

Do You have the Look

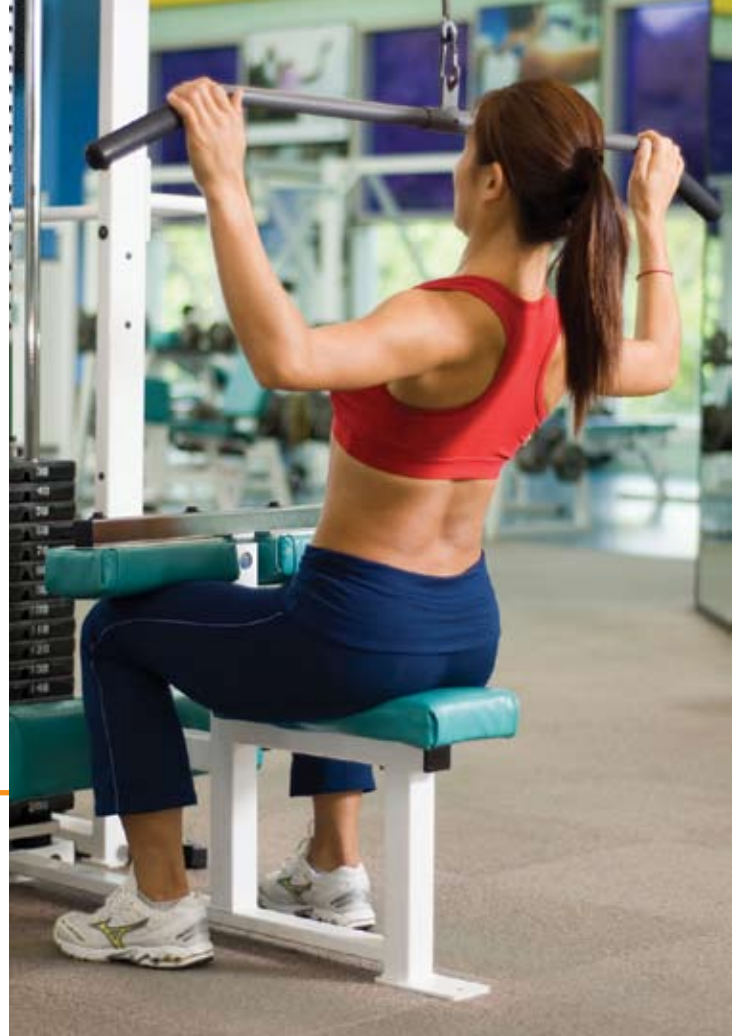
By Mary Nearpass

IT IS IN THE BACK OF YOUR MIND ALL DAY LONG; IF YOU DID NOT ALREADY DO IT THE MINUTE YOU ROLLED OUT OF BED.

The concept of not getting your fix at least once a day, everyday, is inconceivable. No matter where you are, what you are doing, whom you are with, how or why you are doing it, nothing can interfere with this tonic. A hypnotic, compelling, trance-like force must be confiscated. Only this enticement can feed the rush. Where do you get “the look”? At any track, marathon, or gym!

The fire is lit the second your feet hit the treadmill, the step class, the spinning class, the kick boxing class or the elliptical. A flicker of a flame simply will not do. A full, blown bonfire must be created every single visit to the gym or the point is mute. The cortisol, dopamine and/or epinephrine are ignited and the endorphin high is in full flame. A steady, gaze fixates the eyes with a look all its own. The horse blinders are on, and the exercise kicks in stronger and stronger, longer and longer. No matter how hard you exert yourself, how much you sweat, how long you linger, there never seems to be enough equipment on which to work out. If you participate in a class, it has to be the most difficult; no beginner or intermediate for you. Yoga and Pilates are for sissies. Finally yet importantly, you must be as good as the teacher, if not better, and you certainly can blow the others in class out of the water. ... Alternatively, what would be the point?

What IS the point of exercise addiction? Yes, you are reading this correctly. There IS such a thing as an addiction to physical activity. One can rationalize that, “there could be worse things to become addicted to”, which to a degree, is true. On the surface, daily exercising is healthy for one’s personal commitment to health. The temptation to idealize the level of obsession and commitment is almost held with reverence. Nevertheless, other “so-called positive” addictions such as reading, surfing the net and eating are good for one’s daily health. However, if any one pursuit, interest or hobby becomes more than leisure interest, and consumes hours of the day partaking in or obsessing about the craving, it is indeed,



an addiction. No matter the exterior costume, an addiction is an addiction is an addiction.

