



by Robin Weiss Director of Fitness

Reducing the Pear-Shape and Cellulite

For many of us, every extra calorie seems to migrate to our hips and thighs. This is not a figment of our imagination. Before menopause, many women's bodies store excess fat predominantly in these areas, creating what is known as the "pear-shaped" body.

For thousands of years, fat storage in these areas greatly helped cave-dwelling women survive during times of drought and famine. And women who could easily store fat in their hips and thighs were better able to give birth and feed their babies during a drought -- during pregnancy and breastfeeding the body needs as many as 1,000 extra calories a day -- thus passing on their hip and thigh fat storing genetics to future generations. This is one reason why thigh fat is so difficult to get rid of. Genes left over from our cave-dwelling ancestors cause hormones and enzymes in our bodies to direct extra calories into waiting fat cells in our hips and thighs. Levels of the female sex hormone estrogen tend to be a bit lower in women whose bodies don't store excess fat in these areas (or as much of it). But, don't despair; there are ways to coax the fat cells in our hips and thighs into releasing their contents, and to coax our muscle cells into burning it for fuel.

What Is Cellulite and What Causes It?

Besides excess fat on hips and thighs, many women complain about a type of fat known as cellulite. They say that no matter how much weight they lose, they can't seem to smooth out the tiny lumps of fat on their hips and thighs. Indeed, even slender women can have cellulite.

Cellulite is created when fat pushes its way through tiny holes in our connective tissue -- the thick web of interwoven fibers just underneath our skin. Strong and healthy connective tissue forms a tighter web of interwoven fibers that prevents fat from pressing its way through. Weak and unhealthy connective tissue more easily stretches apart and allows tiny fat pockets to poke through. Many factors can weaken our connective tissue, setting the stage for cellulite. They include:

High Hormone Levels: Women with higher than normal levels of the female hormone estrogen tend to suffer more often from cellulite. In addition to directing extra calories to fat cells in our hips and thighs, estrogen also

weakens connective tissue. When estrogen softens connective tissue around the womb, it makes childbirth possible. Unfortunately, estrogen softens all of the connective tissue in our body, not just that around our womb.

Poor Blood Circulation: Usually, high estrogen levels alone won't trigger cellulite to form. Many experts believe that you must also have poor blood circulation to your connective tissue, which tends to cause swelling. The swelling stretches the connective tissue apart, allowing the fat to bulge through.

Fluid Retention: We hear a lot about fluid retention in our abdomen and ankles, but it doesn't just take place there. It occurs all over our body, including our hips and thighs. If you've ever put on a favorite pair of pants and found them tight in the thighs one day and loose the next, you've experienced the ebb and flow of fluid retention. This swelling in our hips and thighs -- particularly on a chronic basis -- will stretch out and weaken connective tissue.

A Hectic Lifestyle: Emotional stress has also been shown to weaken connective tissue.

What Can We Do? – Exercise!!

Daily exercise helps normalize our hormonal levels. This not only helps prevent cellulite, it also helps prevent mood swings. Additionally, exercising increases blood circulation to our hips and thighs, helping to keep the connective tissue healthy. Better blood circulation also helps remove excess fluid. Lastly, as exercise helps us reduce excess fat in our hips and thighs, we'll have less of it to press against our connective tissue.

Good News About Hip and Thigh Fat

Genetically speaking, there are two predominant body types. Some of us gain fat in our lower bodies, creating the pear shape mentioned earlier. Others tend to gain fat in their abdomens, creating what's known as the apple shape. Though we may despise the fat on our hips and thighs, we have a major advantage over those who tend to gain it elsewhere. Research has consistently shown that abdominal fat--and not hip and thigh fat--is particularly dangerous to our health. Abdominal fat more easily makes its way into our bloodstream, clogging our arteries. Hip and thigh fat is much less likely to do that.

Hip and Thigh Fat Challenge

Hip and thigh fat is a little harder to burn off than abdominal fat. But, that doesn't mean we can't burn it off. We can slim down our hips and thighs and smooth away cellulite. We can also build the muscles in our legs, which are some of the largest and strongest muscles in our body. Stronger leg muscles make our overall life feel much more effortless.

Reference: Rodale, Inc. 2006