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What Is In Shape?

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I sat apprehensively on the foam floor mats of the group fitness classroom. Those first day jitters swirled in my stomach as I waited for the instructor. My friends had persuaded me to give fitness classes a try. “The teachers are just such great motivation,” they promised. A thirtysomething, rather large woman entered the room, bulging bags in tow, with a take-charge look on her face. “That lady definitely needs a good workout,” I remember thinking, smugly. But when she took her place at the front of the room, it suddenly became clear—she was the instructor.

Motivation? How could anyone carrying thirty-five extra pounds teach me anything about fitness? Expectations obliterated, I obligingly approached the kickboxing bag, already planning to go for a run later to make up for the impending lackluster workout. Exhaustion. I trudged out of the classroom with gelatinous legs and trembling arms. I collapsed into a chair and watched in utter amazement as the instructor bounced out of the gym on her cell phone, talking and laughing energetically.

Needless to say, my snap judgment was an insult to the reality of my instructor’s abilities. I couldn’t help but wonder how fitness or health could be equated with fatness—and how anyone knows if they’re physically fit.
THE QUEST FOR A TEST

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is important for overall personal health. But how does an Average Joe go about achieving these lofty aspirations? "Take control," the CDC says. "The first step is to determine whether or not your current weight is healthy. BMI – Body Mass Index is one way to measure your weight."

The CDC website directed me to a BMI calculator, where I entered my height and weight. I clicked "calculate," and sat in my desk chair with bated breath. My result: "Normal." Relief. The index is divided in categories – underweight, normal, overweight, and obese – calculated from a fairly simple formula developed in 1835 by a Belgian statistician.

The CDC and many doctors continue to use BMI as an indicator for the general public to assess itself with. "There are three reasons why [BMI has] kind of taken over," says Rose Martin, senior lecturer of food science and human nutrition. "It's easy. Cheap, easy, quick. It doesn't have the same baggage weight does. And there's one system, only one scale for all adults, men and women. ... I don't think it'll go away any time soon."

However, while BMI may be time and cost effective, it isn't the most accurate test. "[BMI] is merely a measure of your weight relative to your height – it's not a measure of fitness," says Gregory Welk, associate professor of kinesiology and director clinical research and community outreach. "When people measure BMI they're just looking at 'is their weight right?' But that's a pretty poor indicator of health because you can be very active and very fit and still be overweight. Research shows it's more important to be active and fit than what your weight is."

Strikeout. My ten-second solution had been derailed. I was back to the drawing board, but with refreshed thoughts. "If you want a better predictor for health problems, it's probably waist circumference. Over thirty-five inches for women and over forty inches for men is not good," Martin says. I grabbed the nearest tape measure and noted the number. Feeling reassured, I reminded myself that this number alluded only to higher risk of health problems, not overall healthiness or fitness.

Nora Hudson, fitness program coordinator for Recreation Services, says that fitness is far more than any number can explain. "We have to not look for an absolute answer and really look at the whole picture. 'Am I able to feel like I have energy to get through the day?' It's about holistic wellness." I'll admit it – I initially wanted an "absolute answer" to my fitness question. But, alas, our bodies simply cannot be judged by any one simple test. Welk, Martin, and Hudson stress a different concept – fitness is the product of a healthy lifestyle.
**X + Y = HEALTHY LIFESTYLE?**

Get 150 minutes of moderate activity per week
OR ........................................
Get 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week
Aim for at least 30 minutes every day
Integrate some strength training each week.

"The most important thing," Welk says, "is to take responsibility for your own health." And Hudson agrees, "We need to look at how we’re functioning in our body versus just the body itself – not get locked in the need for assessments to give us a certain grade." There it ended. No test, measurement, or ratio could single-handedly assess my fitness level. I needed to refocus my lifestyle on personal health and wellness, accented with everyday exercise and realistic goal setting.

