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YOUR FIT GIFT GUIDE BUDGET-FRIENDLY, TOO!

Oxygen

ROBERT KENNEDY'S WOMEN'S FITNESS

JENNIFER NICOLE LEE

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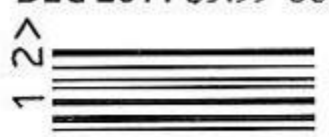
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NO MORE THUNDER THIGHS!

Results guaranteed!
Curl, lift and lunge your way to hot hamstrings.

BY STEFANI JACKENTHAL | PHOTOGRAPHY PAUL BUCETA
SHOT ON LOCATION AT WYNN FITNESS, MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO

This month, Oxygen's gone ham crazy – and we're not talking sandwiches. Read on for the secrets to great hamstrings, and why you should care in the first place.

Hello, hammies!

Made up of a trio of muscles – the biceps femoris, semitendinosus and semimembranosus – the hamstrings are responsible for knee flexion and hip extension. They are comprised of mostly fast-twitch muscle fibers, which make them excellent for movements like running, but are also just as important when stepping out of a car or off a curb. Strong hamstrings look sexy in a cute skirt, and keeping them limber and healthy will aid

you in ways you may never have imagined.

Unexpected benefits

Weak hamstrings, for example, can hurt one of your most valuable assets – your posture. “Tight hamstrings pull on the pelvis, creating a posterior tilt of the hips and forward slouch of the shoulders,” says Paul Frediani, author of *Powersculpt for Women* (Hatherleigh Press, 2004). He notes that moves like stability-ball hamstring

curls are ideal for strengthening not only your hams, but also your lower back and glutes – a trifecta of muscles that must be strong for healthy and confident poise.

Bye-bye boo-boos

Performing hamstring-boosting workouts is also a terrific way to reduce the risk of a torn ACL (the anterior cruciate ligament, which provides stability for the knee), an injury that research shows affects women two to eight times more often than

men. Why? One reason may be how the genders are wired to move. A study found that women tend to use their quads to stop forward momentum, while men rely more on their hams. The quads and hams oppose each other to stabilize the knee when rapidly changing direction, so weak hamstrings can leave the ACL prone to injury. Reducing the differences in strength between these areas by training your hamstrings may be one way to keep these injuries at bay.

SET SECRETS

Model Midori Rutledge held this squat for what seemed like eons as photographer Paul Buceta got the perfect angle from a ladder above.

NEED EVIDENCE THAT BODY-WEIGHT MOVES WORK?

Try the single-legged bench sit (next page); it's a challenging way to test your balance and sculpt your hams!

YOUR PERFECT PROGRAM

This twice-weekly plan includes two unique workouts – one made up of body-weight moves and another with weights. Do both routines, as reflected in the chart below, for impressive, functional hams in about a month!

DAY OF THE WEEK	EXERCISE	SETS/REPS
MONDAY (body-weight exercises)	Single-legged bench sit	3/10 (each leg)
	Stability-ball hamstring curl	3/15
	Donkey kick	3/15 (each leg)
WEDNESDAY (resistance exercises)	Walking lunge	3/10 (each leg)
	Dumbbell stiff-legged deadlift	3/12
	Dumbbell leg curl	3/10

