

A Pushover for Push-Ups

By Faith R. Foyil



I learned how to do "guy" push-ups last year, not to be confused with the "female" variety where your knees are on the ground and you look more like you're hunting for a lost earring post than firming up your arm muscles. Even though I was proud of my fitness achievement, I was frankly surprised to learn it was such a big deal to humanity in general.

Around the very same time I was perfecting my forearm technique, international scientists discovered a 360 million-year-old fossil of a Pennsylvania fish or amphibian that, they said, could coincidentally also raise itself up into a push-up position. This action, they determined, actually held the key to the evolution of mankind! This was no small feat for an out of shape fish creature. The new movement apparently helped pave the way for future vertebrates to travel from the sea and onto treadmills and elliptical machines in health clubs across the universe.

It's not like the little fish creature or I were total pond potatoes before doing push-ups. We simply didn't concentrate on strengthening our upper bodies. I don't know about the fish creature's exercise buddies, but mine used to include fellow "stay-at-home moms" to whom burpees were reactions elicited from infant during two a.m. feedings. We kept busy lifting crying babies, carrying grocery bags full of heavy cans of formula, moving playpens around and bending over backwards to keep harmony in the home.

Our overall cardiovascular workouts consisted of pushing kids in strollers around the neighborhood perimeter. These group walks definitely strengthened our resolve during chicken pox outbreaks and lifted our spirits after long teething nights and napless days. On hot afternoons we might run after toddlers around the swimming pool. This didn't necessarily lower our blood pressure but helped ele-

vate our moods while playing in the refreshing water with our precious, but precocious, one-arm-banded bandits.

A burgeoning legion of media tried to persuade us to expand the limited cardiovascular activity into weight training. But even as our kids grew older it was easy to neglect triceps and biceps and concentrate on tricycles and bicycles. At this stage in parenting isolating meant putting a child in "time out" because she hit her sibling. Repetition referred to watching the same Rugrat video four times in one week, and extensions were dream plans for our houses, a definite stretch - but of the imagination, not our muscles. As far as any "BM Index"...

When both of my kids entered school and my part-time marketing job allowed more "me-time", I had no excuse not to try some new forms of exercise. And I did, with weights and then those tough push-ups, just like my buddy the 360 million-year-old fish creature. It's been fun perfecting push-ups and adding other exercises. It's positively exhilarating racing eighteen-year-olds up the gym stairs to claim the last available set of five-pound free weights. I can even work up a good sweat after my workout while diving through my loaded duffel bag looking for car keys.

These days my fitness vocabulary is finally expanding faster than my waistline. I know that triceps "kick-backs" have nothing to do with illicit funds, that a bicep curl isn't some kind of unisex hairstyle and hip abductions are effective leg lifts, not some bizarre form of body part snatching.

I've always maintained you have to look at life with a good sense of humor which also helps when looking in the gym mirror after a week's vacation in Florida spent exercising nothing but my molars. And here's another uncanny coincidence: It's the humerus bone that was noted as the key to the fish creature's success. The creature's newly evolved humerus was thickly muscled. However, it lacked sufficient movement to allow the creature to walk. This, again, is amazingly not unlike my own legs after three killer sets of lifts, kickbacks or lunges.

These days when somebody performs a squat in front of me, I no longer think of running to grab a diaper. But I hope that my children, both boys, will appreciate just how important exercise is for mankind and womankind like their mom, who needs their help around the house in order to allow free time for us all to keep happy, healthy and fit. If my muscles grow strong enough to beat my eleven year-old in arm wrestling, or my gluteus maximus decides to shrink to a more svelte gluteus minimus, all the better.



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