



Your FLAT BELLY

The shape of your tummy can say a lot about your health. Read our guide to the key belly shapes and discover how to improve yours and your health too. By Kris Franken

guide

Celebrity trainer and fitness guru James Duigan, who has worked with such enviable bodies as model Elle Macpherson, has identified five distinct tummy types. Here, we've matched them with key lifestyle changes to get your belly looking and feeling its best, and get some top tips from the experts.



OVERWEIGHT TUMMY

According to Duigan, an overweight tummy is caused by carrying too much fat all over

your body, but it's vital to remember that it's not impossible to shift.

Old habits

A soft spot for refined or starchy carbohydrates (white bread, rice, pasta, cakes and biscuits) as well as excess sugar can lead to a rounded, overweight belly.

New habits

Eat whole foods

Give up all processed, refined or otherwise 'fake' fatty foods for whole foods like fresh fruit and vegies, nuts, seeds, wholegrains, lean meats and eggs.

"Processed foods have all sorts of toxins in them that cling to your fat cells," says Duigan, "while whole foods are said

to actively encourage your body to shed fat as they help boost your metabolism."

Rethink protein

Kate Gudorf, accredited practising dietitian and a spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia, recommends fat-burning lean protein choices, like fish, turkey and skin-free chicken, while limiting red meat, as some studies have linked it to belly fat.

Limit alcohol

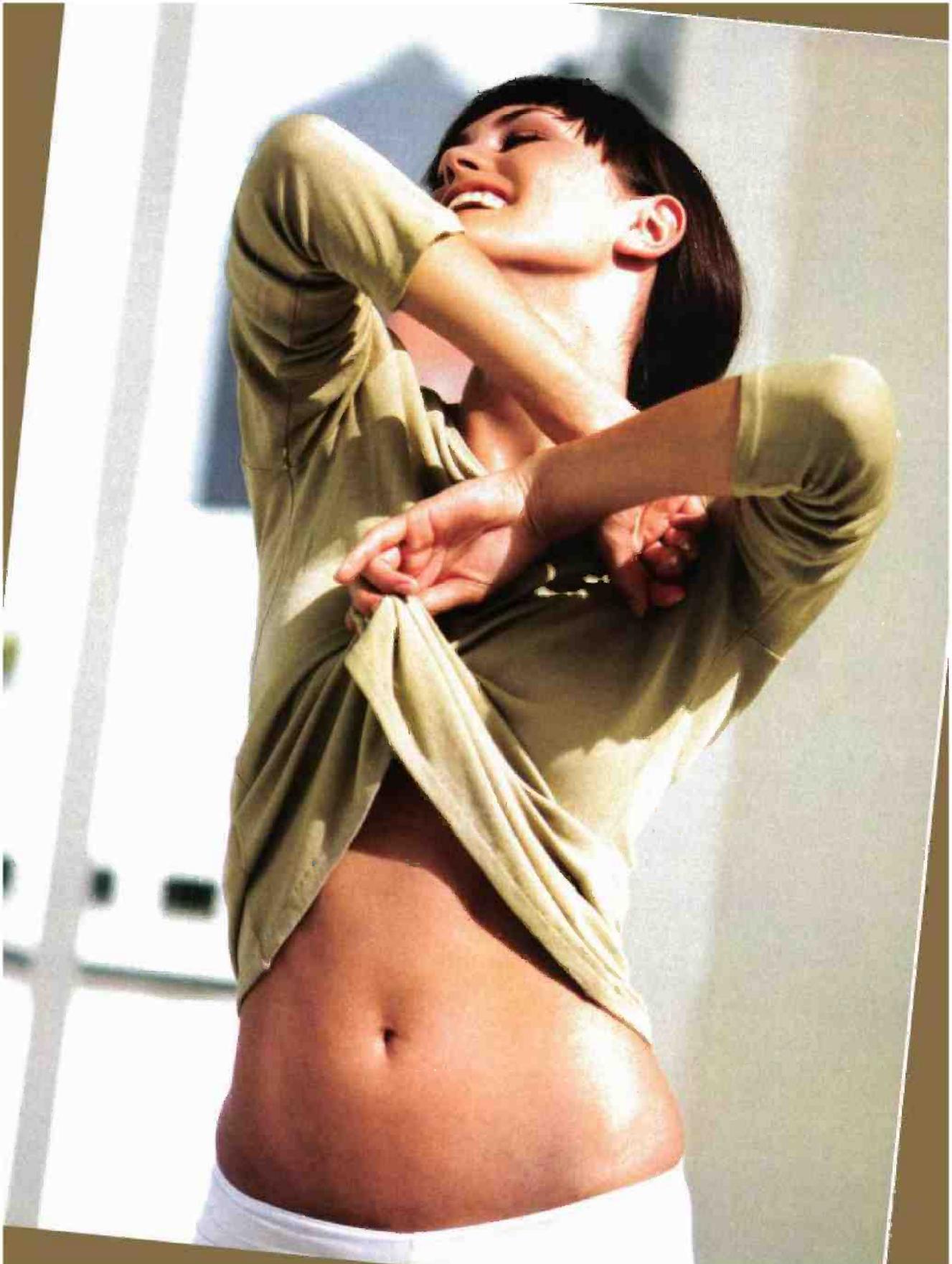
Alcohol contributes to excess body weight, especially around the middle, according to Gudorf, because it's higher in kilojoules than carbohydrates or protein. She advises that alcohol should be limited to a maximum of two standard drinks per night, five days a week.

