

## Skip This



Yesterday was a very special day for me. Two things happened.

One, the skipping rope I'd ordered arrived and boy is she a looker: neon blue plastic rope, suppository shaped handles with built in pedometer AND calorie counter; it's the sort of thing Dr. Who would use if he too was suffering from an acute case of mid-twenties-desk-podge. The second thing that happened was the devastating realisation that I cannot, for the life of me or my paunch, skip. Not even a single revolution of the rope, absolutely no hand-eye coordination whatsoever.

The reason I've decided to spend six, thirty second sessions dodging dog poo in the garden is that for the last seven months I've sat at my desk writing my book and living on of a diet cigarettes, tea and Haribo Tangfastic. The worrying thing about my stimulant diet is waking up in the morning (=midday) and reaching not for a Marlboro light but for a little bunch of gelatine cherries. My bed was constantly full of sugar crystals and chewy cola bottles.

Just before Christmas I had the first draft finished and decided to temporarily unlock the shackles fastening me to my battered old desk in an attempt to 'get fit', or more accurately, 'get less likely to die before I'm 30'.

Dad, an ex-Territorial Army man, believes that everything is a product of the mind and can therefore be cured, overcome or punished into submission by a combination of mental willpower and personal masochism. When he came home and noticed my rope hanging from the living room door (I was trying to get the twists out) he looked at me for the first time with sheer paternal pride. Before I had chance to explain that I'd bought the rope because a) I can do it in the garden and therefore avoid all social exercise environments b) it's easy to do (so I thought) and c) it was either that or extreme hopscotch, he was on the living room floor, hands behind his head, knees brought up powering through a series of sit ups "ONE!" HEAVY BREATHING "TWO!"

Back on his feet and refusing to acknowledge his breathing difficulties (he's nearly 58 and has smoked for 52 of them) he ordered me to put my arms by my sides, legs at shoulder width apart and "SQUAT! ONE, SQUAT! TWO, SQUAT! THREE". My heart rate hasn't increased above resting since the ninth grade when every Friday I'd skip P.E. for the excitement of the local chip shop. Next came the leg rises, the midair leg thrusts and the unreachable toe touching. To finish my impromptu training session dad had me put both hands on the fifth step of the stairs and then lower my weight up, down, up, down. I made it to five push ups when the dog decided that each time my nose touched the step he'd lick my face, for encouragement.



After dark I came quietly downstairs with my rope and overheard dad telling mum about the success of today's workout and how he'd have me army fit within weeks. I crept out into the garden, laid the flaccid rope at my feet and turned on the calorie counter. I held each handle outwards at my waist and began skipping, but by the third rotation the rope became tangled. I looked like a disabled hummingbird fighting off a snake. I felt like a fitness failure but at least doing it in the pitch black meant nothing and no-one would be able to witness it, including dad's fatherly pride and skewed sense of my potential physical prowess.