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Why Are You Running When You Haven't Learned to Walk?

By Nancy L. Jerominski

Every day I see them...the committed fitness buffs out jogging to keep their bodies lean and their cardiovascular systems running at peak potential. Obviously, they're getting that all important 90 minutes daily of cardio "they" insist is for our own good.

So why is it that most of them appear to be in exquisite agony? I don't have to be near them to know that their footfalls slap the surface they're running on even though I'm in my car with the windows rolled up.

They plod along with lolling transverse abdominals, hyper-extended or hyper-flexed low backs, side-to-side-shifting on varus femurs with duck feet and thrusting heads leading the way down their selected path.

"Why are you running when you haven't learned to walk?" I mutter at the miserable looking "healthy" person. I fight the urge to stop my car and give them a tip or two along with my card to stop the madness.

Doing that just makes them cross, I've discovered. I drive on.

Most trainers and exercise buffs teach/get validation from their reflection. Everyone wants a "six pack" to punctuate the mirror muscles they spend endless hours in the gym pursuing. The usual result is a pretty exterior housing a highly dysfunctional movement package.

Too much training of these "pretty-me" muscles (which are flexors of the skeletal system) can lead to chronic injuries, pain and internal organs literally collapsing on themselves, impairing their function.

Paul Chek maintains "training, not draining" our bodies. He is fond of saying that "pain is your body's idiot light. That means stop, not push through it to get stronger."

After nearly 30 years of being around the more-is-better fitness fanaticism, I find I enthusiastically agree and my 53 year old body is proof of it.

Why the experts continue to recommend 90 minutes of cardio-based exercise daily without considering what happens to a body on sub-par fake food, inadequate clean



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sources of fat and protein, hours of training and go-go-go lifestyles stumps me and other holistic conditioning coaches.

Aerobic exercise is high density (not synonymous with intensity) movement that mostly uses slow twitch muscle fibers and can bring on buckets of sweat. The more you sweat, the harder you're working, the fitter you are, right?

Not necessarily.

Being fit doesn't guarantee wellness. Hard core training is catabolic. It stimulates the sympathetic nervous system, which releases glucocorticoids (i.e. cortisol) and actually promotes the storage of fat. Eating foods our bodies don't recognize to utilize can cause cravings and inflammation.

Overconsumption of carbohydrates, whether or not they are simple, complex, conventional or organic prompt the pancreas to release insulin to clear the blood of the excess carbs the body can't use. Insulin's only job is to make and store fat.

Whenever insulin goes up, cortisol and estrogen do too. The more estrogen dominant you are, the harder it is to lose fat.

These are three powerful hormones that we simply don't want too much of in our bodies.

When fitness enthusiasts and their trainers are stumped by a client's inability to lose fat, the immediate tactic is to cut calories and increase the levels of cardiovascular exercise. To their collective dismay, more fat is layered on. So more calories are slashed, aerobic exercise is increased, but fat stubbornly stays.

The message being sent to the body is that it's in a crisis state of starvation coupled with increased activity.

"I'm dying!" is what the cell collective is trying to tell the brain of these misinformed, misled bodies. "Stop running around, feed me plenty of nutritious calories that contain the fats and amino acids I need for protein synthesis, drink pure water and REST!"

We are still ancient survival machines; this caloric restriction with too much exercise is telling the body to eat the muscle and store the fat for survival.

And we simply aren't listening.



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Not only are we turning a deaf ear to the wisdom within our cells, in the ridiculous quest for ripped rectus abdominus, bulging biceps, chiseled chests and flashy flanks, we have forgotten what happens when the flexors of the spine are over-trained to obtain that look.

With each and every step during an hour long run, for instance, 7 to 10 times our body weight is jarred through every single joint in our bodies. That's OK if all systems are operating optimally on an upright, functional spine.

I weigh 160 pounds at 21% body fat. I have a high performing inner unit in spite of 3 ruptured discs and a spine thickened with arthritis (which, by the way hardly inconveniences me because I don't follow popular protocol to be "fit").

Let's do the math: 10×160 (me) = 1600 (total pounds of force).

That's 1600 pounds each time my foot strikes during a jog or an aerobics class.

If my head is pulled forward from an overtrained and shortened rectus abdominus and my pectorals are tight from too many bench presses, the extensors of my spine will be long and loose. My entire spine is being jarred forward or behind of where it's supposed to be.

For every degree forward from optimal alignment my head is, its weight increases by 10 pounds.

My typical 15-20 pound head becomes a whopping 55 to 80 dead weight with just 4 degrees forward of optimal carriage!

If I haven't been taught to use my multifidus, pelvic floor and transverse abdominal muscles in concert with each other and my hip flexors are tight from all the running I've been told is good for me, my low back is pulled into hyper-lordosis.

Perhaps my hamstrings are tight because I don't like to do the flexibility part of the wellness equation. They may well be taut and don't need stretching at all, but strengthening.

If they're tight, my lumbar spine is also being flexed. If they're taut, my lumbar spine may be too extended.



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Sometimes one side of the lumbar spine is sports an anterior tilt while the other side is pulled posteriorly. The pelvis is also often rotated as well. Women usually have little or no glute development and often run with a side-to- side shift or swing.

Is it any wonder orthopedic surgeons are seeing us in record numbers?

There is stress on the spine when walking, but not nearly as much. You can still incur chronic injuries from walking with a crooked spine, so beware. Going out and walking for 90 minutes when you haven't done anything more than channel surf will put you right back on that couch.

As fitness professionals and trainers, it is our responsibility to do at least rudimentary postural, range of motion and movement assessments. If we're not qualified to do this, we owe it to our clients to refer them out. Otherwise, the gym can become as dangerous a place as being in a pharmacy and picking a pill because it's a pretty color.

"If you're not assessing, you're only guessing" is another Paul Chek mantra.

Give your body the material it needs from nutritionally dense food so it can replace the millions of cells that die every second. You truly are what you eat.

Hydrate with pure clean water. When you're eating and hydrating correctly, your brain works better and you'll be able to hear the wisdom there within the cells.

Learn to walk before you run and your spine will take you effortlessly into your twilight years. I plan to ambulate briskly to my grave.

How about you?