

1967

EC67-1009 Just for a Change...Family Fitness

Helen Becker

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist>

Becker, Helen, "EC67-1009 Just for a Change...Family Fitness" (1967). *Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension*. 3834.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/extensionhist/3834>

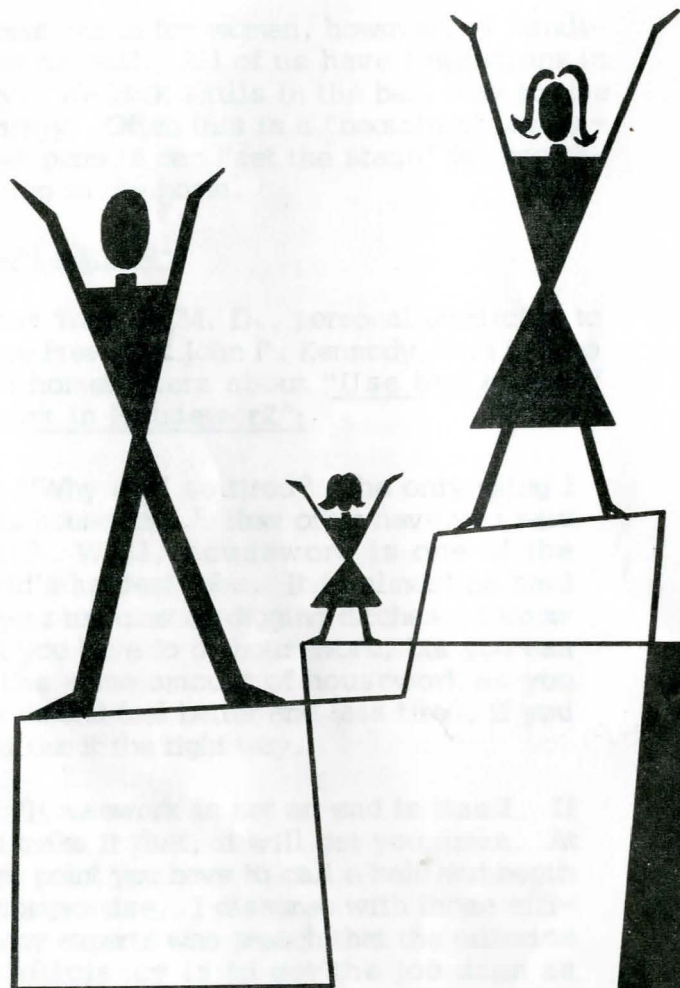
This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Extension at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Historical Materials from University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

EC 67-1009

AGRI
S
85
E7
67-1009

E. C. 67-1009

JUST FOR A CHANGE - FAMILY FITNESS



RECEIVED
OCT 18 1972
COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
LIBRARY

**JUST FOR A
CHANGE ...**

FAMILY FITNESS

Extension Service
University of Nebraska College of Agriculture and Home Economics
and U. S. Department of Agriculture Cooperating
E. F. Frolik, Dean J. L. Adams, Director

JUST FOR A CHANGE - FAMILY FITNESS

By Helen Becker
Agricultural Extension Health Specialist

Your most valuable possession is good health. This means total fitness -- physical, mental, emotional and social. The homemaker is often able to set the "climate" for the best possible family health.

About one in ten women, however, is handicapped herself. All of us have limitations in energy. We lack skills in the best way to use our energy. Often this is a "bootstrap" operation but parents can "set the stage" for healthful living in the home.

Physical Fitness¹

Janet Travell, M. D., personal physician to the late President John F. Kennedy, had this to say to homemakers about "Use and Abuse of Muscles in Housework":

"'Why am I so tired? The only thing I do is housework.' How often have you said that? Well, housework is one of the world's hardest jobs. It is almost as hard on your muscles as digging ditches. I know that you have to do housework, but you can do the same amount of housework as you now do and feel better and less tired, if you go about it the right way.

"Housework is not an end in itself. If you make it that, it will get you down. At some point you have to call a halt and begin to compromise. I disagree with those efficiency experts who preach that the criterion on efficiency is to get the job done as rapidly and systematically as possible. Most housewives can afford to take a little longer to do what they have to do. But they cannot afford muscle injury.

"So prepare now to abandon old-fashioned, backbreaking work habits. There is a way to do every job without undue strain if you will obey the following simple rules for utilizing your muscles properly.

"The first of these is to unscramble your housework. Because a particular job uses the same set of muscles all the time, it is more tiring to iron for hours at a stretch--or to wash all morning, or even to do all the mending at one sitting--than it is to jump from one task to another. It sounds disorganized, but the varied motion makes good sense in terms of muscle health.

"Don't be like the woman I know, mother of three small children, who suffered with constant backache. Most of the things she did each day called for her to work in half-bent positions. She would lean over to wipe the bathtub. All day long she stooped down to pick up her children's toys and clothing. Even when she changed the baby's diapers she bent over the crib. In the Kitchen she washed dishes in a low sink, and in the cellar she worked at laundry tubs that were too low. When she hung the wash on the line, she bent over to pick each piece of clothing out of the basket on the ground or floor. Finally, she would stand to iron, bending over the board.

