

## **PART 1**

### **THE FIRM UP FOCUS**

# Firm Up in 3 Weeks: The Premise, the Promise, the Program

Almost 2 years after I gave birth to my son, Jacob (and before I developed the Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program), I still couldn't button or zip some of my favorite pants and skirts. I'd lost the pregnancy pounds, but something happened to the shape of my body. It seemed that the little bit of curve I'd had in my chest prebaby had migrated down to my waist and hips postbaby. So even though I weighed the same, I had to go up a size in some clothes. From all the letters I'd received from *Prevention* magazine readers and the frequent cries of woe from the women I'd talked to, I knew I wasn't alone.

Even if you haven't had children, shape-shifting is a fairly common phenomenon for women, occurring as we age. The scale may be holding steady, and your eating and exercising habits may not have changed, but your waistline is growing, your clothes feel tighter, and some parts are looking flabbier. A primary culprit behind this softening up as we age is a loss of muscle mass. Not only is this a major threat to our figures, but it also threatens our health. The good news is that you can do something about it.

Whether you're still battling those postpregnancy pounds or new ones that are making an

appearance along with hot flashes, *Prevention's* Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program is the answer to your body woes. The results are fast and unmistakable: You'll see them in the mirror, feel them in your clothes, appreciate them in your soaring energy, and love them in the compliments you'll receive. I know I have!

## METABOLISM MELTDOWN

Usually in your thirties, or even as early as your twenties if you're really inactive, you start to lose muscle mass, which is what fuels your body's metabolism. Metabolism is all the work your body does that requires calories (energy): staying alive, thinking, breathing, and moving your muscles. And it plays a major role in how much you weigh, especially with each passing birthday. Sometime in your thirties, your resting metabolic rate—the number of calories you burn each day just to stay alive—starts slowing down by about 5 percent every decade. That means if you eat about 1,800 calories a day and fit into size 10s when you're 35, you'll be shopping for 12s when you're 45, even if you're eating the same number of calories. By the time you're 55 . . . well, you get the idea.

The culprit behind this decline in calorie burn is the same one responsible for the softening up of your figure: muscle loss. Every pound of muscle you lose can decrease the number of calories you burn by as many as 30 a day. In your late thirties and during your forties, you lose about  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of muscle a year, a loss that can double once you hit menopause (blame it on lack of activity and just plain aging). If you're not

### Success: Week by Week

YOU MAY BE wondering if you can *really* firm up in just 3 weeks. If you've never trained with weights before, you'll be surprised at how quickly your body responds. If you're following the complete Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program, you can expect to see these results.

- After week 1: You'll increase the amount of weight you're lifting, feel more confident, and have more energy.
- After week 2: You'll get firmer, especially in the arms and calves, so your clothes fit better and you'll feel stronger.
- After week 3: You'll drop 3 to 6 pounds, lose several inches, and feel great.

careful, by the time you're 65, it's possible to have lost half of your muscle mass and see your metabolism slowed by 200 to 300 calories a day.

But the scale usually tells a different story. Instead of inching down a pound a year as you lose muscle, it usually inches up about a pound a year—which means you're replacing 1 firm, compact, calorie-burning pound of muscle with 2 pounds of soft, lumpy fat every year. No wonder your clothes are getting tighter, you're looking flabbier, and you're having a harder time losing weight.

This muscle-for-fat swap—called creeping obesity—is common as we grow older. And extra fat puts you at more risk for deadly diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, and some types of cancer. But a growing body of research shows that it doesn't have to happen.

### A FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

The truth is, most of the undesirable changes we chalk up to getting older—waning strength, a flabby physique, failing health, a faulty memory, a dowager's hump—happen because most of us

## Best Belly Flatteners

TO COME UP with the very best tummy-toning moves, researchers at San Diego State University asked 31 people, both occasional and daily exercisers ages 20 to 45, to perform 13 exercises that target the midsection. While the volunteers were performing the exercises, the researchers measured the work of the abdominals (specifically, the rectus abdominis, which runs the length of your torso and is the “workhorse” muscle of the body, and the obliques, which are muscles that lie along the sides of the abdominal cavity that rotate your body and stabilize the pelvis). They then compared how each exercise stacked up against the traditional crunch.

The top-ranking home exercise, the bicycle maneuver, was up to 2½ times more effective at working the obliques and at least 50

percent better at strengthening the rectus abdominis compared with the traditional crunch. Other winning moves included the long-arm crunch and the crunch on a stability ball (also known as an inflatable exercise ball and a Swiss ball). Unlike many abdominal exercises, these two crunches isolate the ab muscles specifically, rather than relying on the hip flexors at the front of the hip to help out with the move, says lead researcher Peter Francis, Ph.D., director of the biomechanics lab at San Diego State University.

