

Strong and Feminine

The Real Value of Exercise for Women

by Ken Hutchins
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Monday morning, Susan dropped in to consult with her exercise instructor. She was just beginning the seventh week of her SuperSlow program. SuperSlow, generally speaking, incorporates a positive contraction whereby the weight is lifted in 10 seconds and a negative contraction whereby the weight is then lowered in 10 seconds.

Susan appeared extremely irritated and impatient. She presented many objections to her program. Some objections were not related in her comments, but her intense emotions betrayed more discontent than she verbalized.

“You assured me I would lose weight doing SuperSlow,” Susan complained, “and I’ve gained three pounds! My thighs feel larger and my slacks hug my hips tighter. I don’t need this. Please, let me train longer on each exercise with more repetitions so that my legs don’t become so large. We simply must change my training somehow.”

Why has Susan experienced a change of heart? Her discontent is due to misunderstandings regarding exercise and its effect on her figure. Erroneous beliefs are eroding her motivation and patience. And these are compounded by emotional and social factors that her instructor may not suspect. Nevertheless, they are lurking beneath the emotions displayed. Her instructor can best overcome Susan’s objections only if he understands their various origins.

There are many and varied obstacles to an efficient exercise program. Some of the psychological barriers—fear for instance—are grounded in myths of one sort or another. Men are often difficult to motivate beyond a predictable threshold, because they staunchly defend a myriad of erroneous beliefs and locker room jargon handed down by blood-and-guts high school coaches or muscle magazines.

Most women are far easier to supervise and motivate than are most men. After all, most women in America have never played high school sports. Sports, with a few exceptions, have remained masculine pursuits throughout human history. Women, therefore, encounter fewer pre-conceived notions as they strive to understand the effect of *SuperSlow exercise philosophy*. They quickly become motivated to pay the price of discipline and reap the possible benefits.

This is not to say that women are totally lacking in the myth department either. They ascribe to many. But most, if not all, women’s exercise myths have a common weakness, and once this weakness is addressed, a woman quickly accelerates her appreciation and understanding of the objectives involved.

The Importance of Muscle

The basic confusion that many women experience is directly related to the myths concerning the properties of skeletal muscle. Muscle plays an extremely important role. It contributes both to the cosmetic appearance and to the functionality of the female anatomy.

Muscle and only muscle produces movement of the body. Other factors contribute to and are necessary for organized movement to occur, but only the skeletal muscles produce the contraction forces necessary to propel the body of any woman or man. To increase the size and strength of the skeletal musculature serves to make human movement more secure and efficient.

Muscle also serves to protect the human body from physical harm. Not only do stronger muscles enable a woman to move more efficiently, but joint stability, dependent upon the dynamic muscular force about each joint, is enhanced. Growing muscles directly and indirectly effect stronger tendons, bones, and ligaments. Connective tissues such as these grow and respond minimally or not at all to most rehabilitative modalities. But muscles respond very quickly to SuperSlow high-intensity exercise. SuperSlow exercise therefore remains the most efficient method by which to strengthen the entire skeleton.

But what about appearance? It is well documented that so-called feminine curves are the result of female body fat distribution occurring at and continuing after puberty. These curves are cosmetically appealing as long as they are well supported by the underlying muscle and precautions are taken against overfatness. Sagging fat is not appealing. Fat is feminine and appealing only when it is firm and properly distributed. This suggests that most women’s figure problems are related to the conditions of being under-muscled and overfat simultaneously.

Since an overfat condition plagues most of us, an increase in muscle serves another valuable purpose. Skeletal muscle tissue is the foremost consumer of energy in the body. When the quantity and strength of a woman’s muscles are increased, more fuel is required to sustain them at work and at rest. In essence, her basal metabolism will increase, and this will supplement the negative-calorie balance of a moderate reduction diet. While it is true that exercise is a very inefficient method by which to burn excess calories, exercise should lead to more firm, stronger muscles that are significantly more expensive calorically for the body to maintain. Stronger muscles will help a dietary over-consumption problem.

