

# Fit for Life

**V**ANESSA CAIRNS, 40, hadn't been on a bicycle since childhood when she signed up, on a whim, for a charity bike ride. In the middle of the 50-mile event, she struck up a friendship with another female cyclist, and they finished the ride together. "I didn't expect to have so much fun, or to get hooked," says the San Jose, Calif., resident, who now bikes four days a week. Nor did she expect to lose weight—but Cairns dropped from a size 12 to a size six.

**EASE YOUR KNEES.** Biking is a low-impact way to burn calories and boost your cardiovascular health. "You're not pounding the pavement, so it's an ideal activity if you have lower-back or knee problems," says personal trainer Lorri Lee Lown, founder of Velo Girls cycling club in San Francisco.

**STRETCH OUT.** Before exercising, do gentle movement-based stretches like arm circles and walking lunges to increase your range of motion, says physical therapist Chris Frederick, coauthor of *Stretch to Win* (Human Kinetics, 2006). After your workout, when your body is sufficiently warm, switch to held stretches—like the hip flexor stretch (good for hips tight from sitting at a desk or in the car) on page 44.»

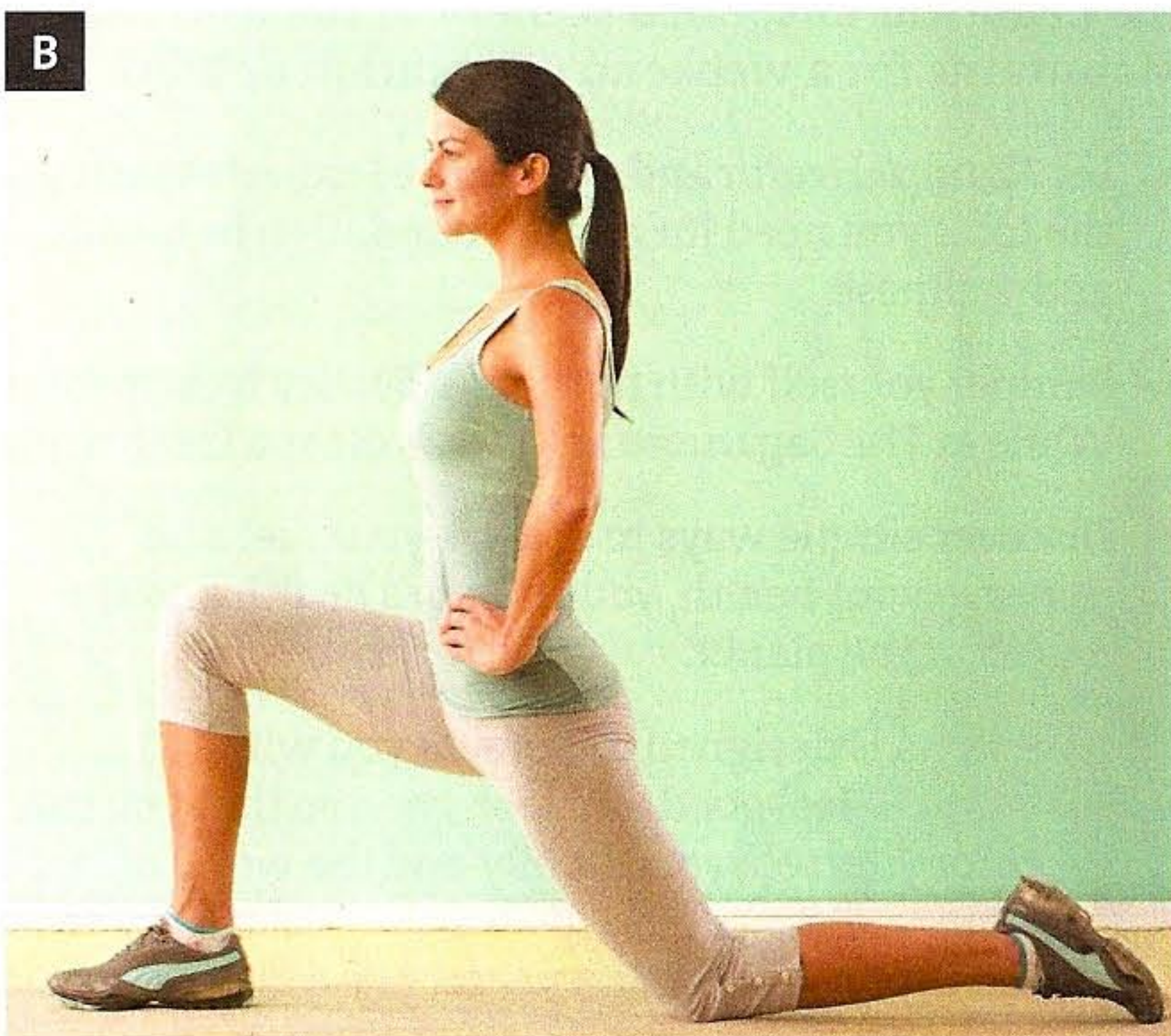
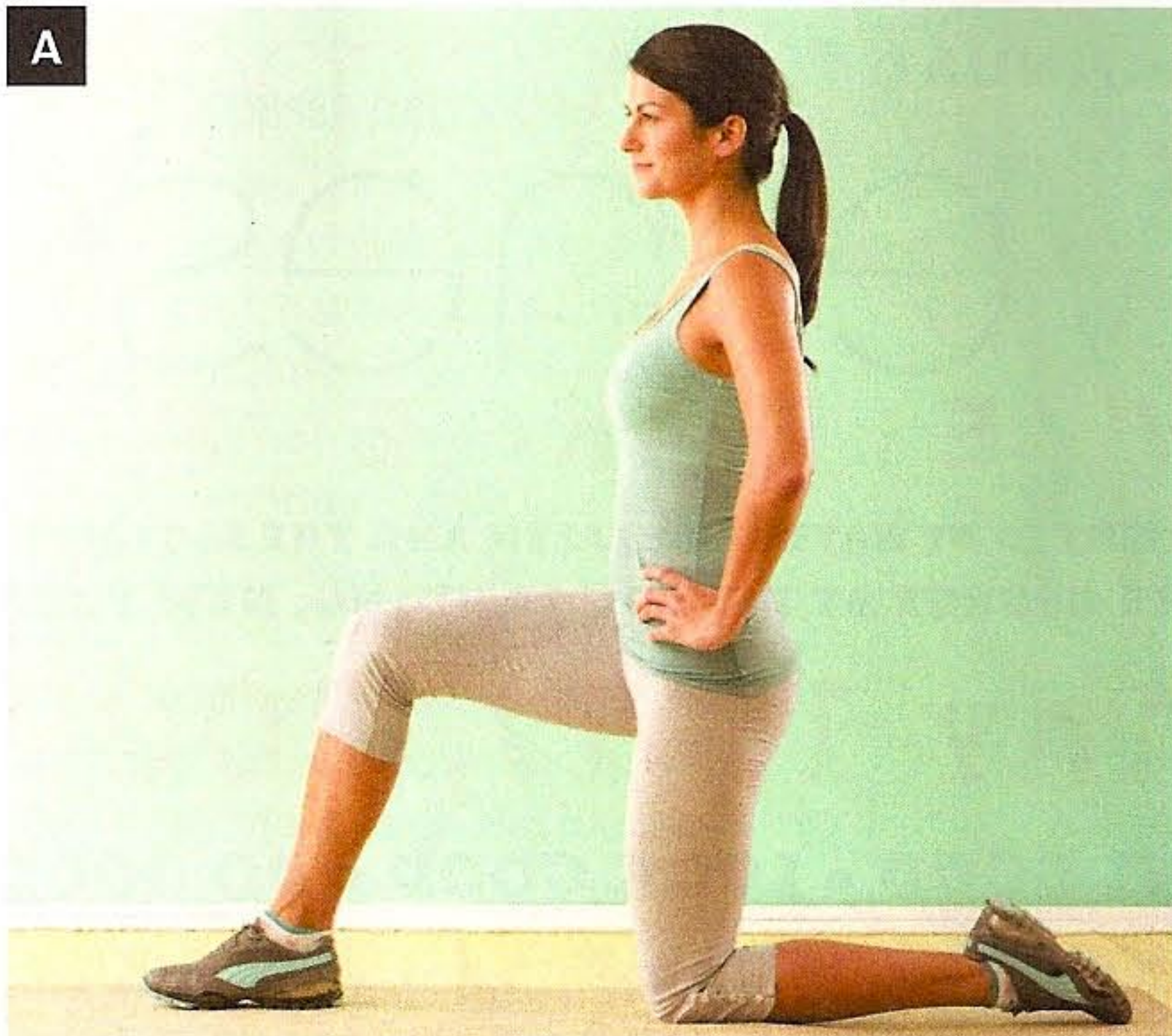
By KAREN ASP