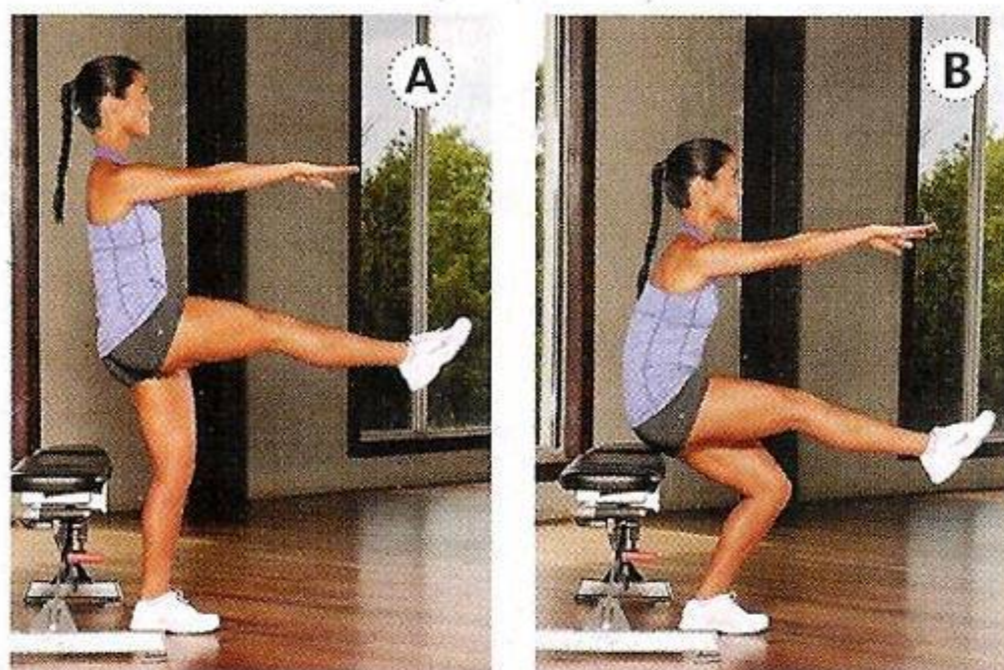
TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE. ▶

1. single-legged bench sit

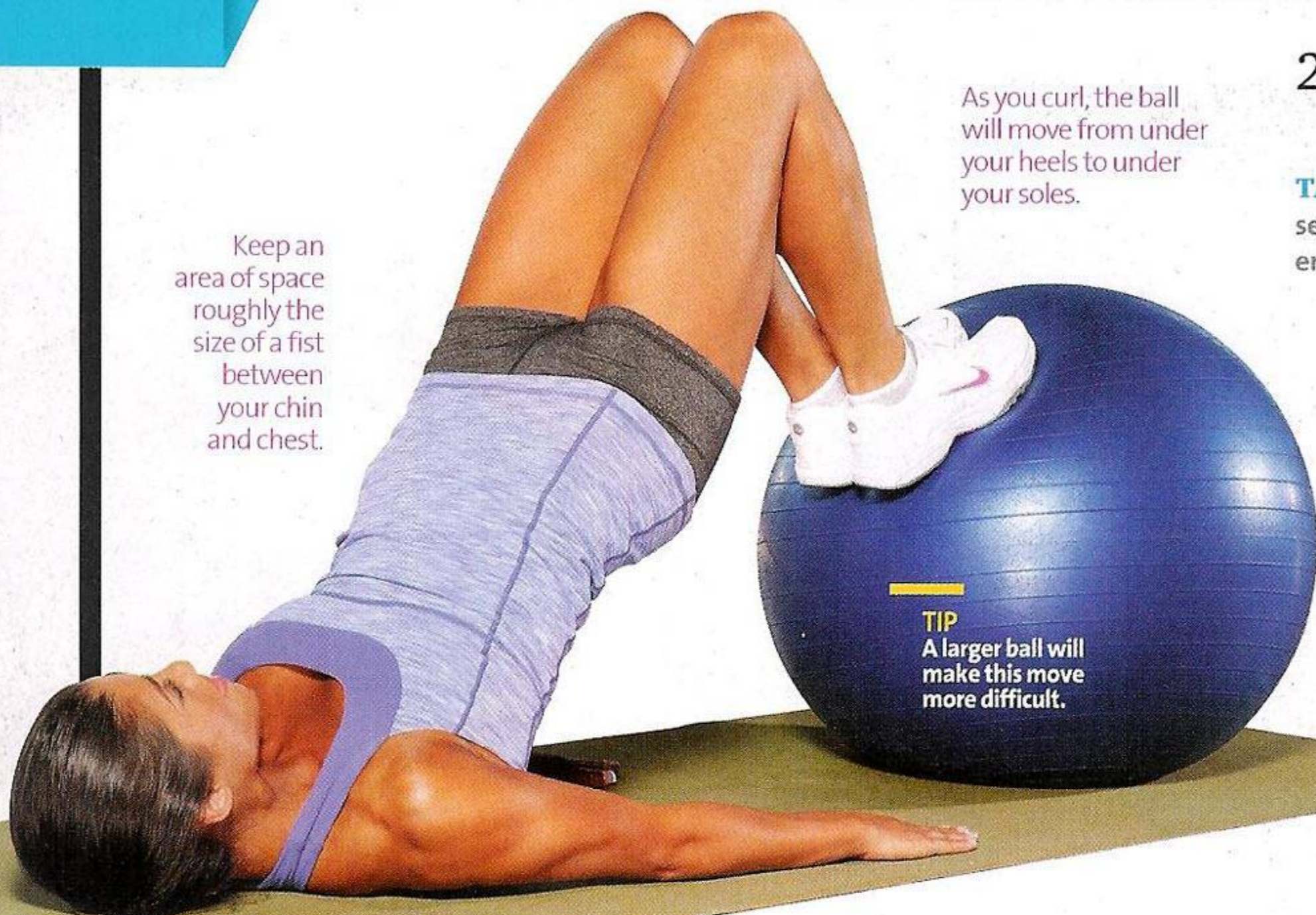
TARGET MUSCLES: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus, quadriceps, gluteus maximus

