

Help!

I WANT TO GET FIT

Katy Bircher & Katie Goodwin



SUMMERSDALE

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Introduction

If you're reading this then you are either a) one of our friends and you've been given a free copy in the hope that your comments will boost our egos, or b) someone who has decided that you can no longer ignore the approach or manifestation of thirty-something body changes.

It is Sod's law that as you grow older, while your life and career may begin to take shape and your self-confidence increases, your body starts to fall apart. Bits appear that were never there in childhood, or even in those dodgy teenage years. You are convinced that that dimple in your backside was smaller yesterday; you wonder how on earth that cellulite could have been allowed to creep up on you and attach itself to the back of your legs. And when was it that running for a bus became such hard work? How can, 'Let's all go to the park and play football this afternoon' be so completely uninspiring? The changes come upon you secretly, mischievously, and before you know it you

have become UNFIT, lethargic, flabby, and you really have no idea what additional horrors you'll discover if you catch sight of yourself in that full-length mirror tomorrow.

If you recognise any of these feelings then it's time to act. If you recognise them from five years ago but have managed so far to ignore them, then seize the day. You are completely normal. Absolutely everyone goes through this, but only a few manage really to take control and begin a fitness programme that lasts. Try to make sure you become one of them – we promise it will be worth it.



Healthy Body, Healthy Mind

People who have got themselves fit will tell you that, 'I just feel so much better...' often with a slightly bemused look in their eyes. Can physical fitness make you feel like a more complete person? Are you really more likely to feel better about yourself, because you do four classes a week at your local gym? Neither of us are scientists with surveys and statistics at our fingertips but the answer from our own experience has to be an emphatic 'YES'.

In the year 4BC Plato argued that his students should be sent 'to the master of gymnastics in order that their bodies may better minister to the virtuous mind.' Similarly, in the year 2BC, Galen asserted that 'exercise is recommended which contributes to the health of the body and to the harmonious functioning of the parts and to the strength of the soul.' In modern times, there have been over a hundred separate studies, which have statistically established the correlation between a happy and satisfactory state of mind and good physical health. Put simply, if you feel good physically then you're more likely to feel both mentally and emotionally healthier.

Why does fitness affect your state of mind?

- ***Exercise converts adrenaline into energy***

It is known that when we are under stress – perhaps due to personal problems, general work pressures, deadlines, an annoying boss – our brain signals for the production of *catecholamines*, or adrenaline. Adrenaline causes a heightened stimulation, usually increasing the sense of anxiety, certainly provoking higher blood pressure and an increased heart rate. During regular exercise this adrenaline can be converted into energy; it is used as a fuel and burned up along the way. Therefore regular exercise can be said to release the pressure valve, allowing some of our tension out in a healthy and controlled way.

- ***Exercise causes the brain to secrete endorphins***

Exercise also provokes a natural ‘high’ caused by the brain’s secretion of *endorphins* – morphine-like chemicals that help combat pain and stress. It is this ‘buzz’ that many fitness fanatics become addicted to, but as long as your reaction to it does not become obsessive, endorphins give you a healthy sense of wellbeing.

- ***Exercise is our body's traditional way of coping during difficult times***

Our physicality is a vital part of our experience as humans and 70% of our body is given over to the purpose of movement. Before the onset of modern civilisation we were hunter-gatherers, needing physical endurance and strength to find food and to survive. Perhaps the recognition of a desire to get fit even today is a response to a primitive need for survival. This might explain why the desire often kicks in in times of crisis or despair, as if our DNA is telling us that exercise is a way of coping on a very basic level – simply of surviving through a difficult time.

- ***Exercise promotes self-confidence.***

Perhaps our perception of quality of life is closely linked with the knowledge that we are making the best of our available hereditary characteristics. Certainly there is something deeply satisfying about realising our potential, doing our best, making the most of what we have. This in turn increases our feelings of self-worth and self-confidence because we feel good about ourselves.

- ***Exercise makes you feel alive***

The centres of the brain that manage and co-ordinate our muscular actions are anatomically very

close to the centres that manage feeling and thinking. The possibility that one brain centre could positively affect another is large, and a tingling sense of being alive might very well be our feeling brain centre's response to the muscular brain centre's activity.

Such explanations for the feel-good factor of exercise are useful. It is good to understand what may be happening in your brain as you get fit and, scientifically, to see the very possible connection between a healthy body and a healthy mind.

However, much of this remains unknown to the average gym-goer, and we have found that, far more persuasive and conclusive than any study or survey, is the obvious positive change in the way we feel on a basic day to day level. Again we return to the slightly bemused 'I just feel so much better' assertion. Most importantly, we both feel the pride of having really taken control of this aspect of our lives; it has become something that is ours, done for ourselves and done in the way that we wanted to. When you are trying, for whatever reason, to assert your own identity, to establish a sense of self-worth and self-confidence – getting fit helps enormously.