Photography by CHRIS FANNING

Cycle your way to a stronger heart, slimmer waist, and more joy.

## A healthy spin





### ▲ Hip Flexor Stretch

**A** Kneel on the floor. (If this hurts your knees, place a towel or mat under them.) Bring your right leg forward and place your right foot on the floor about a foot and a half in front of you. Your right thigh should be parallel to the floor. Your shoulders should be over your hips and your hips over your left knee. Place your hands on your hips.

**B** Keeping your torso tall, inhale then exhale and shift your weight forward from the hips. As your right knee moves toward your right foot, you should feel a stretch in your left hip and thigh.

Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on other side.



*What are the rules of the road for cyclists?*

When biking, you need to think like a vehicle, not a pedestrian.

**Stick to bike lanes or roads.** Don't ride on sidewalks or in crosswalks—this makes it difficult for drivers to see you, especially when they're turning.

**Obey all traffic signals.** Always ride in the same direction as traffic, and remember to bike in the appropriate lane, depending on the direction you're traveling. If you're turning left, merge into the left-turn lane. If you're not turning right, get out of the right-turn lane. **Dress to be seen.** Choose bright colors like yellow, orange, red, or pink, and add reflective stickers to your helmet.

**Pay attention.** Keep your eyes on the road. Be assertive, predictable, consistent, and visible.

—Lorri Lee Lown, personal trainer and founder of Velo Girls cycling club in San Francisco

### BIKE-BUYING BASICS

**DECIDE WHERE YOU'LL RIDE.** For trail riding, choose a rugged mountain bike. For riding long distances on paved roads, choose a lightweight, speedy road bike. For commuting to work or running errands, consider a hybrid bike, which combines some features of mountain and road bikes.

**CHECK THE FIT.** As a general guideline, you should be able to stand over the bike with an inch or two of clearance between your tailbone and the top tube of the bike. The saddle should be sized to support your sit bones but not your entire rear.

**TAKE A TEST DRIVE.** Choose a bike based on how comfortable—and confident—you feel on it, how smooth the ride is, and how easy it is to switch gears.

TURN TO PAGE 46 FOR SOME ESSENTIAL BIKING GEAR.