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Mastering True Fitness in 2008

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Total Body Fitness

Is fitness on your list of goals for 2008? It is for Dinchen Jardine, a Navy ensign enrolled in medical school in Bethesda, Md., and a mother of three. An avid runner who has participated in marathons all over the world, she only considers herself fit when she can train for marathons — something she has had to put on hold due to an injury early last year.

“[My fitness goal is to] be in shape to run a spring and fall marathon and qualify for the Boston marathon,” Jardine said.

But fitness is not only about a running, or even just running. More and more fitness experts are expanding the definition of true fitness.

“We are not locked into a single area of fitness anymore, because we now have defined different arenas of fitness,” said Dr. Janet Brill, registered dietitian and fitness expert as well as author of “Cholesterol DOWN.”

Jardine’s goal to run a marathon only fits in one of these arenas — sport fitness, or how your body performs. Other areas of true fitness are health fitness (the state of your body) and emotional fitness (your state of mind).

Cholesterol, blood pressure and all that stuff — the fitness of your body

You’ve heard it all before: Talk to your doctor before beginning an exercise or fitness regimen. If you’ve never bothered to do this, do it just to take stock of the state of the inside of your body — heart rate, cholesterol and blood pressure — so you know what needs fixing.

Brills suggests the following health goals:

- Reduce high blood pressure or hypertension;
- Make sure your blood sugar is within reasonable levels;
- Reduce high blood cholesterol; and
- Aim for a healthy weight if overweight, especially around the middle.

Entire Body Fitness

Sport fitness: How many sit ups and push ups can you do?

Most women think of sport fitness when they think of their fitness goals. Jay Grattan, former Marine Corps JAG who lives with her husband and two children in Richmond, Va., considers herself reasonably fit but wants to get back to the gym.

"If I hit the gym at least three days a week for both cardio and strength training, I will get in the kind of shape I desire," Grattan said.

She's right. Most of us know what we have to do to keep fit. For those of us who don't, the newly updated guidelines to basic physical activity put forward by the American Heart Association and American College of Sports Medicine is a good place to aim. The new guidelines recommend moderate intense cardio 30 minutes a day, five days a week; or vigorously intense cardio 20 minutes a day, three days a week; and eight to 10 strength-training exercises, eight to 12 repetitions of each exercise twice a week. These guidelines should be a starting point for your physical fitness goals.

Once you attain these goals, or if you are already there, Brill suggests trying the Army Physical Fitness Test for an idea of how you fare in cardio respiratory fitness, muscular health and endurance. Check out the Army Physical Fitness Test Web site, <http://www.army.com/enlist/APFT.html>, and see where you come up for sit-ups, push-ups and a two-mile run for women in your age bracket. What you come up short in is what you work on. If you come out fine, aim for a perfect score!

Emotional fitness — rock out to your favorite music

Christa Delgado, married to a Marine based in Tampa, Fla., would like to take more time for herself in 2008. The mother of three says she is thin but not fit and would like to get to the gym. Her biggest challenge is finding time for herself.

Delgado's goal is an essential one for true fitness, said Lisa Johnson, a certified Pilates and physical fitness trainer and owner of her own studio in Brookline, Mass. She believes that "rest time," or time for yourself, is part of a program of true fitness that also includes stretching, cardio and strength training.

" 'Rest time' is taking a mental break of some sort each day ... rocking out to your favorite music, reading a book or meditation. Whatever lets you escape from your to-do list and feel like yourself again," Johnson said.

This approach to "rest time" for fitness, is reflected in the top 20 world fitness trends, a list compiled by the American College of Sports Medicine. Yoga, Pilates and tai-chi, gained double-digit increases in participation in 2007, according to the ACSM Web site.