



Take It Personally.....

A Health & Fitness Newsletter from Tina Sarkey

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Fitness at Fifty

Things do change, but for the better!

Back in my 20s and early 30s, I was a rock musician. One of the bands I played in, Bad Oskar, was with my brother-in-law, Drew. We look at old pictures of ourselves from back in those days and laugh hysterically at what “hair farmers” we were. We were confirmed rock diehards and we never thought in a million years that 1) I would quit all of that and become a health and fitness geek or 2) that he would grow up to be a bluegrass/country musician (and look the part!). We are both thankful that we made those changes gracefully without trying to hang onto the “rock diehard” ideal of our youth. How awful it would be to have others laughing behind our backs as we paraded around in spandex, black leather, and big hair...at 50! Ughhh!

But I see the “aging rock star” equivalent in many fitness geeks. These are the people who are not willing to embrace the changes that come with age and are still trying to do what they did back in their 20s and 30s. If you choose to ignore the aging body’s pleas to slow down or do something different, you are asking for trouble. Dr. Andrew Weil echoed this advice when he talked on WKAR about healthy aging during the station’s recent pledge drive. The people he feels most sorry for are those who were hang onto their youthful fitness ideals and who are unwilling to pay attention to the changes that their bodies are going through. Ignoring pain and fatigue can result in injury and illness. (See below for information on Dr. Weil’s excellent Web site).

I saw a good example of what he was talking about the very next day. I was in a large physical therapy practice office, waiting to consult with the physical therapist of one of my clients, when I saw a 60ish gentleman who obviously felt right at home by the way he limped around the facility barefoot and spoke casually to the office personnel. He was chatting with the scheduling coordinator to find a good time for his next visit, but he had having difficulty finding time in his schedule between “races” (he looked like runner, for sure). Some of you may say, “You go, mister!” But, like Dr. Weil, I felt sorry for the guy. To me, he was the aging rock star in a plastic surgeon’s office, desperate to turn back the inevitable tick-tock of the aging clock. Spending my spare time in a physical therapist’s office is not my idea of a good time. But to him, it was apparently worth it just to “keep racing.” Racing what, I wondered?

Sometimes you have to determine whether your mental drive is stronger than your physical abilities. In my 20s, I was a hard-partying gal. I smoked two to three packs of cigarettes a day and drank like a fish. With no training whatsoever, I ran an eight-mile course to prove that I wasn't as much of a mess as everyone thought. Ouch! That wasn't smart, and I was crippled for months, but that is how a strong mental drive can override common sense.

A typical day in my 30s included getting up, eating breakfast, walking the dogs for an hour, doing cardio for 45-60 minutes, weight training for an hour or so, tending my 1000-square foot organic garden for a couple hours, teaching an aerobics class, performing two or three massages and then attending to my personal training clients throughout the evening until bed. By the time I was 40, I was had chronic back pain. My physician, Dr. Jerry Chandler (a "runner in recovery" himself), asked me why I was training so hard if I was not a professional athlete? Why was I doing 60 minutes of cardio rather than 30? Why weight train five days a week? Why not two or three? I had no good answer, other than I thought I was turning back the aging clock and defying nature. I thought I was the perfect role model for my personal training clients.

However, what made me re-evaluate was when my fitness mentor, Karen (a marathoner/triathlete/cross-country skier extraordinaire), whose life revolved around training and taking immaculate care of herself, was diagnosed with ovarian cancer in her mid- 40s. Karen's diagnosis was a wake-up call to me that there were other things in life that were more important than how many miles you put in that day or how few grams of fat you ate. Was it was the intense training that lowered her immunity? Did that make her vulnerable to the disease? I used to admire her for her intensity... but was it really good for her - or not?

Intense exercise (along with cigarette smoke, x-rays, barbequed meat, and emotional stress, to name a few) increases free-radical activity in the body. And that activity is thought to play a role in the development of cancer and other diseases.

My advice is to re-evaluate your fitness, lifestyle, diet habits every seven years and make the changes necessary to achieve balance in your life. I made one of those seven-year adjustments recently to accommodate my changing energy levels. That meant pulling back my aerobic program, learning to de-stress life, and making some dietary changes that included eating smaller meals (darn). A typical day for me now is an hour or so brisk-paced hike in the woods with my dogs and an hour of Pilates three to four days a week.

Because I still do some massage work (which can be quite rigorous), this feels like enough at this time in my life. Others may want to celebrate their 50th birthdays with a triathlon or 100-mile bike race. More power to them. But my body says that would be a bad idea for me. I have learned to listen to my body more, which Pilates helps me do. So this month, as I approach 50, even though my energy levels have changed and I don't have the endurance I once had (or thought I had), I feel strong and even more agile than I

did when I was 16. Pilates has improved my functional fitness, which has created an ease of movement in all my daily activities (and has probably extended my massage career).

Aging gracefully for me has meant balancing my mental drive with my physical abilities. It also means that I have more time to do things that enhance my quality of my life – spending time with family, involving myself in my community, reading, study. Does aging gracefully mean that I won't be showing up to my birthday party with big hair and spandex? You never know!

A PROGRAM FOR PEOPLE WHO *DON'T* LIKE TO EXERCISE?

