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perfect fit

● My daughter is 16 years old, five feet tall, and weighs all of 75 kgs! I am very worried about her health and have tried to instill the right dietary habits in her and encourage her to exercise, with no luck. I have noticed that she (possibly unconsciously) makes friends with girls who are actually larger and heavier than her and frequently tells me off saying that she's the thinnest of all her friends, and so is fine as she is! What can a concerned, helpless mother do?

Worried mom

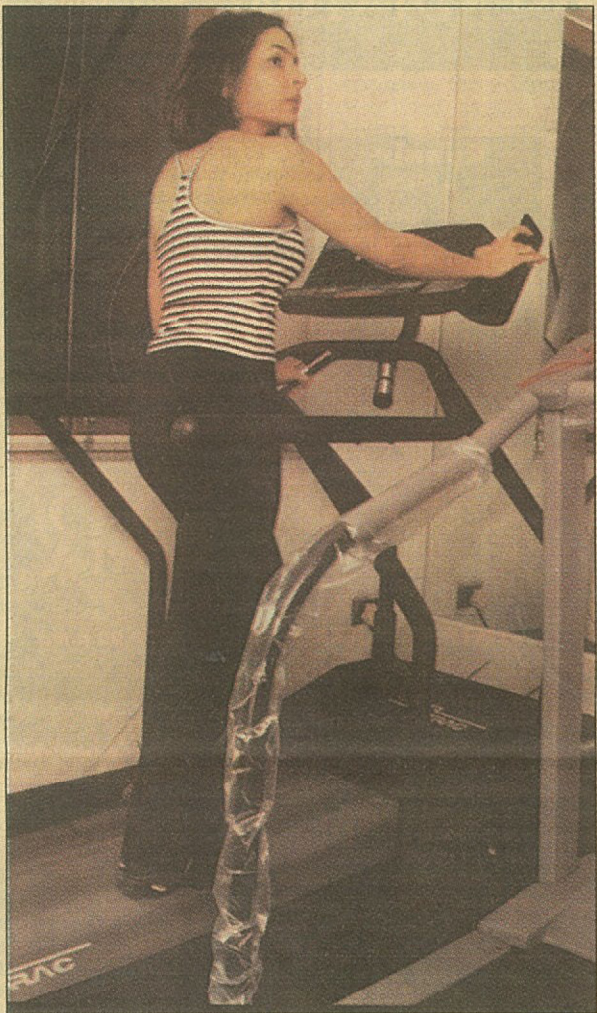


Figure 1: Walking is a fabulous overall exercise

○ While this is certainly no laughing matter, it brings to mind the cartoon figure of a young girl, praying by her bedside, "Dear God, if you can't make me thin, please make all my friends fat." Your daughter seems to find comfort and security in her make-believe world where those closest to her are all larger than she is, and so she's doing just fine. Though hackneyed, we know that birds of a feather tend to flock together. I would suggest that firstly you stop nagging her. The world critically judges everyone by (among other things) their physical appearance and body size both vocally and otherwise. She'll figure out the importance of getting in shape all by herself soon enough. Just stand by, wait and watch, would be my advice to you.

● Without getting trapped into buying one piece of equipment after the other, I would like to know what single piece of equipment you would suggest I buy so that I can exercise at home. I would like something that burns off fat, and exercises the whole body. What is the best thing to do?

Confused

○ I recently came across a cartoon figure telling another that she still used her treadmill; it made a great cot for weekend guests!

My point here is that I don't recommend people buying equipment, as one can with some minor adjustments, get the same workouts in, often with a greater amount of flexibility and variety. More often than not, equipment ends up eventually being unused, and sits around like a white elephant.

However, if you still insist on buying a single piece of equipment, this would have to be the treadmill (Figure 1). Walking is a great cardiovascular exercise that burns fat and works the whole body. Ideally, get one that checks your heart rate, the number of calories you burn, and offers different programmes along with an incline/decline feature.

● My wife delivered four months ago, but still has not lost any of her weight. While I am trying to be understanding about it, it really is the biggest turn-off. While she was pregnant, it was fine, because she was carrying our baby. But now there's no excuse. Now she's just fat! I find myself getting attracted to other women of late, and am not proud to admit that I have strayed in the recent past. I value my marriage and our family immensely, and hate to jeopardise it. I have tried to subtly tell my wife to do something about it, but it doesn't seem to be working. She eats like there's no tomorrow! Can I bring her to you? She used to workout in your class a year ago.