These and other belly-flattening moves are an important part of the Firm Up Action Plan. You'll find out how to do them as you move through the three weekly chapters that are the heart of the program. And in just 3 weeks, you'll notice a tighter midsection, and your jeans will be easier to button.

move less as we get older. This is actually *great* news, because it's so easy to fix. Get moving now, and you can help slow, stop, or even reverse many of these changes. Exercise is the closest thing we have to a Fountain of Youth.

As the senior fitness editor of *Prevention* magazine and a certified fitness instructor for more than 10 years, I am constantly reviewing the latest research on exercise, talking to the leading experts, and seeing firsthand what exercise can do for women, including myself. And now I'd like to share with you the best of all that I've discovered. I've used all that experience and expertise to develop *Prevention's* Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program.

It may sound like a crash diet or exercise program, but it's not. Many people who want to lose weight or firm up want to do it quickly—often in time for a wedding or reunion. Even if you're not looking for a quick fix, you're very motivated at the beginning. Think about New Year's resolutions. Every January, health club memberships jump by 65 percent, according to the International Health, Racquet, and Sportsclub Association. The parking lots are so crowded that you have to drive around waiting for an empty space, and then you even have to wait to get on most of the equipment. But usually by early to mid-February, you can park in the front row and hop right on the treadmill.

*Prevention's* Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program takes advantage of this initial burst of motivation and makes sure that you'll see results in just 3 weeks, so you'll be inspired to stick with it. I *know* this approach works, because I've seen it happen

with high-protein, low-carb diets such as Atkins and South Beach. The first 2 weeks of these diets are very restrictive, but people see quick results, so they are motivated to continue.

The Firm Up Program is a jumping-off point. It gets you started, gets you results, and gives you the tools you need to continue living a healthy, active life.

## THE FIRM UP ACTION PLAN

High-intensity workouts are the secret to dropping pounds and inches quickly. But don't panic and think, "No way!" A high-intensity workout doesn't necessarily mean that you have to run for miles or take an hour-long Spinning class. Intensity is relative. What's high intensity for someone who's unfit may be low intensity for someone who's moderately fit. So no matter what your fitness level, you can get a high-intensity workout just by pushing yourself out of your comfort zone—and the Firm Up Program will show you how to do it safely. The results will definitely be worth it.

High-intensity exercise can burn 25 to 75 percent more calories than low-intensity exercise. For example, cycling at a leisurely pace for ½ hour burns about 200 calories, while cycling vigorously for the same amount of time burns nearly 350. And the benefits continue even after you stop exercising. After a high-intensity bout of activity, the number of calories that you're burning can stay elevated for up to 15 hours, which means that you could burn an extra 75 calories a day.

As you become fitter, moderate-intensity activities will become easier. You'll be able to do more for the same amount of time and effort—meaning that you'll burn even more calories. For example, if you start out by walking 2 miles in an hour, you'll burn about 160 calories. But as you get fit, you'll be able to walk 3 miles in an hour for the same effort, and you'll burn 50 percent more calories.

And research shows that the fitter you are, the more calories you burn while digesting food. It appears that active women's muscles need fuel faster, so their bodies work harder, burning more calories, to absorb what they eat. Which is more great news!

Intensity doesn't apply only to aerobic activities. When you're strength training, you can burn up to three times as many calories and do fewer repetitions by using a heavier weight.

In addition to bouts of high-intensity exercise, the Firm Up Program also incorporates another training principle, called periodization. If you want to change your body for the better, you have to change your workout—often. That's the idea behind periodization training. Vary the types of exercises you do and the order in which you do them, the weight you use and the number of repetitions you lift, even how often you exercise and how frequently you rest, and your muscles will soon reward you with increased strength and shape. In one study, researchers followed 24 women through a 6-month resistance-training program. The multiple-set, periodized group lost 7 percent of their body fat and gained more than 7 pounds of beautifully toned muscle. That was

more than double the results of women doing a single-set routine.

The Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program applies these two training principles—intensity and periodization—to two popular types of exercise—strength training and walking—to help you shift your body's calorie-burning engines into overdrive and firm up fast. I've used them all to help me get back into my favorite skirts and pants and firm up after 4 months of sitting on my butt and writing this book!

## STRENGTH TRAINING FOR A GREAT SHAPE

Strength training, working your muscles against resistance such as a dumbbell, is the key to halting muscle loss and to keeping your metabolism in high gear. (For more on the benefits of this type of workout, see chapter 9, Strength Training: The Firm Up Secret Weapon, beginning on page 357.) The Firm Up Program combines two types of strength-building workouts: traditional weight lifting using dumbbells, and core training using your own body weight and isometric muscle contractions (holding a specific position for a certain amount of time).

