



GUELPH MERCURY

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Get stronger to lose weight

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GUELPH

Matthew Cragg tells the story of a client, a 40-something-year-old woman who did at least four aerobics classes a week, sometimes two in a day, for 10 years and could not lose weight.

He reduced her classes to just two a week and instead sent her to the gym for a strength training and stretching program.

"She lost four pounds the first week and has never looked back," said Cragg, a personal trainer who designs individual fitness programs for high-end competitive athletes, people with restrictive health conditions, and just regular folks.

"It's the strength training that burns fat, not aerobic exercise," explained Cragg, owner of Comfit Consulting. "People who want to lose weight should definitely be lifting weights."

That doesn't mean you'll get a body like Arnold Schwarzenegger — a prospect generally more worrisome to women than men. And it doesn't mean you need a set of barbells in the living room.

"For older people especially, it's extremely important to do some form of resistance training. It's not about looking like Arnie," said Cynthia Hardy, owner of Her Club for Fitness. "It's about building strength and endurance in your muscles. It's about making everyday activities easier."

There's been a shift in thinking in recent years about physical fitness, overall health, and the road to get there. In the 1980s women headed to aerobics classes in droves to burn away the fat and leave long, lean muscles. Men went to the weight room to build massive chests and biceps.

Instead the women got pain in their knee joints, weak and brittle bones, and a regimen that required they do more and more classes just to hold the needle in place on the bathroom scale. The men got massive chests and biceps all right, along with poor posture, bad backs and weak legs.

Albert Klein, a personal trainer at GoodLife Fitness Club in Guelph, said what fitness gurus learned is that aerobic activity, while important for the heart and lungs, had only limited ability to burn fat. And what good is bench pressing your own body weight if your muscles are too bulky to put your hands in your back pocket?

It's by building muscle mass that you increase the body's metabolism, which in turn burns more calories, which leads to weight loss. And the new metabolic rate stays with you throughout the day, burning the food you eat more efficiently.

"Weight loss is the most common goal of our

PHYSICAL FITNESS WEIGHT & RESISTANCE TRAINING

Second in a three-part series

members," explained Klein, "although the benefits of a strength training program go far beyond that."

Klein, Hardy, and Cheryl Guindon, manager of adult programs at the YMCA-YWCA of Guelph, all agree that starting on weight machines is probably the best way to begin a program. For the novice there's less chance of injury. The novice should begin with a program that focuses on the large muscle groups — the front and back of the thigh and buttocks, the abdomen and lower back, and the chest, upper back and shoulder muscles.

"I know this can be intimidating," said Guindon, pointing to the main gym at the 'Y', where dozens of people were lifting free weights or using the weight machines. "It only looks scary."

The most important thing about weight training is balance — top and bottom, left and right, front and back. In general, lifting heavy weights will build strength and muscle mass while light weights will tone and give muscle definition. Doing more repetitions builds endurance. As important as lifting the weights is letting muscles rest.

"With resistance training, it actually puts tiny rips in the muscle fibres, so the body has to burn energy to heal those tears. That's how the body burns fat, how the muscle gets a little stronger and why it increases in size. You need 24 hours for the body to make that repair," Hardy explained. She said that unlike skin or bones, muscles don't age.

"They atrophy. As long as you keep using them, they are there to use," she said.

Free weights require a little more knowledge and supervision but because they are not fixed in a machine, they work the muscles a little differently.

Klein called it three-dimensional training, where there's not just gravity working to pull your arms down, but also side to side. More forces are at play than with single movement weight machines, so the muscles work harder.

Using free weights while sitting on an exercise ball or standing on a rocker boards or bosu trainer (half a ball with a solid base) simulates an environment that's far more realistic and functional than weight machines.

"The goal is not to lift heavier weights. The goal is to build strong muscles that help with daily living," Guindon said.



DAVE CARTER, GUELPH MERCURY

Cynthia Hardy, Pilates specialist and personal trainer, owner of Her Club For Fitness of Guelph, works with client Lisa Hodgson.

Training the core muscles helps to balance the body

GUELPH

Stop whatever you're doing and try this. Suck in your stomach really, really hard, as if you're trying to pull your belly button into your spine.

Now imagine your stomach is a sponge and with only your muscles, try to squeeze the water from the sponge.

Hold that for a few seconds, stand up tall, relax your shoulders and don't forget to breathe.

"When you do this, you activate the deep muscles — the ones that support the torso," explained Cynthia Hardy, personal trainer, pilates specialist and owner of Her Club for Fitness in Guelph.