SET UP: Stand a few inches in front of a flat bench. Raise one leg straight from the floor as shown and extend your arms in front of you for balance [A].

ACTION: Bend your leg to sink into a squat. Beginners can slowly lower until they are seated on the bench, while advanced exercisers should stop a few inches above it [B]. Press through the ball of your foot to stand. Finish your set, then repeat on your other leg.



Keep an area of space roughly the size of a fist between your chin and chest.



As you curl, the ball will move from under your heels to under your soles.

2. stability-ball hamstring curl

TARGET MUSCLES: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus, erector spinae, gluteus maximus

SET UP: Lie faceup on a mat with your calves resting on a stability ball. Extend your arms alongside your body, and lift your hips until your body forms a straight line.

ACTION: Bend your knees to draw the ball towards your glutes; don't allow your hips to sag as you move. Extend your legs to return to the starting position.

TIP
A larger ball will make this move more difficult.

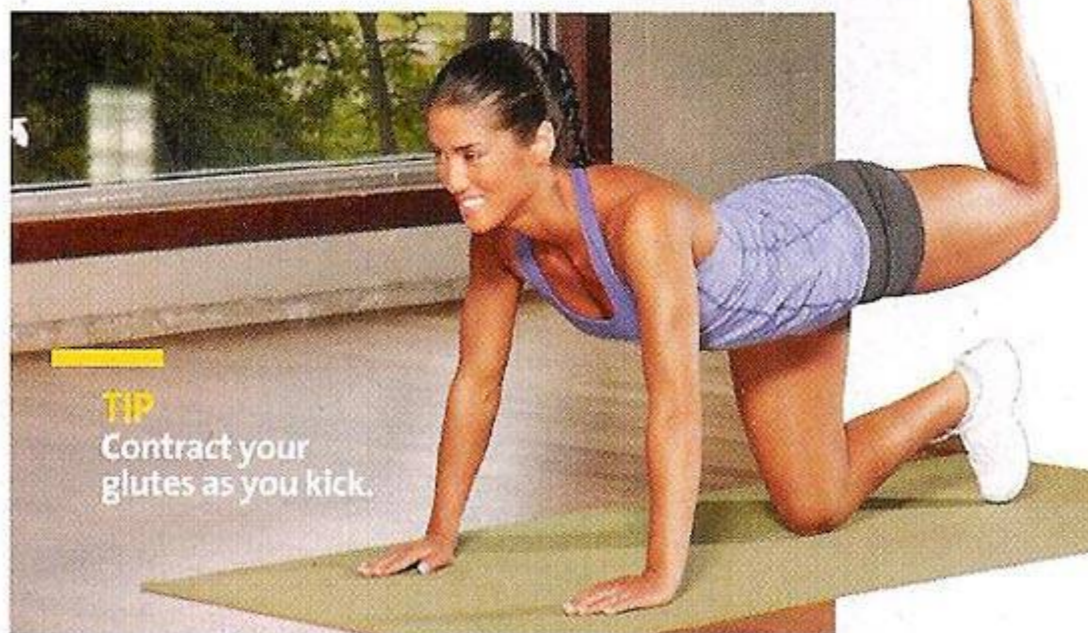
These kicks also target your erector spinae to keep your entire posterior chain strong.

3. donkey kick

TARGET MUSCLES: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus, gluteus maximus

SET UP: Get on all fours on an exercise mat. Your wrists should be under your shoulders (or slightly wider) and your knees directly under your hips.