There are many people who will never achieve the expectations that American College of Sports Medicine holds up as Aerobics Law: 30-45 minutes of moderate to vigorous exercise for 3-5 days a week with a 5-10 minute warm-up and a 5-10 minute cool-down. And if you are one of those who just can't do it, I am going ask you to stop feeling guilty. There is another way to get moving that isn't as daunting as those one-size-fits-all recommendations touted by the big health and fitness organizations. It's called "incidental exercise."

Incidental exercise consists of doing things that are much more fun than whatever those grimacing models in the fitness magazine ads are doing (I never could figure out how those sorts of images could sell fitness *anything* to the general public). Incidental exercise can consist of any of a number of daily activities that burn calories. This form of exercise may not make you look like you walked off the cover of Muscle and Fitness magazine – and it may not improve your sports performance – but it will have a positive effect on your cardiovascular health. It may also help you ward off or manage diseases such as diabetes, blood pressure, and cancer.

Some examples of incidental exercise:

- Take the stairs instead of the elevator
- Take a 20- to 30-minute walk during lunch
- Sprinkle several 10-minute physical activity sessions throughout the day
- Park farther away in a parking lot and walk the distance
- Do yard work or garden
- Walk a dog. (If you don't own a dog, there are plenty of needy pals at the Capital Area Humane Society and Ingham County Animal Shelter, or you can find a new fitness partner at www.petfinder.com . Then be sure to view this fun website: www.thedogdiet.com Volunteer for a dog rescue group and take their foster pets for a walk. Try the Animal Placement Bureau: www.apbpets.com)
- Buy a pedometer and strive for 10,000 steps a day
- Do just 10 to 20 minutes of an exercise video (but be sure you warm up first and cool down afterwards – don't just dive in)
- Get up to change the channels on the TV – give up the remote.
- Get up from the computer every hour, then stretch and walk around the room or down the hall a few times.

- I really like this one: Put on wrist weights while you drink beer. I think they are kidding, but this came out of Australia, so who knows?

If you can rack up a few sessions of incidental exercise (shoot for at least 30 minutes a day and build on that), you can stop feeling guilty and enjoy better health.

Ease into Movement with Pilates

If you haven't enjoyed exercise in the past, you may find Pilates appealing, **if performed properly and with good instruction.** (I can guarantee that if you are not an avid exerciser, you will not be a happy camper with an infomercial Pilates tape or most health club Pilates classes.) Call me if you want to discuss how a Pilates-based functional fitness program can improve your ability to perform all of your daily activities with greater ease. Pilates can challenge the most elite athlete, but it can also be structured to get the sedentary person moving safely and enjoyably. People who are sedentary because they have chronic pain or other conditions may find that the Pilates can help them in their daily activities and provide relief from pain (depending on the cause). When people enjoy living in their bodies more and have ease of movement, they are more likely to want to move more. Moving better will help you in many ways. It will give you the energy to try those incidental exercises listed above. It can also help you with any other exercise or fitness goals. And when you feel better, it is easier to sustain the motivation to keep moving.

SOMEBODY CALL A DOCTOR!

How often have you heard a health claim that seem too good to be true? Chocolate is good for you! Drink more red wine! When in doubt, I always "Ask Dr. Weil" (www.drweil.com). He's the friendly, balding, white-bearded doctor you've seen on talk shows. A Harvard-educated physician who is the Founder and Director of the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona, Dr. Weil is a leader in integrative medicine that combines the best of traditional and alternative medical practices. Who better to consult? You can sign up for a paid subscription to his program on Healthy Aging. Or you can sign up for a free daily newsletter and recipes sent to you via email. His site also offers a Question-and-Answer archive that may answer some of your questions or concerns.

QUOTE OF THE SEASON

The "**Pilates Promise**" really exemplifies what functional fitness is all about:

"The attainment and maintenance of a uniformly developed body with a sound mind fully capable of naturally, easily, and satisfactorily performing our many and varied daily tasks with spontaneous zest and pleasure."

Joseph H. Pilates (1880-1967)

A RECIPE FOR PEOPLE WHO *DO* LIKE TO EAT Asian Kale & Bean Soup



This is a simple recipe that is pure magic. I have been known to cook this and eat it for days on end, that's how good it is. Even if you are not a kale fan, I think you will like this soup. Kale is one of the world's healthiest foods and is readily found in the fresh vegetable section of almost any supermarket. If you have an allergy to peanuts, you can try to make this with almond or cashew butter. Cashew butter is a tasty and more healthful replacement for cream in cream soup recipes, too. Use about 1/3 cup of cashew butter and 2/3 cup of water for every cup of cream.

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 small or 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 large or 4 small cloves garlic, minced
- 1/3 cup peanut butter
- 1 quart chicken or vegetable broth (or 2 -15 oz cans)
- 1 – 1.5 tsp Asian chili/garlic paste (the hot red stuff – you can find this in the international section of Meijer's grocery or go to an Asian grocery store)
- 1 bunch kale, about 6 cups or so, washed and torn or cut into bite-size pieces or smaller, stems and hard veins removed
- 1 - 15 oz can garbanzo beans and liquid
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- Cilantro to garnish (optional)

Sauté onion and garlic in olive oil over medium heat for about 3 minutes in a pot large enough to hold all ingredients. Add peanut butter and then slowly add the broth while stirring so that peanut butter dissolves. Add chili/garlic paste, kale, beans (with liquid), and soy sauce. Simmer for 30 minutes and garnish with chopped cilantro, if desired.

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Call for your FREE telephone consultation to discuss how a functional fitness program can enhance your wellness. Don't hesitate!

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