"Students often come up to me with a goal – a weight or body fat percent goal. Unfortunately, we don’t have a lot of control over that," Martin says. "But we have control and can quickly say, ‘Did I go walking five times this week?’" Setting a goal, not quantitative, but rather exercise-oriented, became apparently important. But, Martin warns, "Do what you can keep up, and do what you like." And rather than get into a running rut, Hudson suggests changing your workouts. "Do a variety of exercises," she says. "If you get into one pattern, then you go try something else, you realize that you don’t have those skills and strengths.”

Hudson recommends trying yoga for its many benefits. "It challenges you to be 100 percent present … so it manages stress and calms the nervous system.”

Thinking about health as a way of life was a new concept. Instead of jumping on a scale and frantically gasping for air over a three-pound jump wasn’t the point. A healthy lifestyle, then, had to be what its name suggested – a lifestyle. "The main goal is to be physically active; whether you have fitness or not isn’t as important as the behaviors. It’s a process, and the product follows." Welk outlines the United States’ physical activity guidelines:

1. Get 150 minutes of moderate activity per week.
2. Get 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week.
3. Aim for at least 30 minutes every day.
4. Integrate some strength training each week.

**HOW TO GO TO THE GYM**

- Girls, pull yo hair back.
- Guys, stop grunting. No one wants to hear the sound you make when you sit on a toilet while they lift.
- Don’t pretend to stretch just to show off your body/lash.
- Spray the machines down, we don’t want your nastiness.
- Jeans and khakis are not appropriate attire.
- Share the equipment, looking like the Hulkin doesn’t automatically have privileges. And if you’re not using it right now, don’t sit there watching ESPN, someone is probably waiting on you.
- Like when you are on CyRide, your music should only be heard by you.
- We noticed old dudes tend to want to go fully nude in the locker rooms for unnecessary amounts of time. But cover up. You can shower, but wear a towel when you’re by the lockers.
- Don’t spit, anywhere.
- Don’t clog the water fountain with your supplements.
- For a break, take off your headphones and listen to the sexually frustrated guys compliment each other. "Your ass gettin’ tight, bro." "’No, yours is legit! More GNC pills?"
- Change your shoes when you get there, we don’t want to use an elliptical covered in mud.
- You will not meet a lady/guy friend here, accept that up front.
- Don’t check yourself out in the mirrors, look when you get home.
- Get some protein when you get home.
- If you’re drinking a bottle of pop, you’re wasting your time being here.
- Do stare at beautiful women. (WOMEN RESPONDING EVERYWHERE: NO, STOP LOOKING AT MY ASS!!)
But the question still remains: How can my kickass kickboxing instructor uphold the seemingly contradictory label “fit and fat”? I’ve shown a video in some of my classes that shows the image of a man – he’s obese, obese by anyone’s standards. But he does triathlons,” Martin says, providing another example of fitness alongside fatness. “It’s all about genetics – the right parents,” she says. “Our body is so internally regulated that the issue of being fit and fat does arise.” Welk agrees, highlighting the fact that being both fit and overweight is possible, though there are still risks associated with the excess weight. “Fitness and activity level provide protection against the health risks, though. So if you’re overweight but active, you’re at a lower risk of health problems than if you’re normal weight and inactive,” Welk says.

Steven Blair, Iowa State’s Hilton Endowed Chair and a professor of exercise science at the University of South Carolina has dedicated much of his research toward the fit and fat phenomenon. “You can be overweight and healthy,” he says. “It makes no difference if you gain or lose weight on the mortality rate scale, but an increase or decrease in fitness does affect mortality rates.”

It begins and ends with activity. Fitness, the product of physical activity, is directly proportional to activity itself, no matter our body’s ratio of fat to muscle. “You want your body to have optimal operation,” Hudson explains. “There is no endpoint to wellness.”

My attempt to assess my fitness level came to a crossroads. And rather than choose to continue searching for a “healthy grade,” I am choosing to heed the advice that initially seemed so confusing. Rather than waste time trying to label my fitness, I’m going to spend my time constructively—running, swimming, kickboxing, even some yoga.

