



# FitHapp=ns

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## Confessions of a Fitness Geek

Ok, so I've always been an off-dresser; always a little behind the times or styles; always a little different from my peers. But when it comes to fitness, especially the science of fitness training, I think I take the cake. I admit it - I'm just a fitness geek.

Sure, there are many others in our profession who read up on the latest stuff - diets, fads, equipment, etc. and that makes for good, high-quality trainers, and training. But I go for the hard science. Perhaps a bit arrogantly, I feel that if you know the science behind the diets, fads, and equipment, you can make better choices and provide better advice than simply reading the book, watching the YouTube videos, or scanning the marketing materials. That's not to say there's not merit in doing all of the former. It's just to say, there's a whole lot more to the story than the picture tells you.

Coming back from this year's American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) Annual Meeting in Denver, I couldn't help but be jazzed about what I heard and learned. Not that Denver's not a cool enough place to be anyway, but getting to hear researchers spout off about their or their colleagues' latest findings on such matters as anterior cruciate ligament tears, patellofemoral pain syndrome, or obesity/weight loss/leptin dynamics - well, it don't get much better than that. No kidding! It was really cool. Why? Let me explain.

Patellofemoral pain syndrome - or anterior knee pain - is relatively common among runners and jumping athletes but also among exercisers for health. Sometimes the offending structures can be identified by a doctor or therapist and specific modalities and exercises can be applied to repair the damage or encourage healing. But when it comes to the exercises, there are almost as many prescriptive exercises as there are orthopedists. But getting to hear three doctors of physical therapy who do research on people with bad knees discuss the history of therapeutic exercises and the biomechanics of the various therapeutic exercises and then to promote a specific set of therapeutic exercises - and then to learn that what the trainers at STEPS have been doing is in line with what these guys all said - well, now you know why I think it's soooo cool. Furthermore, to actually know we were somewhat on the forefront of one of these exercises (with acknowledgment to the work of former UT Lady Vols strength coach, Jeff Dahoda) - the flexed hip lunge - gave me a chill - well, maybe just a grin. But it's nice to know the research world is catching up to us here in Nashville.

So, while we are not physical therapists, nor are we a substitute for that profession, we trainers are capable of learning, knowing, and applying proper exercise techniques and progressions that are designed to minimize the risks of injury to our clients. We do so by staying abreast of the science, and staying adaptable. It's why we're called Scientific Training & Exercise Prescription Specialists here at STEPS.



## Bad News Arising

It's easy to keep beating the same ol' drum about weight management in an era of increasing girth, but it's possibly falling on deaf ears, nationally-speaking. A new survey by the International Food Information Council reported that 50% of Americans now consider themselves overweight. Of course, the number is actually closer to 67%. But the bad news is this: last year 57% considered themselves overweight. Did we get thinner or do we now see ourselves as less overweight because there are so many others who are "realllllly" overweight? I don't know.

To make matters worse, from the standpoint of a national agenda to oppose obesity, a full 62% - read: sixty-two percent!!! - say their diet is extremely or somewhat healthy, UP from 53%. How is this possible?

A hypothesis: people see themselves eating healthier because they are choosing less unhealthy foods. Sounds reasonable. But, as another article in the same newsletter points out, just because a food is labeled "natural" or "organic" does not make it healthier. Studies have shown that subjects, blinded to the actual label but presented with cookies, chips, and yogurt labeled "organic" or "regular" invariably attribute better taste to those labeled "organic". They also tended to guess that such labeled foods were *lower in calories*.

So, it is easy to see how this happens: as we buy organic or natural foods on the assumption they are tastier, healthier, and lower in calories, we stay fat or keep getting fatter while telling ourselves we're living healthier.

Now if only the physiological benefits of self-deception were as good as the psychological ones, we'd be a much healthier nation.

-- Tufts Health & Nutrition Letter, July 2011



## Report Card

America, there's even more of us to love - with dire consequences for the nation's health. The 8th annual "F As in Fat" report from the Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation says that in the past year, **obesity rates rose in 16 states and fell in none**. Led by Mississippi at 34.4%, 12 states now have obesity rates of 30% or more, according to the report; as recently as 4 years ago, only 1 state topped the 30% mark. Unlike Americans' waistlines, the number of states where fewer than a quarter of adults are obese continues to shrink, down from 19 states 3 years ago to 11 states and DC today. Only Colorado, at 19%, remains below a 20% obesity rate. This was the first "F As in Fat" report to examine how the obesity epidemic has grown over the past two decades. Jeff Levi, PhD, executive director of the Trust for America's Health, noted, "Today, the state with the lowest obesity rate would have had the highest rate in 1995. There was a clear tipping point in our national weight gain over the last 20 years." -- *Tufts Online Nutrition Newsletter*