"She varied her tasks, to be sure, but not the strain on her back muscles. Her back could not feel well until she made these simple changes in her way of life.

"She was told to use a child's express wagon to trundle the heavy wash to the line. This put the basket up high enough to eliminate her bending low while hanging out the clothes. The low laundry tubs could not be changed, but she learned to sit on a stool of the right height while working there and learned to sit while washing dishes or ironing. When she changed the baby, she lifted him onto a bed and sat down beside him.

"Best of all, she let the children's toys stay on the floor where the children liked to have them and then taught each child to put his things away at the end of the day. The incessant, fatiguing job of constantly stooping to tidy up was unnecessary.

¹American Medical Ass'n., Today's Health Guide, 1965; pp229-234.

How many jobs can you lighten by thinking out new ways to do them? Think about jobs you can piecemeal. You cannot clean the ceiling or the wall in patches, but I know a woman who makes a two-day job of painting the floor of her outside porch. And if you have a big floor-scrubbing or floor-waxing job, why must you do it all at once?

"One young woman came to me complaining of almost constant pain. She had decided that she would save a few dollars by polishing the family car. She worked hard all day, rubbing and rubbing, driving the same set of shoulder muscles to the point of complete exhaustion. She woke during the night with intense pain in her arm, and when she got up the next morning she could hardly raise it. Months later when I saw her, she still couldn't use her arm for more than the lightest household tasks.

"Spreading the work out may not please the efficiency experts, but remember this when you wash windows: Don't do them all at once. Remember it too when you undertake to clean all the shelves and put down shelf paper in the kitchen closets and the pantry. Do one cabinet one day and attack another set of shelves a day or two later, until you have made the round. The world won't come to an end if you don't finish the job in one day!

"Next to scrambling your housework, probably the most important rule is to cultivate rhythm of movement. For instance, when you push a carpet sweeper, run it first on your right side, then on your left, as if to a dance step.

"Watch a dressmaker cut heavy material with her scissors. She cuts a few strokes, then relaxes, cut, relax, cut, relax, and her fingers never get tired. The barber follows the same principle; with his scissors he snips, snips, snips, then strokes the hair with his comb. Without that pause and change of pattern his finger muscles might be in spasm by the end of the day. The principle of rhythm applies especially to jobs like clipping hedges, scrubbing clothes on a laundry board, washing floors or windows--fact is, in any form of repetitive movement.

"There is a good physiological reason for developing a rhythm of movement. Each time a muscle contracts it squeezes blood out. When the muscle is forced to contract steadily without relaxing, as happens when you carry a heavy suitcase or package, the circulation of blood is cut down, although the muscle needs that blood to continue its effort. If, after holding a heavy bundle of groceries in one hand for a few minutes the muscles begin to hurt, you must shift the bundle to the other hand.

"Another way to avoid fatigue in housework is to avoid hurrying. Running up a flight of stairs puts a greater load on your heart (a muscular organ) than walking up slowly. The same thing applies to other muscles of your body. If you drive them too fast they may fail and quit, just as the heart muscle can fail.

"Ironically, many housewives work themselves into a state of exhaustion the day they have a cleaning woman in to help. In one case I know of, the housewife and the cleaning woman together, turned the mattresses on all the beds in the house, moved all the heavy furniture to clean behind it, then put up all the winter draperies and dusted all the moldings. That evening the housewife had a stiff neck and a hard pain between her shoulder blades. She had done the job in one day, yes. But she had paid for her hurry in physical suffering and in doctor's bills. How much cheaper and more sensible it would have been to spread the job over a week, even if she had to do part of it without the cleaning woman's help.

"Because this is an age of speed, most of us don't appreciate the importance of the rule that you should take short rests frequently.

"A few minutes of rest every hour is more likely to prevent muscle exhaustion than lying down for a couple of hours at a time after a long period of work. Try lying flat and relaxing for two minutes every hour while you are working. Stretch out on the sofa and look at the paper. Or lie on a couch or bed when you do your morning telephoning. Frequent breaks in your work will help avoid fatigue. It is no more than

any well-trained hunting dog does. He runs for awhile, then flops on the ground to rest for a few minutes or seconds. Don't save up all your work to do at one time and all your resting to do at another time. Mix them up.

"It should not be necessary to warn you to avoid sudden overloading of your muscles, yet that's one of the hardest rules to stick to. The amount of strain your muscles can endure depends partly on their tensile strength, and this varies with different individuals. Some people have frail muscles, just as others are born with delicate skin. An older woman with strong muscles can often lift more weight than a younger and apparently more vigorous woman whose muscles don't happen to be so powerful.

