

RIGHT at the beginning, I must emphasise that when we talk of exercise and fitness, it is not to fit you into the contours of the current fashionable shape. The purpose of a sensible diet 'n' exercise regimen is to make your own body as vibrant and healthy as it can be, to help you overcome the alienation from your body that so many people feel.

Some of the health benefits of such a regimen are:

- * Fat loss
- * Increased strength and endurance
- * Increased flexibility
- * Increased cardiovascular efficiency
- * Rise in life-expectancy
- * Increased mental alertness
- * Improved sleep
- * Denser/stronger bones
- * Decreased resting heart rate
- * Decrease in blood pressure

STARVED FOR IDEAS?

When we say 'diet', we're talking about a sensible

FAT TO FIT FROM

NAWAZ MODI kicks off a new series on aerobics with some words of reason, caution and advice

diet that limits caloric intake without depriving you of the nutrients you need. Certainly not crash diets (those below 500 calories), which not only seriously jeopardise your health, but don't really work in the long run. In fact, they're actually counterproductive because, for one, you may lose some fat, but also a large amount of muscle. Further, **crash diets lower your metabolism and set the stage for gaining fat a lot faster in the future, when you come off the diet.** Because of this, you get caught in a perpetual cycle of dieting.

If you're caught in such a vicious cycle, don't despair — all is not lost! The answer lies in getting that metabolic rate up again and working on building up on the lost muscle. Which can only be achieved through a sensible diet and exercise programme.

Your diet should not focus on the quantity, but on the quality of food consumed. It must also not be very demanding, or you'll quickly find that you can't stick with it for too long.

GET TO WORK

You know of course that exercise gets you to burn

calories. What you possibly don't know is that, **upto two hours after having completed your workout, your body is still expending calories at a much higher rate than otherwise.** But the greatest benefit is probably the fact that **exercise increases your basal metabolic rate and turns the body into a fat-burning machine.**

A word of caution: Don't fool yourself into imagining that just because you are exercising, you can shovel the food into a bottomless pit and still expect to lose fat. You'll be wasting your time if you do. **Aerobics will greatly increase your calorie output, but if you go back home and put it all back in religiously, you're negating the effect of your exercise programme in terms of fat loss.**

* **Exercise To Lose Fat** When you set out to do aerobic exercise to lose fat/inches, you must carefully

consider the following factors:

Intensity: How hard one exercises

Frequency: How often one exercises

Duration: How long one exercises

Intensity, or how hard you exercise, must ideally be within your fat-burning zone. This is commonly gauged by locating and checking the pulse. Common pulse locations are the wrist, neck and chest. The fat burning zone is also known as the 'target heart range' or 'training zone'. This range varies with each individual as it depends on factors such as age, fitness level, goals, health problems or limitations. There are various methods by which this target heart range can be calculated. If you work outside this prescribed range — whether higher or lower — you will not burn stored fat, but other sources of energy like glycogen or quick energy, which may not be the goal.

Frequency is how often you should exercise. For fat loss, one would need to work out at least three times a week, preferably moving it up to five or six times.

Duration: Ideally, you should raise your heart rate into its target range and keep it there for approximately 25 to 35 minutes in the main aerobic segment (minus

the warm-up, cool-down and calisthenics or muscle-toning segments).

BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

If you're picking up aerobics for the first time (and even if you're not), keep the following points in mind.

* It's natural to feel a bit self-conscious when you begin, but remember that everyone in your class, even your instructor, was once a first-timer. Focus on the positive. Enjoy the music and the group energy, and be proud of yourself for taking that first step.

* When exercising aerobically, it is important to exercise continuously. If you feel the need to stop due to exhaustion, slow down instead. You're probably working too hard to be burning stored body fat, anyway.

* Aerobic centres often offer a large variety of Cross Training classes to choose from, like Step, Slide and Fusion classes, New Body Format, Boxercise. Circuit and so on. One should ideally cross train. As the name indicates, cross training plans different routines for different days. This allows members to enjoy a wide variety of classes and alleviates boredom due to monotony in routines. It also allows for progression —when one sticks to the same routine, the body adapts to the pressures of that routine, reaching a plateau from which it will not improve. The routine will thereafter be ineffective.

* The muscle toning segment of each session will tone, strengthen and reshape your muscles. This segment also corrects postural deviations such as rounded, droopy shoulders or a forward pelvic tilt. **Even if you're exercising only to lose fat, don't skip this segment.** Toning is not only imperative because it will make your body look better, but is largely instrumental in injury prevention, too.

