the body.

The best way to shape up is to incorporate strength and toning exercises with aerobic exercises. Before you know it, you'll be on your way to looking and feeling better.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

[American Council on Exercise](#)