Roving eye

Exercise your right

○ Some women exercise and diet to keep their girlish figures; others, to keep their boyish husbands. Sad, but seemingly true.

I can see and understand both yours and her point of view. I would suggest that you be just a little more patient though. Said a weight watcher, I'm fat because I have a hand-to-mouth disease! Don't condemn her just yet for it. While she is feeding, she shouldn't cut back drastically on the caloric intake. She's probably very involved with the baby and in being a perfect mother. She'll come around and start focussing on herself and her body soon enough. No, don't "bring" her to me. She will come on her own when she is ready. The will to do it has got to be her own, not yours, or it'll never work.

● I have just gotten over a bout of bed rest due to a severe and very disabling lower back problem. I am now totally fine, but my doctor tells me that I should take on some exercises to strengthen my lower back. Can you suggest something for me?

Out of commission

○ Some common lower back exercises are the Good Morning (Figure 2), the Dead Lift and back hyperextensions. However, they need to be performed in a controlled environment, ideally under professional supervision, or you might end up right back where you started- in bed! I would suggest you either do this through physiotherapy, or a qualified and well-reputed fitness trainer. Once you get the hang of it, you can continue the same by yourself.

● I need to lose some weight and inches, and the sooner, the better. What's the best way of doing this? By best, I mean safe, effective and fast! These days so much is thrown at you from all sorts of diets, different types of exercise, pills, supplements, potions and powders, etc. It leaves the consumer in the depths of darkness. Can you shed some light?

Confused

○ The problem with pills, powders, potions and supplements firstly is that they are not sufficiently researched, therefore

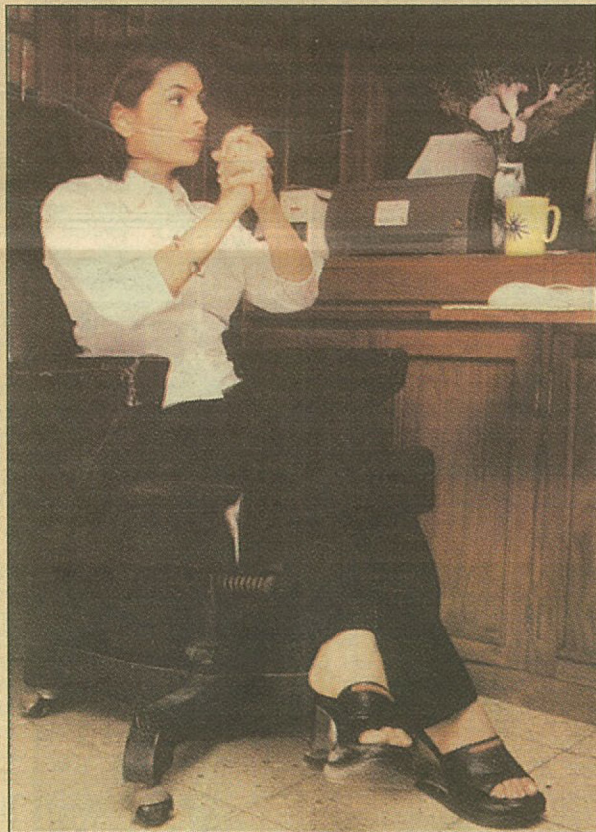


Figure 2: The 'Good Morning' helps strengthen the lower back

approved by some but not all recognised bodies. So their side effects are largely unknown; this sword hangs over your head for all-time. Do you think it's worth it? I don't. Some of these are diuretics or laxatives, causing one to lose a lot of water, along with essential nutrients and minerals, risking dehydration, while your fat stores remain intact. The age-old adage of a sensible diet and exercise is still the best answer to your problem. Chuck in dedication to your workouts and faith in your abilities, and you've got a surefire winner!

● The only time I could spare for my workouts was early in the morning. I find that I value those extra two hours of sleep far more, and have dropped my workouts since some time now. What would you recommend for someone in my position?

Busy bee

○ Don't complain because you have to wake up early every morning. The time may come when u can't get up - period! It is said that those who can't make the time for exercise, will have to make time for illness! As long as you wish to enjoy a physical existence, you will have to indulge in physical fitness. You will never find the time; you'll have to make the time!

● What tips can you offer for exercising in the summer months? As it's far hotter, finding the motivation, will power and energy to stick to an exercise regimen is really tough!

