

# NAAFA Newsletter

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## NEWS AND COMMENT

### IS FAT SO BAD? NATIONAL NEWSPAPER QUESTIONS OLD ASSUMPTIONS

A front-page story in a special January 6 "Good Health" section of USA TODAY carried the headline, "Weighty debate: Is fat so bad?" The article mentioned the "killer disease" publicity associated with the panel of experts which convened in February, 1985 at the National Institutes of Health (NIH); it quoted Dr. William Castelli, director of the Framingham Heart Study as saying that "Obesity is as powerful a risk factor as any we know." However, the article devoted most of its space to comments by Dr. Paul Ernsberger, of the Cornell Medical Center (and Chairman of NAAFA's Advisory Board). His response to Castelli, for example: "Nonsense. It isn't hazardous to your health to be 15 to 20 pounds overweight." (As little as 5 or 10 extra pounds were said to be a risk factor by the NIH group.) "Actually, it's beneficial to weigh 15 to 20 pounds over what the insurance charts say," Ernsberger said.

According to USA TODAY, he called the NIH panel's report "shocking, a throwback to 1959...ignoring all the medical research since." The newspaper went on to quote University of Minnesota researcher Dr. Ancel Keys as suggesting that "the idea has been greatly oversold that the risk of dying prematurely or of having a heart attack is directly related to relative body weight." Dr. Keys based his observation in part on his study of 13,000 men in seven countries. And, a University of Michigan researcher, Dr. Stanley Garn, is said to have found a lower overall cancer rate and a decreased incidence of osteoporosis and anemia among fatter people.

The article gave the last word to Ernsberger by asking him whether any weight control is worth trying, given the disagreement of all the experts. "Throw out your scale," he advised. "Follow the American Heart Association recommendations: Reduce your intake of fats and salt, avoid refined carbohydrates such as white flour and white sugar, eat more fruits and vegetables, exercise."

A separate article on the same page is headlined, "Beware 'yo-yo' dieting", and extensively quotes Ernsberger about his study of the effect of weight loss and regain on laboratory rats--and his conclusion that "I believe the yo-yo effect can be more harmful to human beings than being overweight."

The same article quotes NAAFA advisor Dr. Susan Wooley of the University of Cincinnati's Eating Disorders Clinic as being in agreement with his conclusions. She added, "There are some risks to being overweight, but the cure may do more damage than the affliction. Even the best diets have a 95% (long-term) failure rate, and there is good evidence that weight fluctuations can be hazardous to your health." The article ends with her statement, "It does no good to make people feel more anxious and more guilty about their weight, increasing the stress on them, when we don't have anything better to offer."

## COMMENTARY

Many "experts" in the area of obesity seem to be blind to risk factors other than obesity. In the same USA TODAY that quoted Dr. William Castelli as saying that "obesity is as powerful a risk factor as any we know", another expert, Dr. Thomas Ryan, President of the American Heart Association, was said to believe that smoking is the "single greatest cause of preventable deaths in the USA."

We applaud Ernsberger and Wooley for their outspoken statements in rebuttal to those experts who would ignore large areas of modern medical evidence, and apparently base their conclusions on outmoded and discredited insurance company tables. We know that the experts who sat on the panel at the NIH were not in unanimous agreement. In fact, the only agreement that should have been published was that there was considerable difference of opinion on the subject; but that they all felt that more research money should be spent in the area of obesity. (We surely would have agreed with such a conclusion, if a portion of such research money were to be spent on learning how fat people can live healthier lives, since research into weight loss methods always seems to end in failure!)



**EDITORIAL...by Nancy Summer**

New Year's is the traditional time for people to review the old year and to make resolutions about the year to come. As a fat child growing up in our anti-fat society, I soon learned that my success during any given year was based on how much weight I lost and kept off. Each January first, I would try to remember how much I weighed a year ago, and my success (or failure) for that year was determined by my plus or minus size. I would then make a resolution to lose weight in the upcoming year.

As an adult NAAFAn, I had to learn a whole new way of evaluating success. Should it be determined by college degrees, dollars in the bank, number of admirers, health, happiness, etc.? Then Ann Landers printed a quote from Bessie Anderson Stanley, which I like to read several times a year to remind me of what I feel success really is:

To laugh often and much; to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a little better place than we found it, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to know even one life breathed easier because you lived. This is to have succeeded.

I have had a lot of experiences this year (some good, some bad) that fit into this quote. But the important phrase to me is "to leave the world a little better place than we found it...by...a redeemed social condition." I don't have a child, and the squirrels keep eating my tulips, but I, like so many other NAAFAns, have the goal to help redeem the social condition of fat people. Won't you resolve in 1986 to help us reach that goal? It is one way that we all can succeed.

