

ask the experts

**tone up arms and tone down
hunger hormones—but lose the
hip clicks and classical gas**

ELIZABETH LARKAM & LIZ LIPSKI, PH.D., CGN



I don't dare wear revealing summer clothes until I can tone my upper arms and back. What are the best exercises for those areas?

A Pilates studio equipment and mat exercises provide excellent options for toning the latissimus dorsi or “lats,” those winglike muscles that drape like a cape around the back of the rib

cage, connecting the upper arm to the lower thoracic spine, pelvis and ribs.

One of the most efficient exercises for toning these areas is the Swan, because it requires that the palms press against a firm surface to provide resistance. You can do Swan on the Reformer with your hands on the Foot Bar, on the Chair with your hands on the pedals, or on the mat with your hands on the floor.

To perform Swan on the Reformer, the Long Box should be on the carriage. Place your hands wide on the Foot Bar and hover your ribs above the box. Imagine a light from your chest bone shining on the opposite wall. Aim your elbows toward the floor as you bend and straighten them, sliding the carriage back and forth. Progress to widening your elbows out to the side as they bend and straighten.

Whichever way you choose to perform Swan, move slowly, with precise alignment. Choose resistance that enables you to complete 15 repetitions of each variation with effort but without strain. Exhale as you straighten your elbows, sliding your shoulders away from your ears toward your pelvis.

A toned back and arms alone, however, do not a great body make. To develop healthy overall muscle tone, augment your practice with cardiovascular exercise. —E.L.

When doing leg circles, I often feel a click in my hip joint. What's up with that?

A Leg Circles can bring about a symphony of sounds and sensations in the hip joint area. In some cases, soft tissues such as tendons may snap over a bursa (fluid-filled sack) or bony

prominence. In other cases, the femur (thigh bone) may abut against the hip socket. A consultation with a professional in physical medicine is required to determine which structures are responsible for your particular cacophony of clicking, snapping or clunking.

Here are suggestions for bringing quiet and safety to your Leg Circles. The first priority is to steady your pelvis and lumbar spine. Imagine that area is the pedestal of the moving sculpture of your leg. Anchor your base of support so that your leg can be secure in its movement. While maintaining a steady base, try one, two or all three of the following suggestions: First, bend the knee of the circling leg. This provides some slack in your tissues and may decrease the clicking. Second, decrease the size of the circle. Third, vary the orientation of the femur in the hip socket during the circle. In some cases, external rotation, or turning your leg outward, increases the ease of movement. For others, internal rotation, or turning your leg inward, provides the path of least resistance.

If you have access to a Reformer, practice Thigh Circles with the loops around your thighs just above your knees, or Leg Circles with the loops around your feet. The assistance of the springs and the cords can create a supportive environment for quiet, comfortable circles. —E.L.

I've been told that I overproduce a hormone called ghrelin, which makes me hungry all the time. Is there anything I can do about it?

Yes. Get more sleep. Ghrelin, pronounced GREL-in and discovered in 1999, is a hormone that stimulates appetite and hunger levels and is one of the many players in our complex system of neurotransmitters and hormones. Heightened ghrelin levels stimulates our appetite. After we eat, levels drop. Ghrelin is produced in the

stomach and is called the “hormone of hunger” or the “guardian of energy balance”—an apt name since it’s what gives us that gnawing feeling in our bellies that tells us it’s time to eat.

Drug companies have been scrambling to find ways to suppress ghrelin, hoping for a new multibillion-dollar anti-obesity drug to market. But research shows that perhaps all we need to do is get enough shut-eye.

Because Americans report sleeping two hours less each night than 40 years ago, curious researchers at the University of Chicago decided to see how sleep deprivation affected ghrelin hunger levels. They found that deprivation



increased ghrelin levels by 28 percent and hunger and appetite increased by 24 percent.

Suppressing ghrelin levels may seem to be the quick answer, but it’s not that simple, since it does much more than just control hunger. It is necessary for restorative and REM sleep, helps balance our stress mechanisms, controls secretion of stomach acid, secretes growth hormone and helps regulate anxiety.

Until the link between hunger and ghrelin is studied further, get at least seven hours of sleep each night. If that’s tough, try my method: I turn the lights off nine hours before I need to wake up, and typically I wake up after eight hours of sleep. When I allow my body to get all the sleep it wants, I find that my energy and productivity are much higher. —L.L.

Q. Do products like Beano really control the gas and bloating that’s caused by eating a lot of fruits and veggies?

All foods need to be broken down by digestive enzymes. When we don’t produce enough of these enzymes, we can experience gas, bloating and a variety of other symptoms, such as fatigue, poor concentration, headaches and joint stiffness. Some of us don’t produce enough lactase, so we can’t digest milk properly. Others have difficulty with gluten-containing grains like wheat, rye, barley and spelt. Some people experience gas and bloating from fruits or meats, and others find that beans, soy, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, nuts and onions cause discomfort.

Beano and similar products contain an enzyme called alpha-galactosidase, which is needed for the digestion of beans, nuts, onions and those from the cabbage family, all of which contain specific starchy carbohydrates (raffinose, stacchiose, and melibiosc). If we don’t produce enough of this enzyme, we experience gas and bloating. So if you sprinkle a few drops of Beano on foods that require this enzyme for digestion, you’ll be able to eat them without discomfort. Most foods, however, require different enzymes for digestion. Beano will not help with gas produced from fruits, meats, dairy products or grains because these foods don’t require alpha-galactosidase for digestion.

Since most of us have non-specific digestive issues, I recommend a full-spectrum digestive enzyme product, which can be purchased at most health food or drugstores. These contain a variety of enzymes to help you more fully digest fats, protein and carbohydrates in all types of foods. You may benefit from taking them with every meal or snack or just take as needed. —L.L. ☺