Webster defines addiction as a habit, compulsion, need, dependence, obsession, craving or infatuation of one has thought processes. Do you have “the look”?

In our culture’s incessant drive for the “perfect body du jour”, and our sometimes even greater need to be a part of the “in crowd”, the billion-dollar industry of health and fitness clubs has taken off. Couple this with the weight loss industry, and you have a recipe for OCD (Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder) at its finest, for a vulnerable few.

Although there is TREMENDOUS NEED for weight loss/weight management and opportunities to create a fit body due to our society’s ever-increasing obesity rate, there is a striking increase in the craze of exercise addiction. Superficially, this may appear as an oxymoron, yet this is the furthest thing from the truth.

The addiction can be a stand-alone to exercise only, or it can be a part of the disordered eating patterns of Anorexics and Bulimics. No matter the combination, the outcome sought is the same; control over one’s body through purging. There is an almost “cleansing high”; a pristine, pure, feeling-like-new outcome after the “high” is achieved. If that “high” is not attained on any given day, there is no living with the recipient. The detoxification effects are so much worse than the mental anguish of feeling the need to prove one’s fitness, it seems much easier to the addict and their loved ones to succumb to

the lure of the fix.

In time, the need to “be in control” of one’s body ends up like quicksand. Ironically, what began as an attempt to take back some control of one’s life ends up becoming completely out of control. No matter the circumstances, or previous commitments, in spite of a nagging injury that hasn’t been afforded time to heal, the scheduled workout rules, while at the same time the body’s shortcomings are lamented. When the obsession becomes an omnipotence of mind over matter, when willfulness to overcome physical and psychological limitations is misconstrued as being strong-willed. The exercise becomes their God; it controls their every waking (and often times sleeping) moment evolving into a tumultuous mental chamber.

Although the intent may have been initially to pursue a physical and mental stress outlet of everyday life in a modern world that increasingly attempts to take away our God-given physicality, somewhere along the line the hook of the bait was taken and reeled in. Therein lies one of the great paradoxes; how one individual can enjoy a generous dose of healthy exercise never allowing oneself to be consumed by the training, while another can’t get enough. The missing ingredient, regardless of the “addiction/drug/weapon of choice” is BALANCE. The “balanced” athlete has time for family life, satisfying career, spiritual reflection and a social life outside of exercise. Exercise addiction allows for nothing else within its realm. Ironically, the addict rarely performs to their potential due to total self-absorption and pre-occupation with getting their fix. The outcome is always overload, burnout and diminished performance. Ultimately, that which originally nourished the spirit bedevils the spirit until the addict vehemently rejects the very object of their desire. An all or nothing spirit abounds, when all along, each of us would do well if we took to heart one of the ancient Greek philosophies, “A sound mind in a sound body”; translated in today’s world, BALANCING one’s life.

As the beginning of a brand new year unfolds, a little self-reflection can go a long way. Do YOU or someone you know and care about have “the look”? Only you can know for sure if exercise is running your life instead of you running it. Take a moment to courageously look deep into your soul and confront whether any/all of the following points may apply to you or someone you know. Ultimately, at the end of the day, let 2006 be the year where you can be at peace with “the look” that reflects back to you in the mirror. Make time to help yourself or someone you love to see the forest from the trees. There is help and hope for anyone willing to change their look to a more global vision. As Oprah would say, “one thing I know for sure is that making peace with one’s body can be one of the most freeing gifts one can give to oneself. Focusing on gratitude for the body, mind and spirit, whatever shape they are in, is the key to giving more love to oneself and ultimately others. Yes, you CAN see clearly now the rain has gone!”

Do you have “THE LOOK”?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with five being the strongest, weigh each of the following statements as they apply to you (or a loved one). Consider retaking this periodically to assure balance in your life.

QUESTIONNAIRE:

- 1 - A day without working out is a day not worth living.**
- 2 - Until I get my workout in, I am horrific to be around.**
- 3 - If I absolutely have to miss a day, I can always double up my routine tomorrow.**
- 4 - No pain, no gain.**
- 5 - More is always better when it comes to exercise.**
- 6 - Warm-up and cool-down are important, but it’s the middle of the sandwich that counts.**
- 7 - Quality without quantity is impossible.**
- 8 - Rest is for the weary, not for the strong.**
- 9 - Discomfort exists to work out through, not to be an insurmountable barrier.**
- 10 - All of my friends are exercise junkies; I would never consider befriending a non-exerciser.**
- 11 - A non-exerciser exhibits their inbred “weakness” by not exercising.**

Are you coming to the
PHILLYFIT BASH?

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