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**MEDIA AND PUBLICITY WATCH**

A nice photo of one of NAAFA's favorite performers, Nell Carter, appeared in the 12/3/85 National Enquirer, along with other members of the cast and "Gimme A Break" executives, celebrating their 100th episode. Based on the photo and on recent reports in the media, Nell seems to have regained her health and energy compared with a bad period she went through several years ago, at the time that NAAFA presented her with a Distinguished Achievement Award. (The writing on the show continues to be "spotty" however, with some shows being positive and enlightened on the subject of Nell's ample figure, but some NAAFAns have seen shows that were said to be real put-downs of all fat people...)

A NAAFA group will be appearing on the syndicated TV show Sally Jessy Raphael soon. The topic of the show will be men who are attracted to fat women. The show is tentatively scheduling NAAFAns Conrad Blickens- torfer, Coordinator of the F.A. SIG; Neil Dachis; and William Fabrey. The show is to be broadcast in St. Louis, MO, on Tuesday, Jan. 14; and in other cities on Tuesday, Jan. 21, 28, or Feb. 4, depending on the city. NAAFAns who would like to see the show in their city should check local TV listings for each of the dates shown. The Sally Jessy Raphael show featured a NAAFA group last year, and is apparently willing to repeat the process

An excellent article entitled "Fat Fights Back" appeared in the Star, a national weekly tabloid newspaper, on Dec. 31. Quoted extensively were pioneering plus-sized Ford model Ann Harper, author of The Big Beauty Book; Mary Duffy, president of Big Beauties, a New York modeling agency for full-figured women; and William Fabrey, NAAFA Chairman. Also interviewed for the story was NAAFAn Kimm Bonner (NJ).

More rave reviews from NAAFA members who've seen the German film, Sugerbaby (see last Newsletter). We hope that it will eventually be available in videotape form; neighborhood movie theaters around the country can hardly be expected to book the film extensively, as it is in German with English subtitles. Not to mention the difficulty with which many NAAFAns fit typical theater seats!

NAAFA received mention in the last BUF magazine (for men). It is not known whether such exposure will result in a long-term upsurge in male membership in NAAFA.

Except for advertising, there was no publicity surrounding the well-attended Holiday Happening NAAFA event in New York from Dec. 27-29. Unlike national conventions, for which responsible media coverage is encouraged, events like the Holiday Happening are not well suited to reporters and camera crews. NAAFA's Publicity Committee feels that most cases, too high a price is paid to obtain coverage which can be obtained equally well at other times of the year.

NAAFA is being mentioned in a syndicated medical advice column authored by Dr. Art Ulene, popular medical commentator for NBC's Today show in Los Angeles. Dr. Ulene's column, carried in newspapers across the country, covers the pro's (but mostly the con's) of weight-loss surgery, and cites NAAFA (complete with address and phone number) as an important source of information about the subject. The piece is slated for publication just as this column is being written, the first week in January.



## NAAFA ELECTION RESULTS

One resident of Maryland and one from Ohio were the winners of the 1985 election for the Board of Directors. Paula Dachis (MD) was re-elected to another three year term on the Board. Ohio NAAFAn Jerry Hoxworth was also elected; Hoxworth took the oath of office, and was seated at the "Meet the Board" session at the close of the Holiday Happening event in New York on December 29.

According to Eileen M. Lefebure, Chairperson of the Election Committee, a total of 323 ballots were received prior to the deadline; of these, eight ballot envelopes were not opened due to the lack of a signature on the outer envelope, and four were not opened because they came from non-members. The actual votes were as follows: Paula Dachis, 229; Jerry Hoxworth, 162; Joyce Maloney (NY), 133; and Nellie Hensley (MD), 84.

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## ACTIVISM COMMITTEE REPORT...by Russell F. Williams and Louise Wolfe, Co-Chairs

Mandatory seat belt legislation has now been passed in about 20 states. Of the laws we have seen, none offers any consideration for fat people beyond telling them to get a note from their doctor saying they are fat.

At this time the lack of concern for fat people does not seem to matter, because we can find no indication that the law is being seriously enforced anywhere; but that could change if the Federal Government starts putting pressure on the states.

We ask the membership of NAAFA to do two things:

1. In states where the laws have not been passed, alert your legislators to the special needs of yourself and/or your friends.
2. If you know of any fat person who has been ticketed for being unable to wear a seat belt, please let us know.

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## HOLIDAY HAPPENING '85 GREAT SUCCESS

NAAFA members from more than 12 states gathered to celebrate the holidays (and raise much needed funds for NAAFA) at the event sponsored by the Fundraising Committee at the La Guardia Marriott in New York.

Bunny Peckham, Fundraising Chairperson, has announced that over \$6,800 was raised to help NAAFA continue a monthly Newsletter, purchase a computer for the office, and to offset some of the operating deficits.