In recent years, the fitness community has devoted more emphasis to this role of muscle in fat loss. Most attention in this area remains grossly misleading because of an inappropriate emphasis on aerobics of one form or another. Contrary to what most supposed exercise experts advise, aerobics will not burn a significant quantity of calories. Aerobics will not stimulate, much less maintain the size and strength of the skeletal muscles. Aerobics is not necessary or efficient to burn body fat. Aerobics will compromise your efforts to become stronger and leaner. Aerobics will eventually produce a host of injuries. Aerobics, though promoted for 30 years as progressive, posh, and healthy, has not been proven to deserve any of these adjectives. And though strength training has been recently acknowledged to have an important role in exercise, this is incorrect. *Strength training is the exercise!*

Also, muscular strength and endurance are extremely important during pregnancy. Not all, but many of the negative aspects of pregnancy, both cosmetic deterioration and labor difficulties, are the simple result of weak muscles. Exercise for a pregnant woman is probably more important than at any other time in her life.

Weight vs. Fat

Another source of misinformation is centered about the bathroom scales. For generations, American women have led their daughters to the bathroom to take a reading on bathroom scales. Information acquired through sororities, bridge clubs, and glamour magazines perpetuate and reinforce the erroneous idea that the all-important factor of bodily appearance is *body weight*.

Have you ever enrolled in a chemistry course? Are you familiar with the terms, *qualitative analysis* and *quantitative analysis*? When the chemistry instructor provides an *unknown* to solve, he might request a *quantitative* analysis. He will provide you information concerning *what* you are analyzing, but he wants you to measure its quantity.

Yet if the instructor requests a *qualitative* analysis, he is asking the chemistry student to provide the *what*. In other words, you must tell him the name of the substance measured.

Weight is *quantitative*. It is almost meaningless for anyone to refer to their weight as, for instance, 110 pounds without stating its qualities. 110 pounds of what?... fat?... salt?... lead?... muscle?... Corn Flakes®?... Rice Krispies®?... What?... All of the above?... In what proportions then?... Again, *what* weighs 110 pounds? Let's here and now make it perfectly clear that *weight*, taken by itself, signifies nothing—not *little*—*NOTHING!* A woman's *body weight* is irrelevant. The words *bodyweight*, *overweight*, and *underweight* should be removed from all fitness magazines and medical books when used in this context. Concern should be placed on overfatness and muscular weakness.

Exceptions: body weight can be a reliable indication of the general degree of body fatness in some instances where a

subject's muscular strength is known and stabilized. This must be appraised with simultaneous attention to other variables. This possibility, however, is farfetched for the typical subject, especially novices who have never exercised (strength trained) before. For a typical subject to obtain meaningful information from weight scales, the scales would necessarily provide several windows. Each window would provide a specific breakdown: one for *fat*; one for *muscle*; one for *bone*; one for *other*. Of course, this does not happen.

Measurements of body weight will aid your doctor's appraisal in a general way. At a glance, he can see that you are either grossly overfat or anorexic. He doesn't need a body weight measurement to determine this. Taking your body weight will provide a general documentation of your height/weight to monitor your progress away from these extremes. Again, even your doctor cannot assess your bodyfat specifically in this way. Body weight, however, does remain valuable to him as a reasonable ballpark indication of dosage for many medications.

Most body fat measurements are impractical, inaccurate, or both. These include skin fold extrapolations, electrical impedance, infrared, underwater weighing, and many other techniques to attain a *percentage* of body fat. I suggest that you forget the issue of measuring body fat percentage altogether.

Instead, monitor your *changes*. One method is to measure your skin fold at several key sites. Do not use these measurements to derive a body fat percentage. Merely monitor the skin fold changes as you proceed in your program. If they increase, you are becoming fatter. If they decrease, you are becoming leaner. Additional information is neither available nor useful.

Simpler yet is the *Too-Tight-Pants Test*. Select a pair of denim jeans from your closet that are so tight that you are barely able to fasten them. Keep them available for testing every Monday morning. This technique gives you a goal to strive for each weekend. If the pants are becoming easier to don, then you are becoming leaner. And this test is just as good as the skin fold test provided that you neither wear the pants to stretch them nor wash them to shrink them.

“LOSE TEN POUNDS IN 16 DAYS”

How many times have you read such claims in glamour magazines and advertisements? Such phrases mislead women and men alike into believing that there is a quick and easy method to *fat* loss when advertisements say “weight loss.” This is merely a cheap trick to tell women what they desperately want to hear. The truth is that it is possible to lose only three or four ounces of fat per day and know that it is fat. If any more *weight* than this amount is lost, then this weight is something other than fat—something a woman would rather retain such as muscle or water from the internal organs.