ACTION: Keeping your knee bent to 90 degrees, extend one leg from the hip to direct the sole of your foot towards the ceiling. Hold for one count, then return to the start. When your set is through, repeat on your opposite side.



TIP
Contract your glutes as you kick.

THE "INS" AND "OUTS" OF YOUR LEG TRAINING

Get totally toned thighs with these bonus moves that work your leg adductors (your inner thighs) and leg abductors (your outer thighs).

BAND SIDE STEPS: Tie a resistance band into a loop. Place around your legs and take 10 steps to the right, then 10 steps left to return to the start. Repeat three times.



1. walking lunge

TARGET MUSCLES: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus, quadriceps, gluteus maximus

SET UP: Stand tall and hold a dumbbell in each hand at your sides. (Beginners can try this move without holding any dumbbells.)

ACTION: Step one leg forward and bend both knees to lunge. Press through the heel of your front foot to straighten your legs, then step your rear leg forward, planting it ahead of your other foot. Continue, alternating legs.

Want a hamstring and balance-building challenge?

Make sure the path is clear behind you, and do your lunges backwards.

2. dumbbell stiff-legged deadlift

TARGET MUSCLES: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus, gluteus maximus

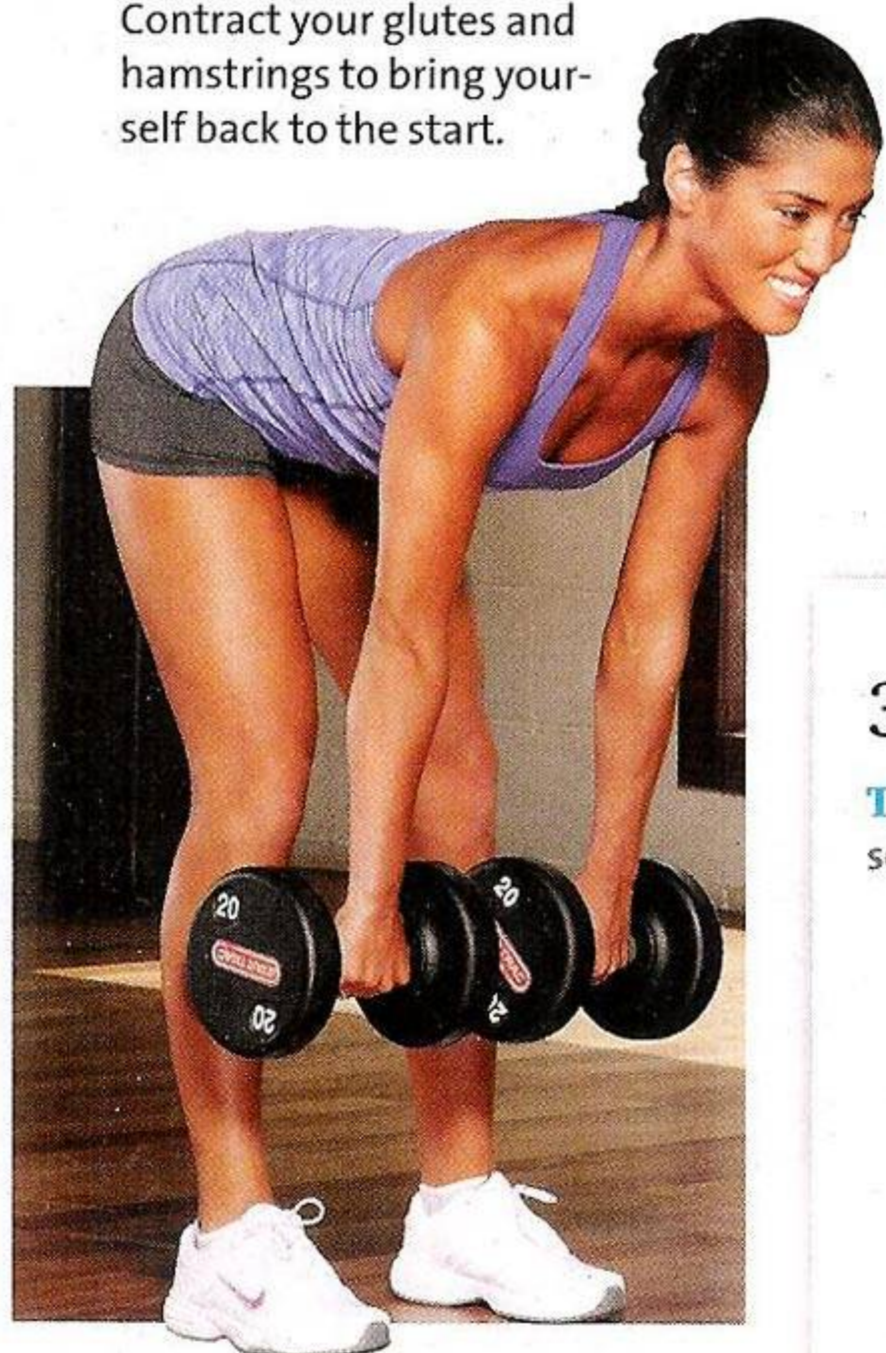
SET UP: Begin by standing with a dumbbell in each hand, palms facing the front of your thighs. Maintain a slight bend in your knees throughout your set.