Now, taped above my desk, is my new stay-healthy mantra, courtesy of Welk: “Fitness: Use it or lose it.”
Know where to get your protein!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Calories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hamburger</td>
<td>6 Ounces</td>
<td>48 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken</td>
<td>6 Ounces</td>
<td>43 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>6 Ounces</td>
<td>42 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg</td>
<td>One Large</td>
<td>06 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottage Cheese</td>
<td>1/2 Cup</td>
<td>14 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheddar Cheese</td>
<td>1 Ounce</td>
<td>06 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofu</td>
<td>1/2 Cup</td>
<td>10 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lentils</td>
<td>1/2 Cup</td>
<td>09 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut Butter</td>
<td>2 Tbsp.</td>
<td>08 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>1/2 Cup</td>
<td>02 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice or Pasta</td>
<td>1/2 Cup</td>
<td>02 g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almonds</td>
<td>1 Ounce</td>
<td>06 g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Know where to get your protein!

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Pre-workout: If you are an active, somewhat fit person that is looking to lose a few pounds, according to Shapefit.com, it is best drink a protein shake or two egg whites before a workout to give energy and obtain fatty acids that are needed for energy, but are not carbohydrates that blow you up. If you are hesitant to down a liquid drink before an intense workout, choose the egg option.

Post-workout: After a workout is the time to intake the good kind of carbs and protein. Again, you can settle for a protein shake that contains fruits or peanut butter or choose healthful options such as lean hamburger and green vegetables. Throw these foods in your diet that help boost metabolism and burn more calories just by eating up nature’s fruits and veggies.

Now you can celebrate eating “fatty” foods that help eliminate cellulite and actually help you lose weight. Who would have thought? Make sure to incorporate these snacks into your diet to fill you up after working out, or as a daily snack.

Know where to get your protein!
As temperatures start to rise and we take off our layers of clothing, you might be regretting all of that comforting but unhealthy food you ate over the winter. It’s true, now is the time many people are hastily getting ready for swimsuit season. But do you have to nibble at salads and spend all day at the gym like The Situation to get decent abs? If that works for you then go right ahead, but here are some less extreme tips for the rest of us, courtesy of webmd.com.

WORKOUT TIPS TO GET THAT SWIMSUIT BOD

By NICOLE GUSTAFSON

Have trouble sticking with an exercise plan long term? Try dragging some friends along with you. When you don’t feel like getting out of bed to go work out one day, your friends will be there to hold you accountable. If you like competition, you can even make a bet over which person in the group will lose the most weight.

Start slowly. When you first walk into a gym, you’ll see a lot of fit people, and it’s easy for a beginner to get intimidated. But if you’re just starting, worry about impressing people later or you could get hurt. The person lifting next to you is ripped, so what? Start out with a slow jog or lighter weights until you’re ready for a bigger challenge. If you end up extremely sore, don’t be afraid to back off a little.

You don’t have to run or bike. If you choose forms of exercise that you enjoy, you’ll be less likely to hate your life the whole time. If you don’t know what you like, try anything and everything.

It takes a minimum of thirty minutes per day, done most days of the week, for you to receive health benefits. This is perfectly reasonable for any college student. How much time each day do you spend on Facebook? Probably more than thirty minutes. Instead of creeping on other people’s pictures, get out and do something for yourself.

Set a concrete goal for yourself, but make sure it’s realistic. Don’t just work out with the hopes of “looking good.” Go online, ask a fitness trainer, or talk to a more athletically inclined friend about what might be a good personalized goal for you. Just don’t expect to go from looking like Jack Black to Matthew McConaughey in two weeks.

Don’t forget to stretch and warm up. Both are important because they get your body ready to exercise and prevent injury. A good warm-up would be a slow jog that gets your blood flowing without making you run out of breath.

Like these tips and want more? There are many more articles on how to improve your fitness at www.webmd.com/fitness-exercise/default.htm.

You’ve heard it a million times, but diet and exercise really is the best way to lose weight or get in shape. Fortunately for the less dedicated (or more lazy, however you like to think of it), you won’t need to starve yourself or live at the rec center to be ready for summer in no time.