Notice that some women follow a sensible fat-reduction diet, but without exercise. If a woman does, she is smaller and lighter after several weeks. She is also weaker, lethargic, more prone to physical injury, and shapeless with poor posture. She has *reduced* herself to a literal bag of bones. In order to prevent this from happening; a strength training program must accompany a fat-reduction diet so that a woman hopefully increases and, at least, maintains her muscle tone.

The Six-Weeks Threshold

Back to Susan: Susan joined a fitness center six weeks ago. The staff at her facility told her that they could provide her with the fastest, safest method to reduce fat, increase her strength and endurance, enhance her figure, and reduce her chances of traumatic injury. She adhered to the prescribed program of a moderately-reduced-calorie diet and high-intensity, SuperSlow exercise religiously. She immediately felt better than she had ever experienced, but by the sixth week had many misgivings. This is expected for several reasons.

First of all, some of the most disciplined trainees begin to lose motivation at about the sixth week. Susan's acquaintance and proficiency with the proper use of exercise equipment is beginning to have a profound effect—the intensity of the exercise is becoming very demanding. Of course, this is desirable for the best possible physical results.

Exercise has become fashionable in present-day American society. In so doing, exercise has been confused with recreational activities which serve an entirely different purpose than exercise.

Exercise machines—Nautilus®, MedX®, SuperSlow®—are a curiosity to a person who has never seen them. They are complex and impressive. In this sense, such equipment compels a man or woman to remain interested in mastering its use. Once an exercise is mastered, it becomes effective and difficult to perform. Only then does this activity constitute exercise. And the fun or recreational aspect is no longer present. The fun occurs after improvement occurs, after the exercise, when those physical improvements translate into more enjoyable and safer lifestyles and recreational activities.

Secondly, Susan is receiving advice—bad advice. After six weeks of discipline, Susan has been to church four times, to bridge parties twice, visited her mother twice, her grandparents once, and talked of her SuperSlow experience with her boss, her new boyfriend, and all of her coworkers. These influences mean well, but she little realizes that at this point, they understand less than she does about exercise.

Possibly, Susan has tried passive exercise salons or body wraps or spot-reduction clinics—all high-pressure consumer frauds. Her family skeptically suggests that, “Susan has done it again.” They grudgingly resent that she has joined a SuperSlow facility, because they believe she will only be ripped off again.

In jest, Susan's boyfriend and boss have asked to feel her biceps, and jokingly asked if she were aspiring to be a woman bodybuilder. Partly because they saw no harm in making her the butt of their jokes and partly because exercise may still be viewed in their mind as a male domain, her boss and boyfriend are actually destructive to her program. They may even be jealous of her, jealous that they are not enrolled, and that a woman is in their rightful place. For lack of anything intelligent to say, they seize the opportunity to crush what little confidence she has about her program.

Susan saw a women's bodybuilding competition aired on television. She incorrectly assumed that if a gathering of 25 lean, defined, and muscular women can be viewed in one location simultaneously, there must be thousands of women experiencing the same result from strength training. Little does she realize that such women are rare, genetic freaks, suffering from hormonal imbalances, and posing to a camera lens that distorts their size even further. Their masculine attributes reinforce her fear about the muscularity *she* desperately needs.

Genes → Fat Distribution → Hormones → Womanhood

Women are endowed with a natural layer of subcutaneous fat, a layer that covers the muscles, that hides them and gives them the typical female appearance. This fat is also the basis of her hormones that make her feminine. If a rare woman does not possess this layer of fat, she may appear somewhat masculine, but such a condition is totally genetic and has absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with any exercise she does. The average, normal woman can no more appear masculine than men can give birth. Nature, by design or chance, provides that exercise can only enhance her feminine appeal. It will never masculinize her anymore than it can feminize a man. This was decided the day our mom selected our dad—totally beyond our control and due to genetics.

Cellulite—A Hoax

An area of focused attention is often a woman's hips and thighs. Hip and thigh machines are effective devices used toward strengthening these problem areas. As the muscles strengthen they become somewhat larger. They also grow more firm, stretching out the skin and ugly pockmarks to give her a shapely, graceful contour.

Puckered and dimpled skin is erroneously termed *cellulite*. This term has been banned by the *American Medical Association* as a hoax. This condition is not due to a special kind of fat as anti-Cellulite advertisements would have one believe. It is due to three factors:

- Overfatness
- Loss of muscular strength and firmness
- Loss of flexibility of the supporting connective tissue in and about the fat depots.

