



NAAFA Newsletter

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Fitness Column: A shift in the Fitness Industry



by Rochelle Rice, MA
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At long last, inroads are being made in the fitness industry to understand and work with the larger body. I was honored to present at the IDEA World Fitness Convention in Las Vegas, July 5th-9th, along with Sandy Schaffer, New York NAAFA Chapter President. Our presentation, "Size Sensitivity Training," included an anatomical approach to help clients

Greetings,

The NAAFA convention is almost here! If you haven't signed up yet, you can register at the door. Check the schedule at BigSummerFun.com. And I'll see you in San Mateo!

• **Three Studies Show Dangers of Dieting**

Three recent scientific studies have sharply highlighted the dangers of dieting.

The first, a two-year study conducted by Dr. Linda Bacon and Dr. Judith Stern of the University of California at Davis, showed that a program of behavioral change and self-acceptance was far more effective at improving the health of fat women. 78 women aged 30 to 45 participated, half of whom were told to diet. The other half were counseled to listen to internal body cues of hunger and fullness, were given standard nutritional information, and participated in a support group. The non-dieters improved their cholesterol levels, blood pressure, physical activity and self-esteem. The dieters, on the other hand, were not able to sustain any long-term health improvements, and worsened in terms of their self-esteem. Neither group lost weight over the long term.

The second study, which was carried out in Finland, followed 2,957 fat people who had been screened to ensure they had no underlying illnesses. Each participant was questioned about their desire to lose weight in 1975 and again in 1981. Records of their weight and general health were kept for the next 18 years, during which 268 of the participants died. Analysis of the data showed that those who wanted to lose weight and succeeded were significantly more likely to die young than those who stayed fat. "We need to study the effects of weight loss on the body much better than we have done so far," said the study's lead researcher, Thorkild Sorensen, of the Institute of Preventive Medicine at Copenhagen University hospital.

In the third study, researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle measured the levels of a type of immune cell in a group of 114 fat (but otherwise healthy) women who had all passed through menopause. Women who had lost and regained at least 10 pounds five or more times had cell activity levels that were one-third lower than those of women who went through only one yo-yo cycle. The study was published last year in the Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

feel stronger in the larger body, a method for developing program designs that assist with activities of daily living and quality of life issues, and techniques for Pilates and yoga for the larger body. What was most exciting were the number of trainers who approached us at the end of the session thanking us for presenting skills and tools they could apply immediately with their clients at home. The desire and awareness was evidence that there is truly a shift in the fitness industry with regard to health at every size.

The fitness industry is ready to embrace size sensitivity. Only 10-12% of the American population attends the gym, yet many people of size desire to lead an active lifestyle. The fitness industry is realizing that a focus on movement – where all movement counts and can be applied directly to the person's life – is the key to creating programs that feel safe and welcoming.

I encourage you to speak with your local gyms and wellness centers if possible. There is literature in the fitness industry that supports program design for larger bodies. I feel excited at this progress yet know we still have a road ahead of us. Health at every size – I dream of the day when all people feel entitled and are supported by the fitness industry to lead an active lifestyle. Have faith. Our work thus far is finally reaping rewards.

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Conclusion: Dieting doesn't work, and can harm your self-esteem and cause premature death, damaging your immune system in the process. Maybe now, the media and general public can finally receive the wisdom of acceptance and health at any size.

• **Activism Column: Activism Through Fitness**

by Sandy Schaffer

President, New York City Chapter of NAAFA



As Rochelle mentions in her column, I was in Las Vegas in early July to help present "Size Sensitivity Training" at the IDEA World Fitness Convention. IDEA is the largest fitness conference in the country with over 4000 in attendance from around the world. I walked among my peers - fitness instructors who are some of the most lean and muscular people around. I am a certified fitness instructor and have been for more than seven years. I am also fat.

This was the second time I helped present at a fitness conference on the movement techniques involved in working out a person of large size. I go to these conferences with mixed feelings. On one hand, I am proud of my accomplishments and have a passion for sharing them. On the other hand, I would be a liar if I didn't tell you that walking into a fitness conference where I am one of a very few (if not the only) fat person is a little intimidating to me. That has never stopped me, but I just don't always know what to expect. I must say that I have always been treated with respect and as an equal at these conferences, except for the lack of clothing in my size in the Expo Hall.

Being able to show people what the exercises actually look like on a fat person was a great teaching tool for trainers. I felt very empowered to be acknowledged for my skills as a trainer. To show my size and use it as a tool and not a judgment felt exhilarating.

Activism is not just protesting a wrong. Being out there in the world and not letting anyone stop you from pursuing your dreams, will also help open closed minds.

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