

BY JEFF GOTHARD

A local expert explains how the stay-healthy movement is changing our lives.

FITNESS BOOM(ERS)

Years ago, when many of us were hula-hooping, dancing to that new scourge rock n' roll and wondering what benign adventure awaited The Beaver, the fitness industry was beginning the climb from its evolutionary swamp.

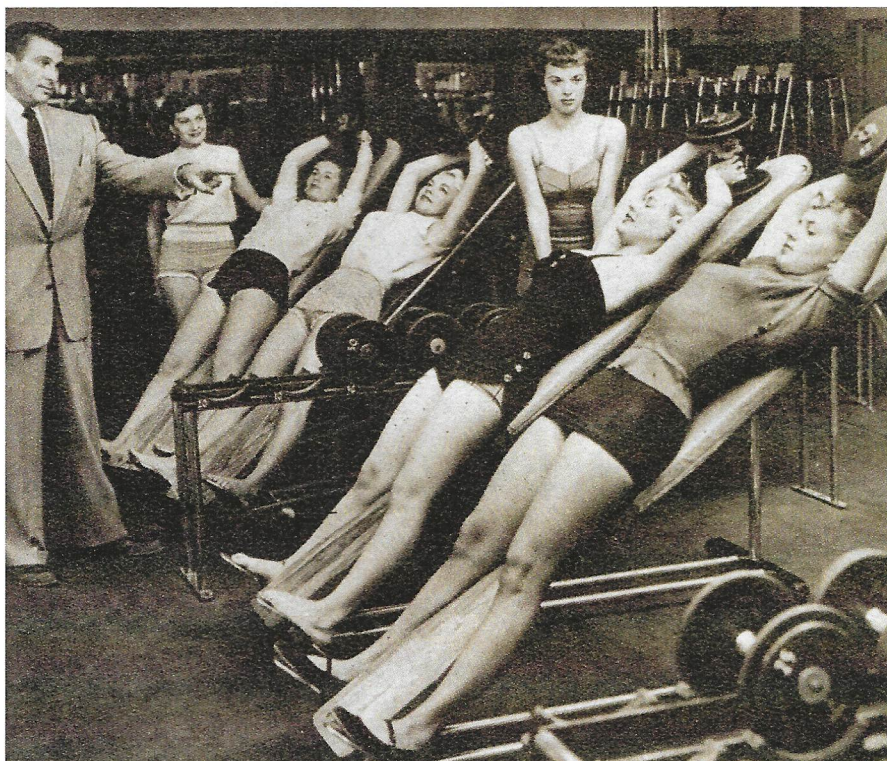
In the 1950's and '60s a teacher named Vic Tanny, with an understanding of the national need for health and socialization, opened dozens of clubs tailored to upper income men. These "spas" boasted gleaming chrome weights, massage, steam rooms, saunas and, early on, passive machines that "broke up" fat. Remember the old vibrating belt machine?

Passivity, however, was not to last.

In the '70s, a generation rebelling against the establishment sought solace within themselves. Those who were tired of the drug scene now chose exercise as their elixir. With help from leaders like Kenneth Cooper, who coined the word "aerobics," and running guru Jim Fixx, the country took to suburban streets in jogging suits and sweat bands. Additionally, a young man with a thick Bavarian accent was brought to America by Joe Weider, a burgeoning fitness magazine publisher. This gap-toothed young man catalyzed a bodybuilding movement ("It's better than sex!") and eventually became known simply as "Arnold." Yes, changes were occurring, and while these pioneers were men, the landscape was ripe for the metamorphosis of the "weaker sex."

"Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live."

- JIM ROHN



Gym King Vic Tanny preps women for Body Beautiful magazine in 1954.

From the 1970s, women became a huge part of the industry's growth and play a pivotal role today in how commercial fitness marketers operate. The women's movement prompted a stronger, more self-reliant female image. This shoed out the former stereotypes of the wafer-thin submissive partner, and soon the sexy ideal of athleticism and muscle tone emerged.