Love doing it

Regular exercise that you enjoy will get you to your goal body shape faster than strenuous exercise, according to Duigan.

"Be kind to your body and your body will respond beautifully!" he says. ▶







STRESS TUMMY

When stressed tummies stick out, they're often the only

noticeable excess fat on a person. "Research suggests that when you're stressed, cortisol levels are high; cortisol tends to dump fat, onto your tummy," says Duigan.

Old habits

Rushed meals of processed foods, alcohol, coffee, soft drinks and sugar, with too much technological distraction – think TV, smartphone and social media.



SMALL PAUNCH

This protruding lower belly easily creeps up on those with

demanding lives. Busy lives and rushed meals can lead to a small paunch in no time.

Old habits

Duigan blames this issue on poor posture, food intolerances, lower back problems, not varying your gym routine and abdominal muscles that aren't switched on.

New habits

Focus on your plate

"When foods aren't digested properly, air bubbles can form in the stomach, leading to a paunchy, tummy," says Gudorf. "To help with digestion, eat slowly and chew food well without distractions."

New habits

Sleep on it

"Sleep is a powerful medicine for reducing cortisol," says naturopath Angela Hywood, who stresses the importance of getting your adrenal glands – which release hormones in response to stress – back to a normal working order. Try, and this is a big ask, to hit the pillow by around 9pm as these early night-time hours are a critical time for fat-burning.

Try relax-ercising

Meditation, yoga, tai chi and a leisurely walk all give body and mind a chance to unwind. "Do something that makes you feel good, not stressed," says Duigan.

Stand tall

"Improve your posture and stimulate your core by using a Swiss ball," says physiotherapist Jason T. Smith, author of *Get Yourself Back in Motion* (Global Publishing Group, \$34.95).

Smith suggests simply sitting on the ball with an upright posture for five to 10 minutes each time during the first week, and building up from there.

Mix it up

"Go for a swim, do some dancing, join a sports club – whatever gives you a boost and a better chance at switching on all your muscles," says Duigan.

Seek help

A physiotherapist may be able to help with lower back pain or hunched shoulders. They can improve flexibility in the upper back while gaining better muscle control of the lower back and stomach region, according to Smith.

Swap wine for milk

"The more alcohol you consume, the worse your sleep and the more tummy weight you'll accumulate," says Hywood. Instead, try drinking a cup of warm milk before going to bed. It's scientifically proven – because it's a food that's high in the amino acid tryptophan – to improve sleep, Hywood explains.

Eat at home

Ditch the takeaways and learn to cook clean, simple, nutritious and delicious meals. It's the easiest way to get major nutrients on your plate. Include plenty of dark, leafy vegetables as they contain calming magnesium and other health-boosting properties.



POST-BABY TUMMY

Pregnancy takes its toll on the belly in many ways, and it can be a real effort

to shift the baby fat after you've given birth. Duigan says it's important to rest (and ignore the belly) for at least the first six weeks. If you have any concerns check with your GP first.

Old habits

Are you short on time to exercise, or perhaps you are exercising too hard? If you have children, eating the kids' leftover meals and snacking on the wrong foods can make it harder to shift the weight too.