The weight-lifting workouts target your arms, legs, shoulders, chest, and upper back, while the core workouts focus on your abs, lower back, hips, and buttocks. You'll be doing each workout three times a week. During the 3-week program, the routine will change (the periodization principle), requiring you to perform different exercises, to do more or fewer reps, to vary the speed of reps, and to lift heavier weights (the intensity

## You Won't Get Big and Bulky!

IF ALL THIS talk of gaining pounds of muscle from strength training is making you nervous, relax. If you're over 40, you've been losing muscle for years now, so in most cases, you're just replacing what was once there (back when you were younger and slimmer).

Muscle is much more compact than fat, so those extra pounds will look sleeker, smaller, and firmer. And you won't bulk up. Women

don't have enough of the male hormones such as testosterone to allow their muscles to get big and bulky. If you're still seeing visions of female bodybuilders, picture this: Most of them spend about 4 hours a day at the gym, follow very strict diets, and in many cases still need a little artificial steroid boost. On the Firm Up Program, you'll just lose fat, get firm, and look great!

principle). This mixing things up will keep your muscles working, and it will really challenge them so they'll get strong and firm up fast.

And to really crank up the fat burn, you'll be doing three sets of each strength-training exercise. When researchers from the University of Maryland in College Park compared 17 women performing one set of resistance exercises with 18 women doing three sets, they found that, while both groups had similar strength gains, the three-set group had a 25 percent drop in body fat, compared with 16 percent in the one-set group. Lifting weights demands a lot of calories, and when you perform three sets, that calorie burn can increase threefold, which is significant for burning fat.

### WALKING YOUR WAY TO FITNESS

If there's a single perfect exercise, it's probably walking. It's easy, convenient, and inexpensive. Nearly anybody can do it at any skill level, from

Grandma to the kids. You can do it almost anywhere, anytime. Plus, it has the lowest dropout rate and injury rate of all exercise programs. That's why it's a key component of the Firm Up Program.

Granted, other forms of exercise, like running, bicycling, and swimming, may burn more calories per minute. But studies have shown that people who take up walking actually stick with it, while those who pursue other activities tend to give up after the first few months. One of the reasons may be that it makes you feel so good. We all know that exercise can boost your mood and your sense of well-being. But compared to other exercisers, who feel better *after* a workout, walkers report feeling better *during* the actual exercise. By choosing an activity than makes you feel good while you do it, not just after you're through, you'll be more likely to stick with it.

Despite all those benefits, every month I get e-mails or letters from women saying: "I walk

every day, but I'm not losing any weight." Because walking is such a comfortable, familiar activity, and most of us don't like to push ourselves, you may not be walking at a high enough intensity to get the results you want. That's why the Firm Up Walking Plan incorporates higher-intensity speed and interval walks along with easier, more moderate walks.

By sneaking short, high-intensity bouts of activity into your regular walk, you won't feel as

though you're killing yourself, you'll reduce your risk of an injury, and you'll burn more calories, so you firm up fast. In one study, a group of exercisers worked out 5 days a week at their target heart rates for up to 45 minutes. A second group exercised the same amount of time, only they did intervals, alternately increasing their intensity just five beats above their target heart rates, then slowing down to five beats below. After 10 weeks, the interval group lost more than three

## Get Firm *and* Disease-Free

SURE, LOOKING AND feeling good are great reasons to try the Firm Up in 3 Weeks Program. But the program's benefits are more than skin deep. It can help you beat disease, too. Here are just a few examples of how exercise helps you reduce your risk of, or helps you relieve, six common health conditions.

**Diabetes.** In the Finnish Diabetes Prevention Study, the people who exercised the most—up to 4 hours a week—dropped their risk of diabetes by 80 percent, even if they didn't lose any weight.

**Cancer.** You can cut your risk of getting or dying from colon cancer by 50 percent if you get at least 30 minutes of activity most days, according to the American Cancer Society.

**Heart disease.** A Harvard University study showed that women who walked at a 3-miles-per-hour or faster pace at least 3 hours a week reduced their risk of heart disease by 40 percent.

**Osteoporosis.** You can start to lose bone as early as your midthirties. As you get older, this bone loss speeds up, dropping as much as a precipitous 20 percent in the 5 to 7 years following menopause. But in one study, postmenopausal women increased their bone density by lifting weights just twice a week for a year.