These are the core muscles and a strong core not only gets more from any exercise program, it makes daily living so much easier too, Hardy said.

Think back about 100 years or so, when women wore corsets to nip, tuck, shape and support the body.

"Everything begins with the core muscles," said Hardy. "They are the beginning of all movement. What's beneath the corset is the core."

Core muscle training is the latest buzzword in fitness but Hardy insists it's no fad. Anyone recovering from abdominal surgery would agree that it does indeed take stomach muscles to walk, get in and out of a chair, go up and down stairs and perform all the other activities in daily life.

Core muscles start at the spine and wrap around the body, through the side, the abdomen, the other side and end again at the spine. They run from the sternum (breastbone) to the pubic floor.

It's not enough to do sit-ups or crunches. Indeed, overdeveloped abdominal muscles without strong back muscles to counter-balance, can actually do more harm than good.

"That's the danger and we see it all the time," she said. "Those tight abs make the body curl forward and that leads to a weak and sore lower back."

"The thing about core training — and any training — is to balance the front and back, top and bottom, and left and right."

Yoga and Pilates (pronounced pi-la-teez) are good workouts for the core muscles as are sessions that use stability balls.

Lisa Hodgson, a Her Club member, said 10 minutes on the Stott Rehab Reformer — a piece of equipment that uses resistance and subtle movements to work the deep muscles at the hip, thigh, abdomen, lower back and buttocks — makes her feel long, lean and firm.

"It really helps with posture alignment. I feel very graceful when I'm done," she said.

With a strong core, and when you are aware of your core, the rest of your workout is much more productive, Hardy said, and safer too.

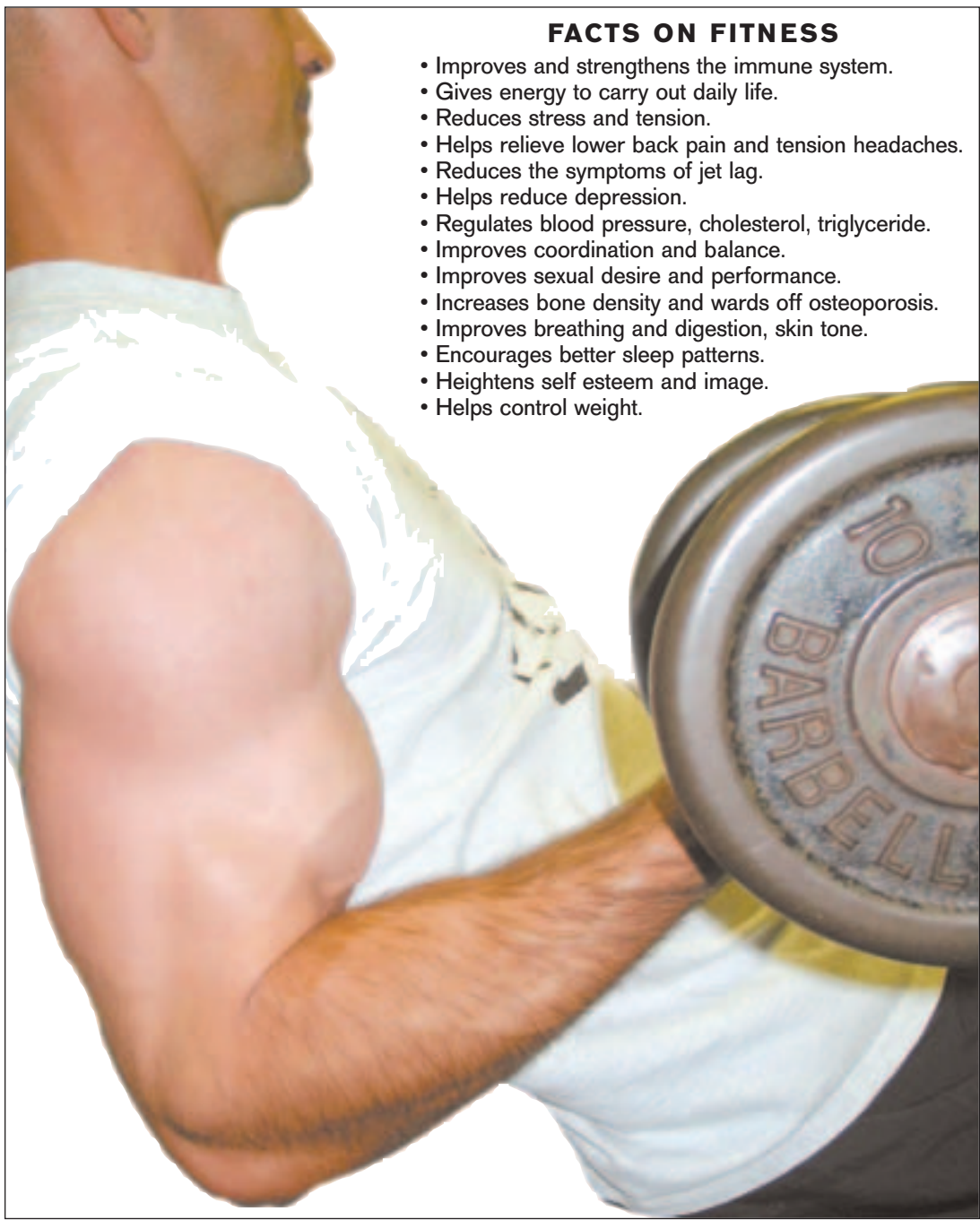
"We have to learn to listen to our body and give it what it needs. That should include wholesome food, lots of water, plenty of sleep and moderate alcohol, along with a well-rounded exercise program," Hardy said.