In addition, she wishes to thank all the NAAFA members who attended, and who have contributed to the fundraising drive...with special thanks to those special people who helped with registration, ticket taking, the hospitality suite, and workshops.

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## COB'S CORNER...by William J. Fabrey, Chairman of the Board

Some people have asked whether my "permissive" attitude toward **FAT PORNOGRAPHY** has ever changed after reading the excellent arguments of Kelly Fennessy (CA) (Fat Pornography: Equal Opportunity Abuse) in the Spring, 1984 edition of the Newsletter. Without refuting any of her points, I believe that pornography is a fact of life, for good or for bad. Anyway, it doesn't matter how I feel about it--there is and will always be a market for magazines like Gent and BUF, and some men and women will always seek them out. As an F.A., I'm glad to see my taste represented, even if the "editorial perspective" of such magazines often disagrees with mine. It's interesting that BUF emphasizes nudity of fat women, but without the violence or hard-core material that many other publications present. Perhaps there are many F.A.'s who just like to look at fat women in the nude or in suggestive costume!

**WILL NAAFA EVER HAVE A ONE-PIECE BROCHURE DESCRIBING OUR ORGANIZATION?** - Such a brochure has been in the works for a long time, and according to the Membership Committee, it looks like we may see one soon. Trouble is, our present "literature" is too complicated and, some say, too negative for many prospective members. It currently consists of several different pieces of literature assembled in one envelope, and is not easily handed to a friend or acquaintance. One of the proposed "unified" brochures even uses cartoons professionally prepared by Stella and Harold Wirk (remembered for their excellent drawings in the Ample Apple bulletin several years ago.) I'm looking forward to trying such a brochure, at least on an experimental basis. We will tell you when it's ready!



Q: How should a heavy person go about starting a routine of exercise? Should they go about it differently than a thin person might?

Almost ANYONE can start an exercise program, even if they have been completely inactive--even if bed-ridden for months. The key is to build up gradually. It might start with a very slow walk around the block (or even across your apartment, if that's the most you can manage), gradually going farther and faster each day until you can cover a mile in about 15 minutes.

An exercycle is ideal for many people because of its simplicity and immediate access within their own homes, and offers special advantages for fat people. There is no need to go outside or wear revealing clothing in public, which often provokes harassment or ridicule from others. There is little stress or strain on the joints, unlike all other activities except swimming. Finally, it is very easy to control the intensity of the exercise, so that one can stop when winded and easily start up again. Exercycles are available with extra-wide "tractor-style" seats in a few models; the NAAFA Anthropometrics Committee is currently doing research on the topic of comfortable seats for exercycles.

In some ways, it's actually EASIER for a fat person to do aerobic exercise. All of you who gasp when climbing stairs may find that hard to believe, but consider this: When a fat person climbs a flight of stairs, they are accomplishing a lot more work in lifting their body one story in altitude than someone whose body weighs one-half or one-third as much. Because a fat person's legs, arms, and entire body are heavier, every movement requires more energy, and therefore more oxygen.

Sure, you get winded climbing a flight of stairs. But a thin person would be just as winded after climbing three or four flights of stairs in the same amount of time --which would be an equivalent amount of aerobic exercise to what you just got climbing one flight. Also, large fat deposits in the chest area make deep breaths more effortful, so the diaphragm must do more work, and become stronger.

So, you shouldn't feel ashamed of the fact that you can't jog. Instead, you may as well take comfort in the fact that you can get as good a workout by walking at a brisk pace as a thin person might get by jogging. And there's no need to worry about shin splints!

Thus in one sense it is easier for fat people to get aerobic exercise. As long as your breathing is heavy and your pulse is quickened, you are doing aerobic exercise. As you get in shape, of course, it will take more and more exertion to cause you to breathe harder and your heart to pound. This is a good measure of fitness, and it is a very personal one: You only compare yourself with yourself in terms of what you can accomplish.

(Dr. Ernsberger will answer questions on fat and health in upcoming issues. Got a question you'd like answered in the Newsletter? Write us, in care of the NAAFA office.)

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**NAAFADVICE...by June Bailey**

Dear NAAFAdvice,

Some of NAAFA's programs seem to be lacking in what I think they should be doing. What's the problem?

Signed, Disappointed

Dear Disappointed,

If I tell you what the problem is, will you promise to help solve it? NAAFA is a volunteer organization and it needs people like you, for instance. It is member supported and funds are not always available to put the programs in full gear. Perhaps the solution is for us NAAFA members to put our money where our mouths are and to contribute regularly to NAAFA. If you think that that's too much to ask, look at the money you've spent on trying to change your body size. That's money NAAFA could use to promote the better idea of acceptance without regard to size. You could also donate an hour or two of your time. If everybody gives a little extra time and money, nobody will ever be disappointed in NAAFA programs. That's a promise.

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