So-called *cellulite* is combated by becoming and staying as strong as possible and remaining lean.

The realization that muscle *tonus* and muscle *strength* and muscle *size* are very closely related may frighten Susan. She must understand that it is expected that her hip and thigh areas might enlarge slightly during her first few weeks of training. She has never encountered strength exercise for the involved muscles, and they will respond even more quickly than a man's *at first*. Then, if she remains patient, her thighs will reduce their size as the fat loss surpasses the muscle gain.

Susan has tailored, well-fitted clothes. They are beginning to fit differently, especially about the hips and thighs. Her figure already appears to have dramatically improved in some areas, but her clothes fit more tightly at the hips and along the upper thighs.

Before her major fat depots will show a decrease in size, she must diligently adhere to her moderate-calorie-reduction diet for several weeks, perhaps months. Susan must remember that she can lose only a few ounces per day or a little more than a pound of fat stored throughout her body—not just from a particular area on which she focuses her exercise and attention—per week. Spot reduction is impossible—as are quick fixes.

Pinch up a fold of skin from the back of your hand... from your forehead... your hips. Notice the comparative thickness between your fingers. If an even reduction, say 10%, of the fat throughout the body occurs, each of these three areas will reduce proportionally 10 percent. But which of the three will be noticeably smaller? The larger fat depot, at the hips, will appear smaller, the other areas will be unnoticed. Nevertheless, 10 percent of the fat throughout the body will be lost.

In reality most subjects will not lose fat evenly throughout the body. Another principle is ongoing. Each individual possesses a genetic prioritization of fat depots which lose fat in the reverse sequence from which they acquire fat.

Susan's instructor actually promised she would "reduce fat." She heard "reduce weight." Six weeks later, Susan weighs a few pounds more. She is very disturbed by this. Muscle is denser than fat. A pound of fat weighs the same as a pound of muscle, but the muscle requires less space. A very obese woman should certainly lose weight as she reduces fat and adds muscle, but some women will become heavier as they become slimmer, leaner, and stronger with better appearance. Again, weight is meaningless. Do not worship at the altar of the almighty scale!

Improved Feel

Many women have poor feeling or sensing ability about their lower extremities. Susan's awareness of this area is keener due to the movements in the exercise machines. Also her hips

and thighs now reveal a firmness she has never before experienced. Her newfound firmness is made possible because of larger stronger muscles. Extra firmness coupled with the fact she is learning to *feel* in these areas compound her confusion about her transformation.

Often without realizing, many women wear their clothes too tight. Increased awareness and feel about those areas of the body on which they focus undue attention can have a disturbing effect. This increased awareness results in them becoming more pressure sensitive to the snugness of clothes.

Instructor's Credibility

Who does Susan believe? Should she take the word of her instructor or listen to the input from family, friends, television, glamour magazines, and the fears made real to her by the strange changes she sees in her own body. Susan is frightened and her instructor is sorely outnumbered. How can he expect to ever win her confidence?

The best method to combat these fears is to address them *before* they materialize. After fright takes its grip, the timing is usually too late and the emotions are too intense to explain away the numerous misunderstandings. Later, there is still hope that logic will win out, but the instructor's credibility has suffered in Susan's mind.

Victory Close At Hand

Many women will experience some of the foregoing events. They collectively represent the only real obstacle for a woman's training program. Once past this, she will understand the real and possible benefits that high-intensity exercise bestows. She becomes the easiest trainee to supervise, performing the exercises more properly than most male counterparts and achieving desirable results that serve to reinforce her motivation beyond her original goals. Within another six weeks, she is leaner, firmer, healthier, more feminine, more enduring, and less susceptible to injury. She remains motivated because she understands the principles.

At the outset of her program, Susan was unsure and frightened. She did not yet truly believe in the program for various reasons. Properly counseled, she slowly began to understand as well as to believe in her program.

Many women in our country have been involved in fitness for many years. They are beginning to realize that they have been sold short on fitness. They are now more concerned with the haunting debilities of osteoporosis and the fear of losing their youthful appearance and mobility. Many have been injured, some badly, in their pursuit of health.

A correction of the fitness industry is overdue. And women are the best candidates to foster this change. Women embrace SuperSlow strengthening exercise for one simple reason. They want a safe program that effectively works to combat their health and figure problems.