

# Shake your body

*Doing the shimmy could be the quickest way to tone up and lose weight. And the tassles are pretty groovy too, says PETA BEE*

I have to confess I had my doubts. Teetering on 3in heels and wearing nothing but a small dress covered with white tassles, Joanne Farrell, the musical actress, was talking me through the shimmy — the latest fitness find that, she promised, would get me into shape in almost no time. Four minutes a day, to be precise. No Lycra, no running shoes and no gym equipment required and, what's more, you can do it wherever you fancy. All you need, Farrell adds, is bags of energy and the ability to shake your body . . . all over.

"It's easy," she says. "Just tense every muscle in your body and then shake everything else for all it's worth."

Within two months of appearing as the Shimmy Girl in the West End musical *Smokey Joe's Cafe* at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Farrell, 27, has accidentally shed half a stone; a weight loss she attributes solely to this vigorous dancing routine.

The shimmy is the brainchild of Joey McKneely, the American choreographer who developed the technique for the Broadway production of the show, and it took Farrell just one afternoon to master it: "I couldn't believe the difference it makes to my appearance or how much healthier it makes me feel," she says.

A year after the show opened, her tummy, legs and bottom have slimmed down and toned up and, even better than the weight loss, she has developed hitherto unseen well-defined muscles in her upper arms. And, even though shimmying leaves her feeling ravenously hungry most of the time, which means she is eating more than ever, her weight has fallen to a respectable 8st 2lbs.

I had heard enough. Please, please, please teach me how to shimmy.

"There are quite a few basic moves but, once you have the hang of them, you just link them together. You start with something simple such as standing with your feet slightly apart, knees bent, arms outstretched and then twist your waist to both sides as fast as possible," Farrell explains.

"Another easy move is to stand with your arms crossed at shoulder level and to quickly thrust your shoulders backwards and forwards. Whenever you shimmy, try to keep your bottom and stomach tense. That way you will feel how hard you are working."

Tell me about it. Four minutes may not seem very long as far as regular gym

workouts go, but when you are shimmying the time passes like a decade. Even before we had progressed to pelvic wiggles and whole-body shakes, I began to feel a little tender around my midriff where muscles were moving twice as fast as they had ever moved before. My bottom and legs were beginning to feel the pressure, too.

And, as hard as you try to maintain control, there are parts of your body that take it upon themselves to wobble in the opposite direction. To protect body parts that may have been out of action for some time from the shock of all this sudden movement, Farrell advises warming up by stretching thoroughly for 10 minutes before you start. "It is quite a strange sensation at first because it is nothing like the kind of dancing you are likely to have done before," she says. "You should wear something really comfortable and, if you are female, invest in a support bra."

According to Dave Reddin, exercise physiologist at Loughborough University, the shimmy dance has plenty of fitness benefits. Because you work at such a high intensity, it burns more calories — between 60-70 for a four-minute session — than a continuous activity such as running or swimming.

"There are two ways of approaching weight loss. Most people choose to go to the gym and work out for 30-40 minutes at a very low, but fat-burning intensity," says Reddin.

"An alternative is an exercise like this one that requires you to work much harder but for less time. I would say this would be the equivalent of about 12 minutes of low-intensity slow jogging or cycling."

The main effect of shimmying is that it requires you to hold muscular contractions for up to four minutes. Because of this, says Reddin, it is an excellent all-over conditioning routine.

"It works in a similar way to weight training, where you contract various muscles against a resistance, but here you are contracting all of your main muscle groups at once," he says. "One bout of the shimmy for a duration of four minutes would achieve the same benefits as one or two full rounds of a gym circuit where you would be working each muscle in isolation."

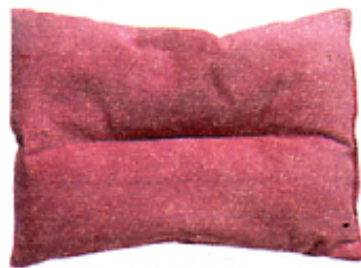
This may all be great for firming, toning and conditioning, but ideally, says Reddin, shimmying should be combined with some form of aerobic workout for an all-round fitness programme. "Four minutes of dancing this way is probably all that a lot of people could manage, but that is way below the minimum 20 minutes needed to build aerobic fitness. Swim, jog or cycle a couple of times a week and shimmy a few times as well and you will build great fitness levels."

"I sometimes wonder how I will keep fit when the show finishes," says Farrell. "At the moment I can eat what I like without putting on weight and, although I try to go to the gym regularly, I know it is the shimmying that is keeping me in shape. I will definitely try to keep it up in the future — I think I will have to. Anyway, it is so enjoyable that it makes you feel good about yourself when you are doing it."

Of course, the shimmy is also supposed to be sexy. For someone whose dancing skills are decidedly, well . . . shaky, even I admit that after a week of just four minutes every day, I am beginning to think I am now transformed into an altogether more sassy and sensual mover. Okay, so you may never be able to transfix everyone on the dance-floor with a raunchy, Madonna-style routine but so what? When you're shimmying, you'll certainly *think* you can.

● *Smokey Joe's Cafe* is showing at the Prince of Wales Theatre, London (0171-839 5972).

## CHEAT OF THE WEEK



Cuddle up to an aromacushion. Impregnated with essential oils and activated by chilling to make a cold compress or heating in the microwave, the cushions relieve pain, tension, anxiety or depression. Prices from £6.99 to £17.99. Call 0181-788 0402 for mail order.