



Let's Get Physical, or Else... Learning to Embrace Physical Fitness

By: Ellen D. Hosafros

My doctor recited the words that anyone of a certain age, condition and poundage dreads hearing: "You need to exercise and lose weight."

"Give me a break, doc. I'm fine," I replied while trying to sit up on the exam table. Frankly, I couldn't move; I was stuck like a tipped cow.

Doc offered his hand and yanked me up.

**"42% of American adults are obese," the doctor said.
"Including you."¹**

"I don't have a weight problem," I replied. "I have underactive glands."

Doc rolled his eyes. "I don't know about your glands but you certainly are underactive. I suggest that you get off the sofa and go for a walk, or join a gym."

While I dressed behind the privacy curtain, Doc rattled off the benefits of exercise—cholesterol, weight and diabetes management. I tuned him out because I was lost in the memory of an exercise class I had joined a few years earlier. It didn't go well.

I remembered rooting in the back of my closet for something to exercise in and finding a terry cloth headband, a ratty sweatshirt and pale pink tights that were new when Olivia Newton-John released her hit song, "Let's Get Physical." Using a crowbar and a can of Crisco, I wedged myself in the tights, pulled the sweatshirt down to cover my 30-year-old post-pregnancy bulge, and snapped on the headband.

I arrived at the gym for a guided tour from perky Amber with thighs skinny enough to floss with. It's fair to say my thighs resembled twin MetLife blimps. Amber led me past treadmills, stationary bikes and mats for floor exercises. Neckless men and women with tree-trunk arms and legs grunted at a bank of weight machines. One of them, a female who could bench-press a Mini Cooper, smirked at my pink tights as I jiggled by.

My tour concluded at a large studio. "Because you're dressed for dancing, you might like this," Amber chirped. "It's an aerobics class with Latin-style music." She stared at my tights. "Um, what was that sound?"

"I'm fasting and my stomach's growling," I said. In truth, my tights were emitting a noise like the grinding of tectonic plates. I eased into the studio and moved to center front row, sliding in next to a man wearing, I kid you not, red Speedo swim trunks.

The dance instructor took her place in front of Speedo Boy and me. I recognized her as the neckless woman at the exercise machines who'd smirked at my tights. She introduced herself as Petal. According to her tattoos, she owned a Harley and no one dared to tread on her country.

Latin music erupted with a shriek. "Get ready to sal-sahhh," Petal screamed, scaring Speedo Boy who took a couple paces backward. I held my ground though not from courage; I was afraid to move because the waistband of my tights was starting to separate from everything else.

Petal and the other people moved to the music with the precision of goose-stepping parade marchers. Meanwhile, Speedo Boy and I imitated convulsing zombies. After a few years, the song ended. I tiptoed to the door, which caused my tights to creak and moan like rusted iron girders on an old suspension bridge. I heard a grunt behind me and felt something snag the end of my sweatshirt. With a jerk, Petal pulled me back into the room.

"You ain't exercised until you've sweated your guts out," she snarled.

Another song blasted with a tempo twice as fast as the first one. With Petal watching me like a prison guard, I tried to keep up with everyone else. So did Speedo Boy, whose face turned as red as his swim trunks. Petal was watching him too.

"Sweat, sweat, sweat," she yelled. "Tuck those butts! Swivel those hips. Kick, kick, kick! Now bend over and slap your knees!"

I hadn't seen my knees in years but was aware they existed because they made me scream with

pain when I walked farther than a city block. I slapped at my thighs instead. The movement jarred my Olivia Newton-John headband and it fell over my eyes. I slapped again and, unfortunately, connected with Petal's leg. I knew it was her leg because it was the density of a steel beam, making my palm vibrate like a tuning fork.

She actually growled.

With the headband covering my eyes, I ran toward what I thought was the exit. As I stumbled away, I tripped over something squishy that smelled like a moldy mattress and stale beer and realized I'd trampolined Speedo Boy who was sprawled on the floor.

I yanked off the headband and flung it. It landed on Petal's extended hand, the one reaching to crush my face. As I made my escape, my tights unraveled with a hiss and a violent snap, leaving only the waistband, the feet and a 30-foot vestigial tail of pink nylon thread.

The other exercisers jeered as if I were the losing player in the Hunger Games. Everyone yelled, "Kill her, kill her," even the supine Speedo Boy.

Petal snorted and bore down on me. Her hand reached for my shoulder and I felt my bones splinter as I....

...woke up to hear Doc babbling from the other side of the privacy curtain in the exam room. Apparently I had dozed off while tying my sneakers.

"The days of treating people only after they get sick are over," Doc continued. "It's your responsibility to take your health into your own hands." He paused. "Are you listening?"

My sigh of exasperation billowed the privacy curtain. “I heard you, doc. I’ll start exercising, I promise.”

“Great,” he said. “I hear there’s an aerobics dance class with Latin music at the YMCA. You might want to give it a try.”

The reality of this story is that in 2010, Ellen Hosafros took the advice of her doctor and lost 60 pounds. She joined a local gym and continues to walk 10,000 steps per day.

¹ [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), “Prevalence of Obesity and Severe Obesity among Adults: United States, 2017–2018”

MORE RESOURCES:

[Infographic: 7 Reasons to Exercise with a Workout Buddy](#)

[Stroke and Heart Attack: Real Threats Impacting Younger Adults](#)