

ASK THE TRAINER

QUESTION:

“Dan. I have a question that plagues many older women... **What is the best exercise to specifically target my drooping (pear-shaped) buttocks?** I am personally already doing a leg curl that targets the hamstrings and glutes in general, but I'm looking for something that provides a much more specific target. Thanks so much in advance for your generous assistance and knowledge.” – North Carolina

RESPONSE:

Do you want the bad or good news first? Let's start with the bad: Compared to other body types, it's more difficult for “pears” to slim down their lower bodies. Here's the good news: With the right nutrition AND exercise program, “pears” can get more of the body they want.

Some of the best material I have come across, and principles that I found to actually work on “real” clients comes from Michele Olson, Ph.D., and professor of exercise science at Auburn University in Montgomery, Alabama. Let me summarize her findings.

Female bodies are often referred to as “pear-shaped” or “apple-shaped.” Think of these two as forming a continuum, with all sorts of bodies falling in between. You probably know someone who carries almost all her weight in her midsection – a true “apple” shape. A “pear” carries most of her weight in the hip/thigh/glute area. An “apple” and a “pear” may weigh the same but look completely different because of different fat distribution.

While “apple-shaped” women are more at risk for health complications such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes, their midsection body fat is easier to lose. **“Pearshaped” women don't face the same health risks, but their fat is more stubborn.** Fat in the hip/thigh/glute region is more resistant to mobilization – it likes to stay put. Thus, “pears” are at a disadvantage from the beginning.

If you're an overweight “pear” and you begin to lose weight, will it come off evenly throughout your body? Probably not. If a woman is overweight in general and she tends to be a “pear” shape, she's probably going to have a more difficult time releasing lower-body fat than someone who is a “pear” shape, but not overweight.

Release of fat from the lower body is more blunted the more overweight a person is. An overweight “pear” needs to first work toward a total weight reduction, without focusing on where the weight is coming off from. Then, the closer to a normal weight a woman is, the better chance she's going to have of getting that fat to release from the lower body.

What makes it so hard for a “pear” to lose fat from the lower body? You can blame it partly on hormones. In addition, women in general are more prone to storing fat than men. The enzyme

lipoprotein lipase (LPL) is partly to thank for this female attribute.

Despite the obstacles, there is hope. **One of the main keys to getting the body you want is working effectively with what you have.** You'll still have to cut back on the do-nuts (good nutrition is so VERY important), AND combined with that, the following program will make a huge difference in your lower body.

Tip #1. Do **aerobic exercise** for a minimum of 45 minutes per day, for as many days per week as you can (I recommend taking at least one day OFF though. If you have been diligent and faithful you deserve this and look at it as a reward – use it for reflection). While health professionals often advise 30 minutes, it's just NOT ENOUGH for lower-body fat release. The reason isn't so much having to do with the heart and cardiovascular fitness – it's because of the overall energy expenditure you get with longer exercise sessions. If maximum calorie burn is your goal, aim for 45-60 minute cardio sessions.

It needs to be fairly intense. On a scale from 1-10, 10 being hardest, we're talking 7-8. Most people cannot maintain high-intensity for an entire workout. If you're doing them right, they're really taxing. So, consider “interval training.” Do intense for 60 seconds (after a good warm-up), then include a steady-state bout (training at a more moderate intensity) for 60 seconds. Repeat the cycle. As your endurance increases, you can extend the time periods for the high-intensity until you build up to an all-interval 45-60 minute workout that is giving you the maximum result.

If you want to speed up the process, schedule multiple cardio sessions per day (one in the morning, one in the afternoon). Do this on days when you have the time and energy. Don't attempt it every day unless looking good is your full-time job. Do the extra session at a lower intensity.

Also, don't forget to do abdominal training on cardio days (do movements like: crunches, bicycles and hip lifts to hit the full range of ab muscles. Aim for about 3 sets of 15 - 20 reps each).

Tip #2. Do **resistance training** 3 days a week (maybe Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. You want at least one day of rest between resistance training sessions). A good lower body routine would be something like this:

Leg Extension Machine
Leg Press Machine
Stationary Lunge (can use dumbbells)
Leg Curl Machine
Abductor Machine
Adductor Machine

For trimmer thighs, **“pears” need to train their lower bodies differently.** This means laying off the heavy weights, focusing instead on lighter weights for high repetitions. Just because the weights are lighter doesn't mean your workout will be less intense.

A good rule-of-thumb would be to use about 50% - 60% of what would be your maximum weight for 1 or 2 repetitions of any given exercise. (So if you can use 100 pounds on the leg press machine for 1 or 2 repetitions, you would use 50 – 60 pounds).

Do 3 sets of each exercise movement with 20-25 repetitions.

Use the circuit method if conditions will allow. This simply means doing 20-25 repetitions at the chosen weight on one machine and then move rapidly to another exercise. When you finish the circuit, START over. If conditions will not allow (crowded facility, for example, would prohibit this since you always want to maintain courtesy), do 3 sets on machine with just a few seconds rest (maybe 25 - 30) between each set. Then move to another exercise machine.

I hope this helps.

Dan

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