"It's the whole package that leads to good health."

• Mercury staff

FACTS ON FITNESS

- Improves and strengthens the immune system.
- Gives energy to carry out daily life.
- Reduces stress and tension.
- Helps relieve lower back pain and tension headaches.
- Reduces the symptoms of jet lag.
- Helps reduce depression.
- Regulates blood pressure, cholesterol, triglyceride.
- Improves coordination and balance.
- Improves sexual desire and performance.
- Increases bone density and wards off osteoporosis.
- Improves breathing and digestion, skin tone.
- Encourages better sleep patterns.
- Heightens self esteem and image.
- Helps control weight.



Consider recent news on trans fats danger as a wake-up call

Your first reaction may have been horror, guilt or even anger. If you have been following the latest media blitz on "trans fats" you may be left wondering what IS safe to eat.

Trans fats are being touted as the most "dangerous" type of fat in the diet because it has the potential to raise your bad cholesterol (LDL) and lower your good cholesterol (HDL).

A study conducted in the United States followed 85,000 female nurses over 14 years. They found that even one gram of trans fat eaten every day over the course of many years can increase the risk for heart disease by 20 per cent. The more trans fats you consume the higher the risk. In Canada we consume an average of eight to 10 grams of trans fats per day.



HEIDI SMITH

NUTRITION FOR THE LONG RUN

Many people are horrified to find out that children's foods such as arrowroots, fish crackers and even some puddings and granola bars can have as much as two grams of trans fats per serving.

Trans fats are produced when liquid oil is hydrogenated to form a solid. For example, liquid vegetable oil is hydro-

genated to make shortening which has better baking and shelf-life properties. Trans fats are therefore largely found in processed foods such as baked goods, convenience foods and fried fast foods. So what can you do with this new information? Some people are left terrified of the foods in their cupboards, others are angry that such unhealthy ingredients have been allowed in foods.

This new information is a potent reminder to make more foods at home and rely less on convenience foods and fast foods. For example, instead of buying the "movie style buttery" microwave popcorn (7 grams trans fat per serving), you can use an air popper and add your own non-hydrogenated margarine.

You can make more informed choices by looking at food labels. Detect hid-

den trans fats by checking the food ingredient list for words such as "hydrogenated" or "shortening". You'll notice more products are starting list "trans fats" in addition to "saturated fats" on their food labels. This is part of a new joint US-Canadian labeling system requiring all foods to have the same format of food label by 2006. For example, the label shown here indicates that one serving of cheese popcorn has a whopping five grams of trans fats in addition to 3.5 grams of saturated fats. That's almost half your day's allowance according to the Health Canada recommendation to stay below 20 grams of trans AND saturated fats combined.

Notice that trans fats are not considered in isolation. We mustn't forget that saturated fats also contribute to heart

disease risk. It's not about trying to eliminate all "unhealthy" foods but instead choose your processed foods wisely and portion them out appropriately. You don't have to swear off cheese popcorn for life. All foods can fit if you build a solid base of wholesome, homemade foods in your diet.

Try to view the latest news on trans fats as a wake-up call. It's a chance to re-evaluate what conveniences you really need and what you can replace with a healthier alternative.

• Heidi Smith is a Registered Dietitian from the Health and Performance Centre at the University of Guelph. For more information on trans fats check out the Nutrition News links at www.heidismithnutrition.com