**Arthritis.** Exercise can reduce pain, cut your need for medications, and help you avoid joint-replacement surgery in the future. Some studies also show that aerobic exercise, such as walking, can decrease inflammation in some joints.

**Depression.** Studies have shown that as little as 10 minutes of exercise can boost energy and reduce tension for up to an hour afterward. And less than 1 hour a week of brisk activity can relieve major depression as well as antidepressants do—and the effect is long-lasting.

times the weight lost by the continuous exercisers. This type of training also helps beat boredom and fatigue.

## A FIRM BODY DOESN'T LIVE ON EXERCISE ALONE

Exercise just isn't enough to firm you up and help you stay that way. Your eating style—that is, your diet plan—is just as important as your exercise routine. That's why the Firm Up Program makes eating—what, when, and how much—an integral part of your 3-week program.

Does what you eat really make that big a difference? I'll answer that question with a simple math exercise: If you weigh 130 pounds and ride a stationary bike for 30 minutes at a moderate pace (one that *really* makes you sweat), you burn 173 calories. Not knowing that number, though, you feel entitled to a piece of apple pie—which weighs in at a whopping 410 calories. Not only did you *not* burn off the pie, but you also gained an extra 237 calories!

That's the obvious reason why eating the wrong foods—or too much of *any* food—can derail your efforts to firm up. But the not-so-obvious reason to avoid overeating may be at least as critical in keeping you healthfully trim: Overindulging, even in healthy foods, may make it harder to burn fat. Preliminary research on animals suggests that chronically overindulging may desensitize fat cells to epinephrine, a hormone that is released during exercise and normally signals fat cells to empty their contents. So no matter how hard you exercise, you may not be

able to burn fat efficiently if you overindulge too often.

Now, notice that I didn't say *never* indulge. In fact, the Firm Up Eating Plan allows for a daily indulgence. This meal plan limits calories without leaving you feeling hungry or deprived. It focuses on high-fiber whole grains, beans, fruits, and veggies to fill you up; low-saturated-fat proteins such as lean meats, poultry, fish, and eggs to keep you satisfied longer; and low-fat dairy foods to boost your calcium intake, which has been shown to help make losing weight and staying slim easier.

I've made sure that all the recipes are fast and easy to make, so you're not tempted to skip this vital part of the program because it's just too much work. (There are even suggestions for fast-food and restaurant meals that fall within the plan, so you can stay focused on firming up even when you're shopping or eating out with your spouse or family.) Best of all, there are lots of choices. You can follow the daily meal plans in the weekly chapters (3, 4, and 5) or choose from the meals and snacks in chapter 7, Mix-and-Match Meals, to create your own menus.

## FIRM UP YOUR ATTITUDE

It all comes down to this: Any exercise and diet plan you embark on can succeed or fail because of your attitude, not just because of your food or exercise choices. So throughout this book, I focus on firming up your attitude and motivation as well as your body. You'll find real-life success stories to inspire you, tons of tips to help you

stay in the Firm Up mindset, and chapters specially geared toward pumping up your attitude and boosting your motivation.

## FIRM UP FOR LIFE

What happens *after* you've finished the 3-week program? To stay firm, you have to keep working—doing the weight-resistance exercises,

walking, watching your calories. So I've devoted an entire section of this book (part 5, Firm Up and Beyond) to keeping you on track for lifetime firmness.

In this section, you'll find my Stay Firm Plan, advice on how to get back into firming up if you've "fallen off the wagon" (it happens to everyone now and then), and ways to avoid boredom and enjoy your path to firmness forever.

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### *Real-Life Success Story*

Six months before her wedding, Lisa (Getz) Trollinger of Allentown, Pennsylvania, started shopping for her dress. "I was mortified to discover that the only size that fit well was a 16," she says. When she found a style she liked, she ordered it two sizes too small. That same week, she committed herself to getting in shape by following the *Prevention* program.

In just 3 weeks, she lost nearly 4 pounds and 2½ inches. "Two months later, my size 12 wedding dress arrived. I still couldn't quite get it buttoned, and I knew the salesperson thought I'd set my expectations too high," she says. "But when I tried it on again a month before the wedding—my dress had to be taken in!"

"Imagine starting a strength-training program at age 45—after being sedentary and overweight—and going from 168 pounds to 144 pounds in 6 months! I looked and felt fabulous on my wedding day."

And 6 years later, Lisa has lost another 6 pounds and easily maintains her new figure. "This program showed me how simple and effective strength training is. I never would have thought I could lift weights," she says. "Now I lift 2 or 3 days a week. It energizes me, maintains my muscle tone, and keeps my weight steady, even though I love bread and butter. The only tools you need to stay young are some dumbbells."

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