

Off-the-Cuff - Having a Physical Fit - Spring 06

Contributed by Char Thompson

Reject the media machine and get fit on your own terms.

I hate waiting for a machine at the gym. I hover like a hummingbird, only my metabolism is better compared to plate tectonics than a tiny bird on speed.

The beginning of a new year is especially frustrating, with the gym being as clogged as the arteries of the folks who have all made the same weighty resolution. It was while in yet another holding pattern that I began to reflect on all these extra people jogging to nowhere, climbing stairs that lead to exactly where they started, and wondered why it is that so many folks consider their weight only at resolution time. Their good intentions slide off the proverbial treadmill by Valentine's Day, only to resurface with a new regimen a month later.

With a media constantly touting the latest diet/exercise/magic bullet trends, we seem to have become a society riddled with ADHD — Adult Dieting Hell Disorder — trying every fad that comes along. Angelina Jolie does Pilates? Sign me up! Gwyneth Paltrow and Madonna embrace an organic lifestyle? Fill my cart with brown rice and pesticide-free produce! Jennifer Aniston is a Zone devotee? Charge my credit card and deliver my meals, please! Our addiction to these picture perfect, reed-thin, pop culture icons skews our perceptions and makes us extremely susceptible to this type of influence. Quite frankly, we all deserve to be lashed with a lo-carb wet noodle for being so easily swayed. Walking down the street recently, I noted bright red signs hanging off every doorknob. They screamed "Warning!" in big black letters. Fearing a gas leak in the area, I went up to one of the doors to read the smaller print. There was gas alright, and it was stinkier than the methane byproducts of gastric bypass surgery. The flyers were from a reputable gym in the area, listing the "side effects" of joining their fitness club. On the list of four, three of which were "increased happiness, improved cardiovascular health and longer life," was — hold on to your protein bar — "enhanced sexual performance." Immediately, I felt like improving my own cardiovascular health by jogging around the neighborhood and yanking these flyers off all the doors. While I don't discredit the notion that having a healthier body makes one more confident in both bedroom appearance and performance, I also don't imagine that most folks walk up to the health club registration counter and say, "Hi, I'd like to enhance my sexual performance, where do I sign up?" Sure, there are those anomalies who work out in full make-up and a Lycra thong or who sneak their camera phones into the changing rooms, for whom this type of advertising is probably appealing. But shouldn't the greater emphasis be put on health, not hormones? Even if you didn't see "Supersize Me," it takes only a cursory glance around you to see that we really need to get our health priorities in shape, for ourselves, yes, but even more so for the future generation who are even more easily influenced by pop culture and the media. Throw away the magazines and teach your kids to appreciate their bodies as a muscle that requires exercise and the proper fuel, not as a receptacle for the latest Hollywood diet craze. Explain to them that those perfect celebrity bodies they (and we) worship are the result of personal trainers, ample money, free time, and copious amounts of airbrushing. Then have them strap on their iPods and get moving to the beat. Exercise and healthy eating, not quick fixes and trends, are the answer. Also, encourage schools to take the junk food machines out of the halls and load the cafeteria up with healthy choices. Tell a Subway manager to build a playland (I do this all the time). WE own our own bodies, not the media machine. And I guarantee you that as soon as we drop the unrealistic addictions and expectations to fad diets and dedicate ourselves to OURSELVES, the pounds will begin to drop as well. Until then, we're simply running in the same place and getting nowhere fast. Hey look! The treadmill's free, gotta go!