The secret to shapelier, stronger calves

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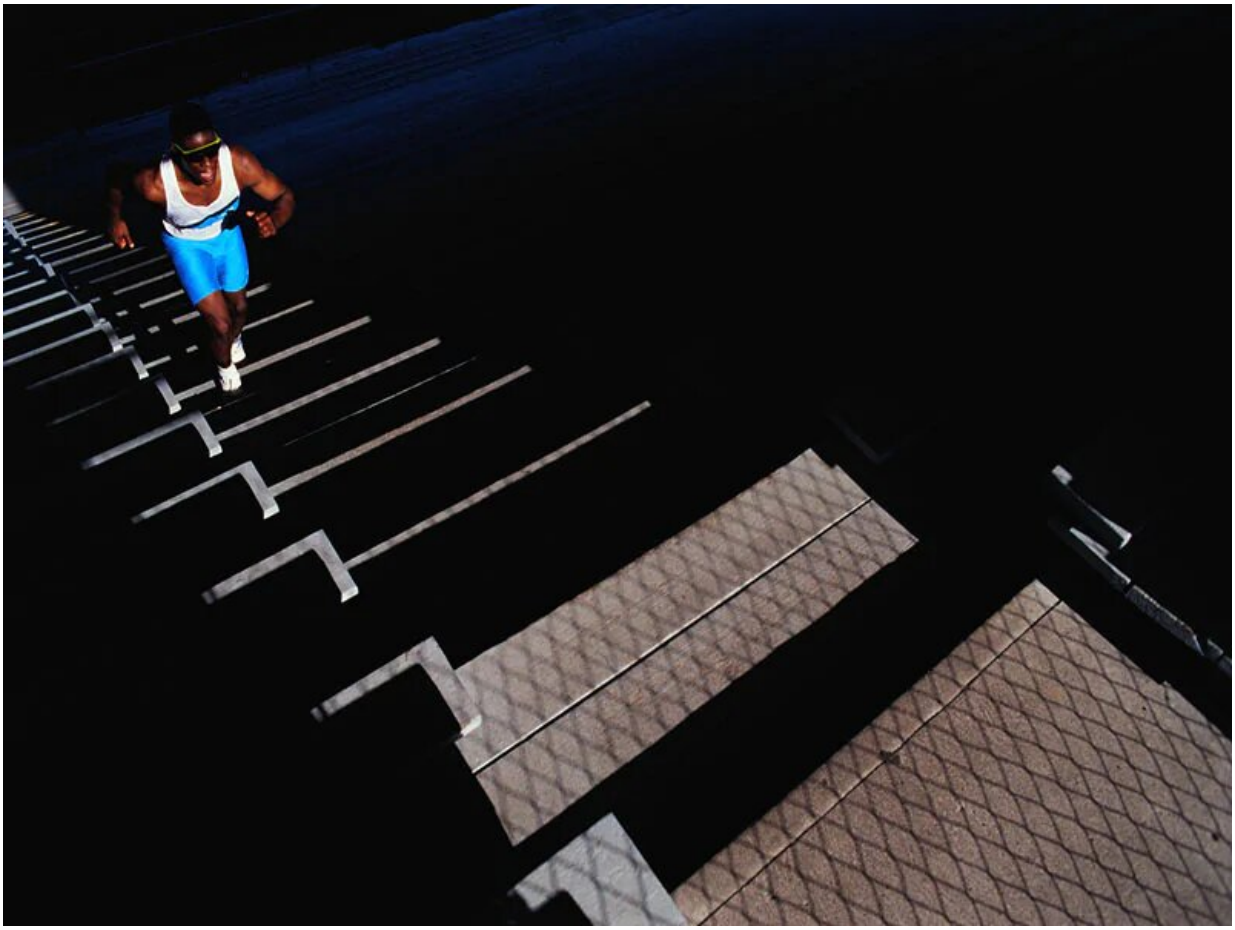

(HealthDay)—When it comes to sculpting muscles, it's easy to overlook your calves. But toning and strengthening your lower legs will make them look and feel great.

What's more, it will make these muscles more effective at their key jobs, which include supporting joints from your ankles to your hips.

Start with simple calf raises, an excellent exercise you can do anywhere because it doesn't involve any equipment. Stand about 6 inches away from a wall, facing it. Place your hands on the wall at shoulder height and at shoulder-width apart. Slowly rise up on your toes and hold the position briefly. Then lower yourself to the floor. Do three sets of 10 reps.

If you belong to a gym, take full advantage of the leg press machine. Place your toes and the balls of your feet on the bottom part of the platform, with heels hanging off. Your feet should be hip-width apart. Now press against the platform to fully extend your legs. Keep your knees steady, but don't allow them to lock. Hold the flexed position for a few seconds and then release to gradually, and with control, return to the starting position.

To get your heart pumping as you work your calves, head over to the stair-climbing machine. You'll feel the burn in your calves as you push off each step with the ball of your foot. No machine handy? Climb a staircase for the same effect.

Do these three calf exercises on alternate days two to three times a week for great lower leg definition.

More information: The American Council on Exercise has a library of exercises for the calves on its website.