"Do not be surprised if after you have helped your husband transfer everything stored in the cellar to the attic, you are unable to raise your arms above your head for awhile. You should not attempt to move single objects that are too heavy for you. The world is full of people who awkwardly lift a bureau of desk to slide the rug underneath and then suffer backache for years. They don't know how to lift heavy objects as the moving-man does. Some of the severest cases of muscle injury have resulted from careless overloading of the body framework for just a few seconds.

"Another good rule is this: Don't sit too long in one position. When you sit through a double feature at the movies, turn your head about and rotate your shoulder blades every now and then. On long automobile rides, stop for a moment and walk back and forth by the road. Sit in a rocking chair when you read for a long time; the constantly changing position will relax your muscles and rest you.

"When there's a long job that you must do, such as writing letters or hand sewing, your body is held in a fixed position. This means that the muscles are constantly contracting without letup, and unless they are given a break and stretch once in awhile, they tend to shorten and go into spasm.

"The special curse of muscle strain is the way painful muscular spasm persists

after a momentary injury. A vicious cycle begins when the muscle is first pulled or the joint sprained. Nature tries to splint the part that hurts by contracting the muscles, but she often overdoes this job of immobilizing the injured part. The protective shortening of muscles is greater than needed and itself causes pain. The pain, in turn, causes more spasm. Then the muscle in spasm contracts down on the artery which supplies it with blood so decreases its own blood supply. This leads to further pain and more spasm. And so it goes, round and round in a circle.

"The fact that muscles shorten even when they are not moved explains why muscular pain often becomes worse at night. While you are lying still, healthy muscles relax, but injured muscles shorten further. Cat-stretches before you get out of bed in the morning will help equalize the tension of muscles and tune them up to make them ready to lift the load of the body.

"Don't let people tell you that back pain or shoulder pain is all mental or that it is a sign of age. Many young women who held office jobs before they marry put little muscular effort into their office work. After marriage, they have a baby or two and find themselves doing heavy physical labor eight or ten hours a day. Having had little experience with housework they don't realize what a big load it is on the muscles. Moreover, they don't know how to use their muscles properly, so they begin to suffer aches and pains and feel exhausted.

"When a young wife complains to me, 'I'm too young to be felling the way I do. How will I feel 10 years from now?' I say to her, 'I hope that you'll be wiser 10 years from now and will know how to take care of your muscles.'

"I am well aware that the perfectionists will resist or pooh-pooh the foregoing suggestions. So let me end with this bit of philosophy. It isn't the housework that's really important. It's homemaking. Housework is endless. You have to call a halt somewhere. The work horse who strains her muscles and her temper may want to make a good home for her husband and children, but actually she defeats her own purpose because she is too tired.

"So remember, your first obligation is to the members of your family, to create for them the atmosphere of a restful, loving, and harmonious home. Don't let housework get you down!"

It is essential in the light of present knowledge, that every family member meet basic health needs of:

- .A balanced diet according to needs.
- .Comfortable sleeping quarters and rest, according to needs.
- .Soap and water cleanliness in the home and in the habits of every family member.
- .Correction of remediable defects with the aid of the family physician and dentist.

Beyond these basic needs each individual need physical fitness program^{2, 3}, of his own.

- .An evaluation of physical fitness needs.
- .A recreational pursuit that calls for appropriate energy output.
- .Exercises to tone muscles, improve breathing, and increase energy.

Mental and Emotional Health⁴

Mental and Emotional Health is not just the concern of those who suffer from severe mental illness. There are few of us who cannot profit by applying certain principles of mental and emotional health to daily stresses and strains.⁵ It becomes important to establish a pattern for living that puts troubles and difficulties in the scheme of things so that they are not allowed to dominate our lives. Some of the ways to minimize frustrations and difficulties are:

- . Accept what you cannot change.
- . Set goals and ambitions that are reasonable for yourself and family members.
- . Try to understand your family member, neighbor, or associates even though they feel differently than you do.
- . Know that other people have problems too. Stress and strain is normal.
- . Use your resources.

Social Well-Being⁶

What do we mean by social well-being as an ingredient of health?

As far back as historical records go, the home and the family have constituted the center of human living. Many times they have been grouped together in villages or cities. Patterns of community organization have varied, but the home has been essentially the same throughout the centuries whether it was a cave, tent, covered wagon, a modest house, an apartment, a mansion, or a trailer.

Hopefully, how the home serves as a safe, convenient, comfortable shelter also relates to the way individual members in the home react to others outside of the home. Regardless of where or what the home is as a dwelling, it serves as a shelter and a center for all the activities of the family group. Persons of exceptionally strong individual character can overcome disadvantages due to inadequate homes, but often they do so with difficulty.

²President's Council on Physical Fitness, Adult Physical Fitness, Vim, Vigor.

³American Physical Fitness Research Institute, Inc., American Keep Fit Ladies Dozen.

⁴American Medical Ass'n., Today's Health Guide, 1965.

⁵Nebraska Psychiatric Institute, Use of Volunteers in Nebraska's Mental Health Program.

⁶American Medical Ass'n., Today's Health Guide, 1965, p. 2.