

Arms like Obama's are within reach

By Sarah Kennedy

DIRECTOR OF WELLNESS AT SPLENDIDO

Michelle Obama has been going out with fashionably bare arms and showing off her toned physique. Regardless of age or political affiliation, women have noticed our first lady's tone and wondered how to get a similar look.

She isn't doing anything groundbreaking. She simply adopted a healthy diet and a balanced exercise plan with even amounts of strength and cardio.

Supplementing strength with cardio

Strength training is important, even though some women skip working with barbells or pass up push-ups for more time on the treadmill. Incorporating cardio-focused exercises is great for developing tone and enhancing one's overall fitness.

However, a pure cardio regimen won't cut the wiggle out of your arms by itself. That takes heavy lifting.

You'll also increase your metabolism, turning the body into a fuel-burning machine. This helps keep weight off, allowing you to show off your muscles. Dumbbell presses and chin-ups can add flexibility, increasing your ability to excel in activities such as yoga or climbing stairs.

Focusing on biceps and triceps, the major muscles in the upper arm, will also help fill in loose skin. You can't really tone skin, but you can enhance the muscles beneath it.

Unwarranted fears

Many women avoid weights because they don't want to look like a bodybuilder. This is an unwarranted fear, as women don't produce testosterone the same way men do. Female bodybuilders use weight gainers and drugs on top of lifting sessions to get their build.

Moderate use of weights for strength and tone is fine and essential to getting those coveted arms.

Understanding your body

Michelle is a wonderful fitness role model, especially for women wanting to wear sleeveless tops in warmer weather. Nevertheless, she, like all of us, has a unique genetic code and it's unhealthy to compare yourself to her.

Everybody stores fat in different places and there is no way to change that. As you incorporate cardio and strength training, your body will use some from your arms, but also from legs, chest and back. Removing fat from specific areas is difficult and you may have to lose a higher overall percentage than planned to get your arms as fit as you want.

We also all age differently. The natural aging process begins in our 20s. You may age quickly or slowly. As skin becomes thinner and elasticity declines, it may be harder to get the results you want. Genes control how quickly the process unfolds and gravity constantly pulls our skin downward.

You can age well just like Michelle. To accomplish that goal, it's important to focus on being healthy, rather than concentrating on a particular look. Healthy arms come with healthy living.

Going strong

Here are some Tucson venues that offer strength-training classes for women:

- Curves (www.curves.com): Fifteen locations throughout Pima County.
- Jewish Community Center (www.tucsonjcc.org), 3800 E. River Road..
- SWAT Fitness & Personal Training (www.swatfitness.com/locations.html): Four locations in Pima County
- UND1SPUTED (www.undisputedtucson.com): 1240 N. Stone Ave.

Think positively and build self-esteem about your accomplishments while working out. The physical image you want may come, but you'll also gain a beautiful mental physique to show off with your fit body

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