* The warm-up and the cool-down are important segments that must be given their due importance. The warm-up includes a combination of stretching and limbering exercises which get the muscles and heart ready to work. The cool-down brings your heart rate back to normal and helps you stretch and relax the muscles you have worked so hard. This is important, because leaving the muscles in a contracted state instead of stretching them could cause stiffness and even muscle cramps later. Both the warm-up and cool-down play an important role in injury prevention.

* Don't compromise on footwear. Get a good pair of sneakers with a thick sole for adequate cushioning. Your lower limbs require good support and air-soled shoes are usually far more supportive and provide better cushioning than others.

* Cotton is the ideal fabric for exercise wear (especially during the hotter months of the year) as it allows the body to breathe easily. Cotton allows the heat build-up, which is a natural by-product of exercise,

to be easily dissipated.

* Synthetics, like spandex, lycra and nylon, on the other hand, are avoidable as they don't allow the body to breathe easily. It's therefore difficult to continue exercising as the core temperature which is built up during exercise cannot be easily dissipated. As a result of this, one may additionally suffer skin irritations and rashes.

* Many exercisers like the look and feel of leotards and tights, but any non-binding clothing that allows you to move freely is fine.

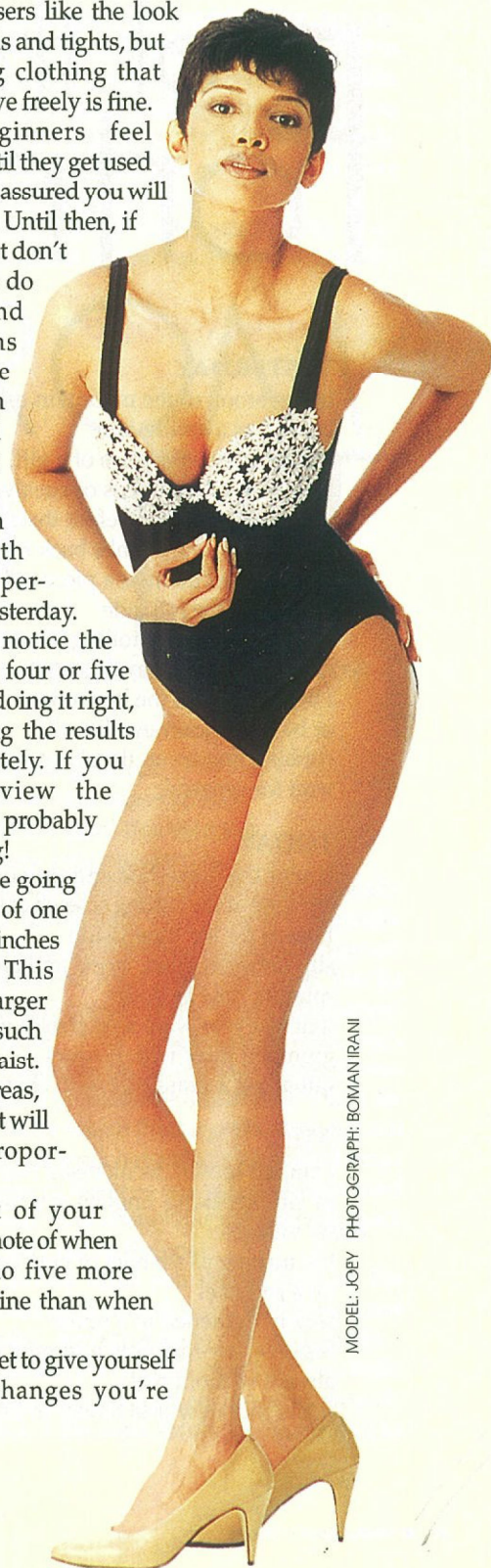
* Many beginners feel uncoordinated until they get used to the routines. Be assured you will get used to them. Until then, if your arms and feet don't synchronise, just do the footwork and leave the arms loose. Take on the arms only when you have pieced the footwork together. Remember you are not in competition with anyone, except perhaps the you of yesterday.

* You should notice the difference in just four or five classes. If you're doing it right, you'll start seeing the results almost immediately. If you don't, then review the situation. You've probably missed something!

* You should be going down at the rate of one to one-and-a-half inches per month. This pertains to the larger areas of the body such as the hips and waist. On the smaller areas, such as the arms, it will obviously be proportionately less.

* Keep track of your progress. Make a note of when you're able to do five more of a set or a routine than when you started.

And don't forget to give yourself credit for the changes you're creating today!



MODEL: JOEY PHOTOGRAPH: BOWMANIRANI