## Hold Your Water

Summer is going full tilt, and we're experiencing record high temperatures. Most of us know by now how important it is to stay hydrated. We've also all heard the 8 glasses of water a day rule. But who came up with the amount, and is there any validity to it? Dr. Margaret McCartney, MD, one of the authors of a new scientific review states in the *British Medical Journal* that there is no clear evidence to support that particular level of hydration. Studies funded by the bottled water industry are, unsurprisingly, typically flawed and biased in favor of higher levels of water intake. The US Institute of Medicine says thirst should be your guide to adequate hydration, adding that water need not be your only source of fluids: Liquids in foods count, as do coffee, tea, milk, soda and juice. Dr. McCartney's advice in the face of advertisers telling us how much water we should drink: "We should just say no". -- *Tufts Online Nutrition Newsletter*

## Boot Camps for Kids Get the Boot

For overweight or obese kids, boot camps (or "fat camps") are not the answer, according to Deborah J. Rhea, associate professor at Texas Christian University. Compared to Physical Education classes, increasingly disappearing from U.S. school curriculums, boot camps are too short and offer no tools for educating kids about proper nutrition. Rhea says, "Many of these camps are designed to get kids in shape in a 6-10 week period, but they are short-term fixes, just like diets." Instead, she advocates longer-duration exercise interventions that give kids a variety of choices for physical activity, as well as information about how brain power, and therefore grades, improve with exercise.

-- *IDEA Fitness Journal, July-August 2010*

## Good Friends Departed

This has been a very difficult year for those of us who not only train our clients but become emotionally attached to them, their well-being, and their families. As trainers, we are given profound opportunities to learn from our clients about all matters of life, including life itself.



Earlier this summer, Elaine McWilliams finally succumbed to the ravages of cancer. After a multi-year struggle to manage what she knew to be an incurable form of cancer with tri-weekly treatments, and getting to see her youngest son graduate MBA and soon head off to college, she gently left us. Rarely does one get to see such courage in the face of what another knows will be the death of her. But I had plenty of opportunities to watch and listen to her as this process unfolded, while she worked out to restore strength and balance that had been depleted from the treatments she's endured so long. Elaine left with grace and with strength, leaving the rest of us off balance. Ironic – but she already possessed what she came to STEPS for. Now it's her friends and family who will have to get what she already had.



Then, one of Nashville's grand ol' dames, Betty Brown, passed away after a decade's bout with Parkinson's. Betty has been one of Nashville's quietist but most forceful humanitarians, philanthropists, and environmentalists for decades and, as the Scene's tribute to her exclaimed, she left Nashville "a greener place". I had the pleasure to train Betty for several years, until the disease put her at too great a risk for falling. I can honestly say that her kindness flowed thoroughly in every word and deed well below the surface of what her many positions and public actions might declare to the community at large. I saw it live – like the time, right before I took my middle school-age daughters to Paris for a Spring break and she gave each of them a wad of cash to spend on themselves. Betty knew them through our many hours of training, had met them a few times here at the gym, and treated them like they were her own kin. Much as she treated all her friends; much as she treated the community at large. It was said, and written, that her last words were: "Aren't we lucky?" What cannot be said often enough, quietly and loudly, is how lucky we are that Betty walked the hills of Tennessee - quietly, but with intent to make them even more beautiful.



Finally, Anita Davis, with whom Chuck Neff has been training for many moons, lost her battle with cancer in mid-July. Anita – or 'Nita – came in to train when most others would have stayed home: with no hair, with chemo-packs draped over her shoulders, with all kinds of medically-induced bruises....and with an ever-ready smile, subtle but authentic, and a willingness to share but not complain about her situation to those who were willing to listen. Those who dared to watch the process unfold witnessed the gradual but steady decline in the spring in her step, the shuffle gradually taking over, and the fading light from someone who otherwise shined. Then they had a choice: they could feel pity, or feel shame. Shame, not because she deserved any such misattribute. Rather, shame because who would dare complain about being in the gym working out hard in the presence of one such as 'Nita? Who could? No one!

Elaine, Betty, and Anita. These three beautiful ladies demonstrated – no, they still demonstrate – what no fitness trainer or fitness training can ever yield. Despite our claims to help build strength, endurance, balance and agility, let us watch the lives and the deaths of these women to see what strength, endurance, balance and agility really are: the means by which some people walk the earth without pushing, without demanding, without forcing themselves onto it. Rather, they walk the earth gently, gracefully, and proudly, like Zen masters, leaving the rest of us to wonder, and take joy in having had the opportunity to know them, even if for just a few hours a week.