

In good shape

Liz gives the lowdown on leaner legs.

My legs are the limbs I like the least. While I'm very grateful that they work – and for their new-found strength due to an increased exercise regime involving simple weighted squats and running – I've never been especially thrilled with their shape. So, over the last year, I've been researching and testing some intensive salon therapies to try and achieve a pair of pins that I'm happier with. More expensive than home-use products, these are high-tech treatments from medical salons and spas. Here's what I found works best.

Wellbeing HEALTH



Sclerotherapy

SCLEROTHERAPY

What is it? A quasi-medical treatment to remove broken thread or 'spider' veins on any part of the body, but especially useful for clusters of broken veins that tend to appear on the legs following weight gain, pregnancy, hormonal change or ageing.

How does it work? Using a very fine needle and a magnifying glass for accuracy, tiny amounts of a solution called a sclerosant are injected into the damaged vein. This then causes blood clotting within the vein and, in time, the body destroys the vein and it disappears. The solution normally used for this procedure is a salt solution called sodium tetradecyl sulphate (STD). More than one session may be required and it's best to wear medical-grade compression stockings for several days following the treatment for best results.

Results? This definitely works. You can expect to see veins entirely disappear or at least be vastly improved. However, if you're genetically prone to thread veins, you'll probably need to repeat the treatment every five years or so. Blood vessels in our legs are under constant pressure, so more likely to leak here than in other areas of the body.

How much? Depends on the clinical salon in your area. The procedure must be carried out by a medical practitioner, so prices per session are likely to start from £80 upwards.

Verdict An excellent and effective treatment if you're bothered by red thread veins.

1 BURPEE & JUMP

A tough test for quads and cardio fitness. Ensure a good landing by bending your knees to absorb the impact.



2 GLUTE BRIDGE

Perform slowly, holding for a couple of breaths at the top. Keep shoulders grounded (don't put weight on your neck).



LEG WORK

Without doubt, the cheapest and best way to reshape the legs is with regular, specific leg exercises. Here are six of the best, brought together with the help of award-winning personal trainer, Michael Garry. Bookmark this page for easy future reference. Just a few minutes a day of targeted exercise will really begin to pay dividends.

Some of the best leg exercises, Michael says, are straightforward squats, walking lunges, running and stair-walking, which can help trim the whole body. 'These work the large muscle groups in our legs, which speeds up our metabolism, so we burn more calories, reducing the amount of fat we have.'

A number of studies have claimed exercises like squats have also been shown to increase growth hormone. Michael explains, 'Growth hormone declines as we get older. By working the big muscle groups in our legs on a regular basis, we can slow that process down and keep our body looking younger.'

'We're often told it isn't possible to target certain parts of our body. But, Michael says, when it comes to our legs, it is. 'However, there is another thing we have to get right, and that's diet. We won't see the results we're hoping for if we eat a diet high in, for example, refined carbs.'

Because we're working large muscle groups and burning more

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3 GLUTE KICK

Fire up your glutes! Keep your knee bent and your foot flexed. Squeeze your glutes as you reach your foot to the ceiling.



5 SQUAT



Try hovering your bottom just above a chair seat. Knees should be at 90 degrees to hips. Hold weights by your side for a full-body workout. Start with 1kg and gradually work up in weight.

4 SIDE LIFTS

A simple exercise targeting the outer thighs. Keep your body in a straight line from head to toe.



6 WALKING LUNGE

Michael highly recommends walking lunges, which work the quads, hamstrings, calves, core and, especially, the glutes. This is one of the most crucial leg exercises he insists all his clients do regularly!



calories, we might find we want to eat more following a leg workout routine. Here, Michael suggests, it can help to increase our intake of protein, with foods such as fish, chicken, eggs, pulses and nuts.

To support a leg workout, we also need to be looking out for cardiovascular fitness, so we're, in Michael's words, 'fit to train'. His point is that 'strong and healthy heart and lungs give us greater capacity to perform squats and lunges. We don't tire so quickly so we can do more.'

For many of us, leg exercises can improve the appearance of the skin there, too. He says, 'It lifts the skin, particularly around the glutes.

Because the muscles are stronger and tighter, they help smooth out the skin.' As an added bonus, leg exercises help increase mobility in hips, knees and ankle joints.

Michael advises we always warm-up before leg exercises, stretching our quads (front of thigh), hamstrings (back of thigh) and calves (back of lower leg, actually two muscles), so we don't pull a muscle. 'A warm-up shouldn't be intense; just preparation. Afterwards, we should stretch for longer, at least five minutes, compared to two or three beforehand.'

Delayed onset muscle soreness, or DOMS, is to be expected when we start new exercises, Michael says. 'It often comes around 48

hours afterwards. It's not usually something we need to worry about; it will go away. And as you keep up with your routine over time, you probably won't experience it.'

Try your own routines with the exercises above, three times a week with a day's rest in between. Start with ten to 15 minutes, increasing to 20-30. 'There's nothing wrong with focusing on legs one day and another area of the body the next,' Michael says, 'but I like to include upper body exercises while doing leg work (for example, by holding weights while you squat and lunge), so you're doing a complete workout one day and can rest the next.' ●

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