

Bye bye bingo wings

In a flap about your tuckshop arms? ANNA-LOUISE BOUVIER has some strategies to trim them

It's an issue that sends women shopping for cardigans and stops men wearing singlets: fat, flapping upper arms. So what causes this problem, is it reversible and what can you do?

There are two types of fat arms: first, fat arms with or without cellulite dimpling and, second, flapping upper arms, aka bingo wings, characterised by the skin tissue under the arm continuing to wobble after you stop waving to hail a cab or blowdry your hair. According to Wikipedia, these are also known as "tuckshop arms" and "nana wobbles". They are more noticeable in women 30+ and in men 40+.

WHY DO WOMEN GET FAT ARMS?

Women are genetically predisposed to store fat in the thighs, hips, buttocks and, sadly, backs of arms. Men store it in the stomach, lower back and waist. This tendency for "spot" storage is largely hereditary, so look at your parents to see what may lie ahead.

WHY DOES OUR SKIN GO LOOSE AND FLOPPY?

- Your body has a matrix of connective tissue. This has many forms but the form that holds your skeleton together is your ligaments. Another form is your skin.
- Your inherent connective tissue makeup is encoded in your genes, which are responsible for the amount of proteins such as collagen and elastin in your matrix.
- If you have very loose connective tissue you will tend to be flexible (or floppy). You can touch your toes and bend your fingers back (this flexibility declines with age, though).

Fast facts

- 1 The shoulder joint has three main bones, while the forearm has two and the hand/wrist 27.
- 2 The only joints attaching the shoulders to the main skeleton are at the junction of the sternum and the clavicle (feel the notch at the top of your sternum just below your Adam's apple and move 1cm laterally).
- 3 The triceps muscle consists of three heads, which start at the back of the shoulder. They then join into one large tendon that attaches to the back of the elbow.
- 4 Rotating your shoulders inwards inhibits your ability to activate your triceps muscles.
- 5 The term "bingo wings" apparently originated from the bingo hall custom of raising one's arm aloft and shouting "House!" (Source: Wikipedia).

- At a skin level, loose connective tissue is more like a loosely wrapped sandwich. This means gravity will affect the "shape" of your arm when it changes position. With age, this looseness becomes more marked.

DOES WEIGHT LOSS HELP?

Most of us know that losing weight from specific areas is almost impossible. A friend always says she has either a lovely face and a fat bottom or a gaunt face and a size 8 bottom.



If you keep your total BMI down, though, and combine slow weight loss with specific exercise, your connective tissues have more chance to accommodate the changing circumference. With less total fat, you are less likely to have excess fat to store in those problem areas.

People who do have rapid significant weight loss often find their skin remains very loose (think loose connective tissue). In some cases, surgery may be a consideration.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIE HOWARD



WILL EXERCISE HELP?

Yes, certain specific exercise done regularly will help. The only muscle at the back of your arm is triceps muscle and its function is to extend your upper arm and straighten the elbow.

There are two reasons for muscle wasting in this area. One is age, the other disuse. Most of us lose 3-5 per cent of our muscle mass each decade (Nair 1995).

Because so much of our lifestyle is

“forward”, very few activities in a normal day actually activate the tricep muscles (unless you are in the habit of doing frequent handstands).

Specific exercises will maintain the triceps muscle bulk and tone, which should help “fill” this area. However, if your connective tissue is very fine (and you are super flexible), even a very toned young person may still notice a slight flap, which understandably drives them mad.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK?

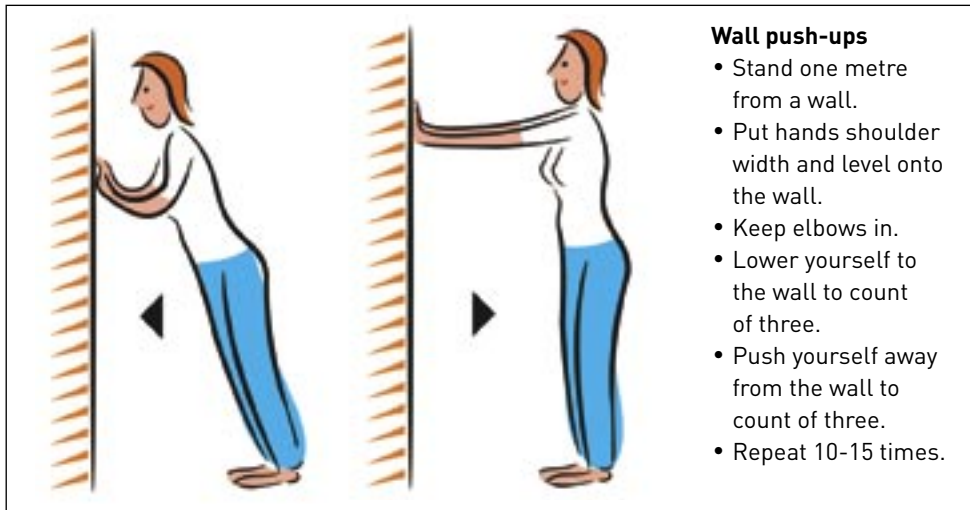
- Magical fat-reducing creams.
- Plastic wraps.
- Electronic muscle stimulators.

Extreme measures include surgery and liposuction, but it's important to consider your genetic predisposition to fat deposits and loose collagen. A favourite suggestion from one of my clients was to always wear Lycra three-quarter sleeves.



The exercises

Forget personal trainers and gyms — all you need is a wall and a chair to do these moves anywhere, any time



Wall push-ups

- Stand one metre from a wall.
- Put hands shoulder width and level onto the wall.
- Keep elbows in.
- Lower yourself to the wall to count of three.
- Push yourself away from the wall to count of three.
- Repeat 10-15 times.

Chair lifts

- Sit at the edge of your chair.
- Place hands at side of the seat, close to the edge.
- Gradually move your bottom off the chair.
- Unlock your elbows 15 degrees, keeping them in towards your body.
- Hold the position with your tummy drawn in for five breaths.
- Repeat three times.

NB: Keep pushing up out of your shoulders and don't let your neck collapse.



Chair dips

- Repeat set-up as above.
- Maintaining your "sitting" alignment, try to gradually drop your bottom towards the floor

- as if you are scratching your back on the edge of the seat.
- Go as deeply as your strength allows and repeat 10-15 times.

Fat arms: what you need to know

- * Keep your weight down.
- * Keep the bulk of your triceps up.
- * If you are really floppy, buy a lovely three-quarter cardigan.

Five of the best

At this point in summer, most of our bodies need a little scrubbing up. Whether you're smoothing away peeling skin, or doing some prep work for a fake tan, these exfoliants get our tick of approval for the job.

Dermalogica Exfoliating Body Scrub, \$48

No artificial fragrance or colouring, just fig, date and olive seeds, and essential oils working their magic. **9/10**

Sodashi Organic Green Tea and Dead Sea Salt Exfoliant, \$54

Use this one in the bath, as it is rich in minerals and antioxidants, helping to detoxify and relieve muscle tension as well as exfoliate. **8/10**

Davies Gate Walnut Scrub \$32

Ground apricot seeds and walnut shells gently exfoliate and form a mild lather on your skin, while organic oils hydrate. We love the squeeze bottle and moderate price, too! **9/10**

Aveda Caribbean Therapy Body Scrub, \$59.95

Cane sugars, coconut, avocado and passion fruit oils help bring a little bit of tropical loving to your skin. **7/10**

Nutrimetics Nutri-Rich Sugar Body Scrub, \$38

A great scrub for sugar lovers, enriched with apricot kernel oil. **8/10**