New habits

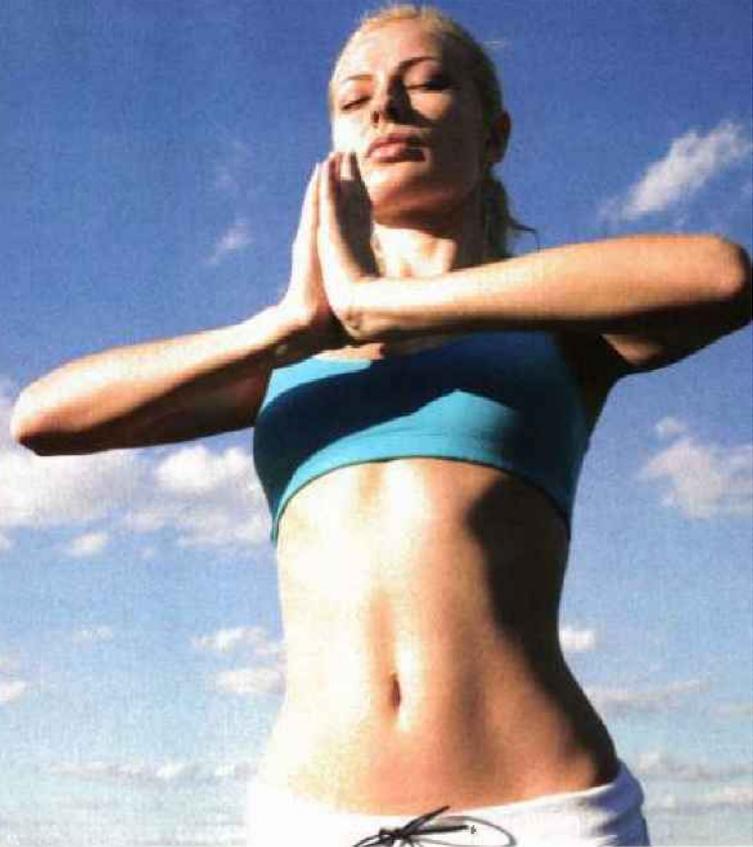
Go for good fats

"Great fats – such as a handful of nuts, avocado, oily fish like salmon and sardines and extra-virgin olive oil – will

Don't ignore your feelings

The first step to creating a good relationship with food is to address emotional eating. "Stress, depression, low energy, irritability, low self-esteem and anxiety can trigger over-eating behaviour," explains Sydney-based psychologist Jacqueline Saad.

Replace bingeing with positive behaviours, such as a massage, joining a yoga class or going on a walk with a friend, to take food and weight gain out of the equation.



help you metabolise fat and boost mood and emotions, so you feel strong and stable," says Duigan. "These foods are also anti-inflammatory to help calm inflammation of the gut."

Vary your protein

A serve of protein four times daily will keep blood sugar levels stable, boost energy and help burn fat, according to Hywood. Choose good quality proteins such as lean meat, hummus, miso soup and low-fat cheeses and yoghurts.

Play with your kids

Incidental exercise, such as taking the children (or your newborn in a pram) for a walk, to the park or for a swim, can give you a better chance at fosing those excess kilos.

Pelvic floor exercises

Duigan's top tip for new mums is to squeeze the pelvic floor – the muscles you use to stop the flow of urine – 15 to 20 reps, five times a day. Do them anywhere to help tighten your pelvic floor muscles from the inside out.



BLOATED TUMMY

Bloating is almost always caused by inflammation of digestive organs, according to Duigan. "Sometimes the belly starts off flat and bloats throughout the day after eating the wrong foods; other times the bloating is a chronic, ongoing problem."

Old habits

If you listen to your body, you'll recognise signs that something's amiss, such as flatulence, cramps, indigestion or a drop in energy. Your body is constantly 'talking' to you, so tune in and be aware of possible allergies, intolerances or sluggish bowels.

New habits

Tackle intolerances

The most problematic foods are wheat, gluten, alcohol, yeast and processed dairy, according to Duigan. "Eliminate foods [that might be problematic] one at a time

and reintroduce them after two weeks to see if they make a difference," he says.

Sip water that is at room temperature

Duigan recommends drinking two to three litres of still, filtered water at room temperature every day, but not with meals as it causes fluid retention and bloating. Why room temperature? Because this water hydrates the body faster than cold water as the body uses energy to warm up cold water, thereby delaying its hydrating effects.

Top up good bacteria

"Outweigh the bad bacteria with healthy bacteria; this way unwanted gas is quashed and digestion improves while the tummy slims," says Hywood. Try kefir (a fermented milk that's high in probiotics), unsweetened yoghurt or a probiotic supplement.

Find a dietitian

Allergies and intolerances can affect your quality of life. "A dietitian can help identify which foods may trigger your symptoms and help create a meal plan that excludes the offending foods," says Duigan. ☺