With the help of the female

exerciser, fitness clubs sprouted like dandelions. In 1977, there were 2,700 clubs in the United States. By 2006, that number bulged to nearly 20,000. Today, the fitness club is pervasive and has specialized to meet the myriad demands echoed by a continuously restless public.

So it seems that we have grown together, the Boomer consumer and the fitness movement. The industry has branched out and established

roots in nearly all possible configurations of our need for conformity or individuality. We are bombarded by so many subtle body image imperatives, "ultimate" workout solutions and fast and easy miracle products that our minds reel. So what is real?

The reality lies in simplicity. It involves peeling away layers and getting to the sweetness inside – that sweetness expressed in the way we are made and how our bodies function. We must remember that fitness follows, no matter how you slice it, the human body's need for efficiency and harmony. Finding harmony is the grail, and the sharing of knowledge our round table.

And where better to begin a quest than with the definition of what we seek? Understanding the basics of fitness is essential to making healthy lifestyle decisions down the road.

Fitness can literally be defined in a few categories. They naturally mesh together to create a more productive, efficient, healthier and happier you. What follows is a listing

A young Arnold Schwarzenegger promoted Weider products.

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Kickbox training can be anaerobic and/or aerobic.

and brief description of six general categories.

Cardiovascular Fitness: This refers to the functional capacities of the heart and lungs. The circulatory system transports oxygen to working muscles to create energy and whisk away built-up toxins during exercise. The more conditioned this system, the more efficiently the body can perform, and for longer periods of time.

Aerobic Fitness: This refers to the body's ability to efficiently transport oxygen and utilize the oxygen for energy requirements. The activity typically will be at least 20 minutes in duration. This is also called sustained exercise. Exercise examples would include jogging and cycling.

Anaerobic Fitness: This energy system uses both oxygen and energy stored within muscle cells. The activity is usually short in duration,

with rest periods in between. Exercise such as sprinting and circuit training are included here.

Strength: This is an expression of the maximum work capacity of muscle within time parameters (local muscular endurance), or the maximum force applied during a muscular contraction (maximum strength).

Flexibility: This is a review of a joint's ability to move in a full range of motion. For instance, a hip flexion stretch tests the flexibility of the hip joints via the resistance of the muscles of the hamstrings, gluteus and spinal erectors. Remember that "touch your toes" stretch Coach Meanie made you do at school in gym class?

Body Composition: This, above all others, is what Americans seem to focus on most. Indeed, a majority of fitness enthusiasts focus

almost entirely on this component. Body composition is a measure of the body's muscle mass and skeletal mass vs. body fat percentage. This component, of course, determines how we appear to ourselves and others.

Training for improvement in all these areas is what total fitness is all about. There are, naturally, many benefits to exercise. The Mayo Clinic offers these for starters:

- Weight control.
- Raises HDL, the "good" cholesterol.
- Helps prevent diabetes, depression, arthritis, stroke and falls.
- Improves self-esteem.
- Assists in healthy sleep patterns.
- More energy.
- It can be fun!

The important thing to remember is to train all of these areas whenever possible, particularly if you are a Boomer or older. As we age, we lose muscle mass, which in turn slows down our metabolism. We also tend to lose the flexibility we once had, and without challenging exercise, our heart and lungs may weaken. There is, however, no need to fret.

The clincher is that fitness, just as the Mayo Clinic staff stated, can be a whole lot of fun. Really! Remember that industry we grew up with? Well, it is there for you. For YOU. Don't like fitness clubs? No problem. Training at home has practically infinite possibilities. Don't want to be inside? Great! Get out and enjoy our wonderful weather. All that is required is a will to begin, a fun place to do it, and safe, educated protocol. In future articles, we will discuss in more detail the various facets of fitness, and how, in a beautiful irony, it can serve to be more than just a physical experience. ❁