ACTION: Keeping the dumbbells close to your body, hinge forward from your hips until your torso is about parallel to the floor. Contract your glutes and hamstrings to bring yourself back to the start.

Maintaining a tight core as you move will help you keep your torso tall.

Extend your rear leg up behind you before stepping forward to add an extra boost to your glutes and hamstrings.

As you push off with each step, your calves get in on the burn.

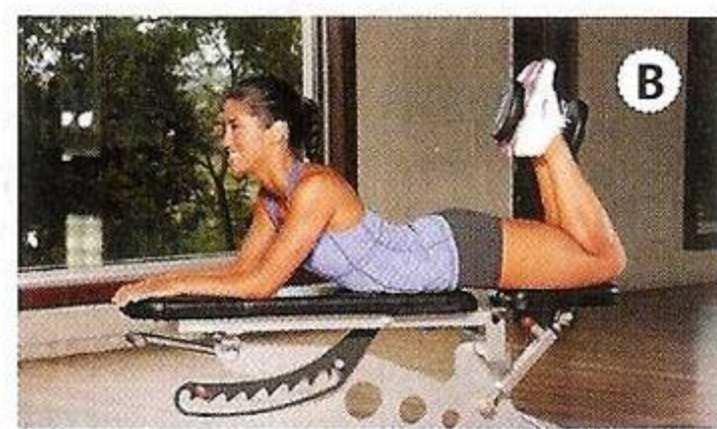
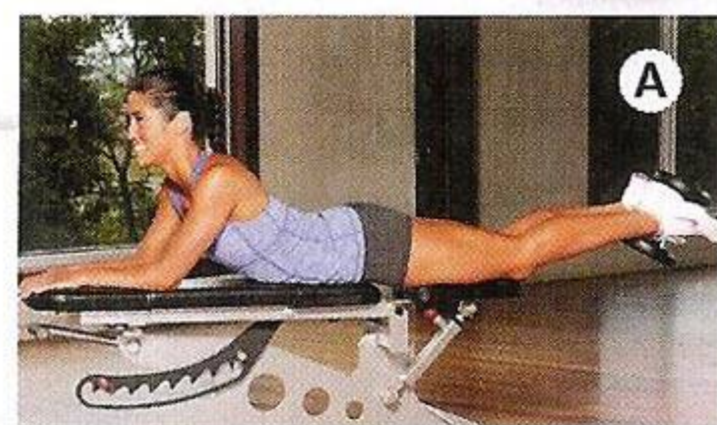


3. dumbbell leg curl

TARGET MUSCLES: biceps femoris, semitendinosus, semimembranosus

SET UP: Lie facedown on an exercise bench so that your calves extend just beyond the back of it. Reach behind you and place a dumbbell between your feet, or have a friend help you. Hold the bench for support [A].

ACTION: Flex your knees to raise the weight. Stop when your feet point towards the ceiling [B]; return to the start.



SUMO SQUATS:

Stand with your legs wide, toes pointing out, and hold a weight with both hands. Squat, then slowly reverse to stand. Aim for three sets of 12 reps.



FIRE HYDRANTS:

From an all-fours position, lift one leg up and out to the side, keeping it bent. Do three sets of 15 reps on each side. Ⓞ