XYZ

○ Drink a lot of fluids to replace the extra water lost through sweat. Keep your hair pinned up and out of the way, and wear loose, comfortable clothes to avoid heat being trapped in and around your body. Stick to cottons only. Avoid all synthetics

such as nylon, lycra and spandex, as these do not let the body breathe through the skin. This traps the natural heat build-up of exercise, in your body, making it near impossible to continue exercising, due to the body becoming over-heated, and unable to dispense of the same. Wear light colours. Dark colours are heavy. Exercise in an air-conditioned room. Stick to eating light. Heavy Indian food laden with oil and masala will only compound your problem. Try switching to fresh juices, salads, soups, sandwiches, smaller meals and the occasional ice cream — this one does wonders for the soul!

● As time goes by, I increasingly feel I need to work on toning up my upper body, specially the chest. I lead an immensely hectic life, and don't have the luxury of being able to take the time to exercise. Do you have any quick tips for me?

Saggy Sam

○ Time may be a great healer, but its no beauty specialist. Okay, here's a quick one you can do everyday while still at your work-table. Get your arms in the position you see in Figure 3. Press your palms together hard for two seconds while exhaling, and release the pressure while inhaling. Do eight to 10 reps and two sets each day. As you progress and the exercises start to feel easier, you can start doing more reps first, and then increase the number of sets at a later stage. You'll see the difference in no time!

● My sister is 25 years old, but has the health problems of an 80-year-old! She has a bad back, pain in the joints, a neck problem, weak ankles, and asthma, to mention a few of her ailments! Maybe this is what makes her pessimistic, ill-tempered and irritable, but it's beginning to take its toll off our other family members too. She's never exercised a day in her life, but the doctors repeatedly tell her to do so. What would you suggest she do?

Concerned bro

○ The mind and body are strongly inter-related, and deeply affect one another. Your sister's problem seems to be more to do with her head, than her body. Cheerful people, the doctors say, resist disease better than glum ones. In other words, the surly bird catches the germ!

As E C Mc Kenzie said, our health always seems much more valuable after we lose it. On the physical front, your sister should ideally sit down with a qualified fitness instructor and discuss her problems and goals before what she should do and the best way to go about it can be determined.

● I'm 28 years old and have started developing varicose veins. Can exercise do anything to help me get rid of them?

Paranoid

○ There are quite a few ways of keeping the problem to a bare minimum. Yes, exercise can improve the condition. Cardio workouts will increase cardiac and respiratory suction action. Weight or strength training also results in improved pumping action. Include stretches for the lower limbs. This will help the peripheral veins.

● What are fat burners? Are they effective and safe?

Wondering

○ Fat burners usually claim to speed up the body's metabolism, thereby increasing energy expenditure, or caloric output.

Generally speaking, the problem is that in the process of doing so, there are various side effects. Firstly, the heart rate increases. So does the blood pressure. This can be life threatening to cardiac patients. Secondly, fat burners have not been ade-

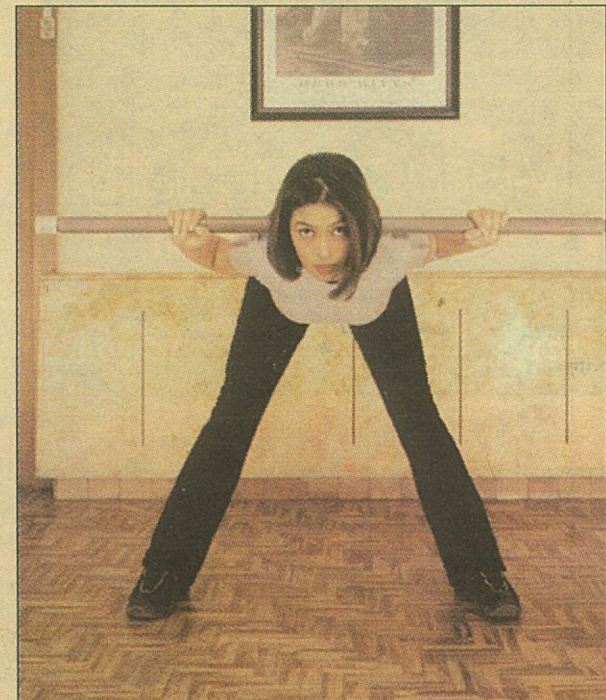


Figure 3: A simple desk exercise for the pectorals or chest

quately researched yet, and therefore the full implication of their effect is not entirely known or understood.

It's far safer to combine a sensible diet, which limits caloric intake with exercise, while keeping these powders, supplements, pills and potions at bay. Be good to your body; after all, it's all you've got!

Stay safe!

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