Hey Alice,

I really want to lose some weight, but I go to school and I don't have the time. Now that school is out, I have the time to exercise. But the summer will be over faster than a snap of the finger. So what is a good exercise to really work out my inner thighs, stomach, and my hips? What are some really good exercises that don't take too long (but are a really good work-out) that I can work into my busy schedule?

Thanks,
A

Answer

Dear A,

It's great to spend some of your free summer time getting more physically fit by starting an exercise program. Indeed, exercise is one component of a healthful routine—especially if you're looking to drop a few pounds. Depending on the types of activities you enjoy, try to get either 30 minutes of moderate exercise (increased heart rate, but still able to carry on a conversation) on at least five days per week, or 20 minutes of vigorous exercise (sweating, breathing heavily) on at least three days per week. There isn't one "quick" exercise that will help you shed pounds, but if you follow the guidelines above, and eat a sensible diet, you'll be on your way to a sustainable, healthy weight for you.

In order to lose weight, most people need a combination of increased activity and reduced caloric intake. Beyond weight control, exercise yields some serious health benefits, including:

- Reduced blood pressure
- Improved sleep
- Stress management
- Increased level of good cholesterol (HDL)
- Improved blood sugar levels (among numerous other positive effects)

We can't pick and choose where on our bodies we lose fat. Although it's possible to tone and strengthen specific muscles, fat won't be diminished in a specific area by lifting weights or doing certain exercises focusing on that body part. Body fat is decreased when we expend more calories than we take in—but we can't control exactly where fat loss will take place. For instructions on activities that'll help tone and strengthen your thighs, stomach, and hips, check
Since your schedule can be particularly tight, you can incorporate exercise into your daily travels. Biking or in-line skating to your destinations is a possible option, perhaps as a way to keep active during the school year as well. Taking the stairs whenever possible, getting off the bus or subway one or two stops earlier, parking further away if you drive, or even walking to work or school all contribute to your goal of being healthier by incorporating more movement into your life.

If you're looking for a "total body workout" for the summer, consider swimming, which can also be a cooling activity if your summer is a hot one. Swimming engages many muscles and provides cardiovascular benefits, too. Varying strokes can help work other muscles (such as the breast stroke) or provide greater cardiovascular benefits (such as the butterfly).

There's no secret easy answer, short-cut, or abbreviated workout that will yield magical results. Working each muscle group at least twice a week helps strengthen muscles. Although everyone responds to exercise at different rates, usually one or two sets of eight to twelve repetitions, working the muscle to fatigue, is usually sufficient for strength building.

To maintain a fit body, it's essential to carve some time into your schedule for exercise and planning healthy meals and snacks, however, it doesn't have to be a lot of time. Scheduling these kinds of activities in your calendar as you would with social activities may help. You can also make plans to exercise with a friend, multi-tasking this way can give you plenty of time to socialize and exercise. Best of luck getting started!

Alice!
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