

Fitness Programs: An Up-Close-and- Personal Look At Personal Trainers

By DICK DAVIS

Mother said there would be days like this. She just never told me that one of those days would be *this* day at the Youngstown YMCA.

My revelations came as a result of an assignment by *The Business Journal* to find out what people can expect when they work with a personal trainer to develop an individualized fitness program.

My trainer of choice was Maureen Horvath, adult fitness director at the YMCA, who is responsible for running numerous fitness programs and overseeing a staff of 30 or so. The mother of five also goes far more than the extra mile in keeping herself fit.

For Horvath, it's running, lifting weights, racquetball and swimming. Climbing out of bed at 4:45 a.m., she gets to her job by 5:30, finishing her days about 9 p.m. by helping out at one, or both, of the restaurants owned by one of her sons.

"My kids can't believe that I can go the way I do," she says. "But there is no way I could maintain this level of activity without exercising. It is

absolutely essential to exercise, because we lose muscle mass as we age. I feel that weight lifting or weight training is the most important thing we can do for every part of our body."

In addition, Horvath runs 15 to 20 miles a week. A bad back, which she believes was strained by too much exercise about six years ago, is kept under control with proper workouts.

But today, it's my turn. Right from the start, Horvath pulls no punches. "You know that as we age we lose muscle mass and bone density," she says. "After the age of 25 or so, you lose about a half-pound of muscle tissue each year.

"That's the process of aging. Our bodies don't respond in the ways that they used to. And you're what, 46?"

She's talking to me?

Well, it must be me - I'm the only other person in the room. And, I plead guilty to being 46.

My first discovery, then, was that I am indeed aging. I thought I knew that; but a part of me also believed that running long distances - as I've done for most of the past two decades - would keep me young forever.

Some of the news was good. My low percentage of body fat classifies me as "very lean" and in the 95th percentile among men my age.

Not that I'd be obese if I didn't run; I've inherited the metabolism of a caffeine-addled hummingbird. I burn calories by blinking.

My body is about 14 percent fat, which Horvath informs me translates to about 20 pounds of blubber on my 5-foot, 10-inch, 143-pound frame. This she calculated by taking skinfold measurements (or at least what passes for skinfolds) at seven points of my body.

Next came a flexibility test - and once again, I scored well. I place, Horvath says, in the 88th percentile in the trunk flexion test, which basically measures how far you can stretch from your trunk while sitting on the floor with your legs straight and stable. Stretching after my runs, I think, has paid off.

The good results continued with the sit-up test, where she tells me I place in the "above average" 60th percentile.

From here, it starts to go downhill. My cardiorespiratory endurance places me in the 68th percentile - above average, but not nearly as high as I expected it to be.

Frankly, I was winded from the three-minute test during which I stepped from the floor to a 12-inch high bench and back again - left foot up, right foot up, and so forth.

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THE BEAT GOES ON - Maureen Horvath, adult fitness director at the Youngstown YMCA, checks the heart rate of *Business Journal* writer Dick Davis as he undergoes a personal fitness evaluation.

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Training

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For the next minute, Horvath takes my pulse while I rest – and pant like I'd just escaped the clutches of the Grim Reaper. My heart clocks in at 100 beats per minute; better than nothing, perhaps, but not as low as I had hoped.

The last test brought the really bad news. My weight-lifting results place me in the 20th percentile, or "poor" for men my age, Horvath points out. The test measures the strength and endurance of the chest and triceps muscles.

Horvath is a true professional; never once did she laugh, chuckle, sigh, point a finger or even roll her eyes as I struggled with the axle, er, barbell. Instead, she matter-of-factly explained the aging process. "It happens to everyone," she told me. "You just need some weight training. That will help you a lot."

It also happens I've inherited a weak spot in my neck that needs professional adjusting or manipulation from time to time. My doctor cracks my neck and upper and lower back; we jokingly refer to it as my 5,000-mile tune-up. Recently, the neck pain persisted to the point where the doctor could no longer adjust my spine. X-rays were ordered to determine the possibility of nerve or disc damage.

A few days later I got the call with results. "Dick, the X-rays showed just the normal deterioration of your discs at the top of your spine," the doctor's assistant told me. "This happens with aging, you know?"

Had she talked with Maureen Horvath?

Along the way, I've rationalized that persistent problems with my neck and upper back have skewed my weight-lifting efforts. Working with Horvath, however, I'm forced to admit that's not true. Without the neck pain, I may have grunted one or two more barbell presses – advancing me all the way up to the strength category of a 15-year-old girl. Wow.

It is time, I now realize, to listen to the professionals in developing a weight-training program.

Now, Horvath takes over. It is a basic principle of fitness, she explains, that muscles, when properly exercised, will increase in size while those that are not will atrophy. Thus, the objectives for my personal training program are to build muscle, increase endurance and maintain – possibly increase – flexibility. It is my hope that by adding some muscle, a painful, persistent problem with my neck and upper back

will be somewhat relieved. Patiently, Horvath explains what I need to do to reach the level of physical conditioning I should be in and walks me through some of the exercises designed to get me there.

From now on, it's up to me. Will I reach my goals, especially given that I've become wary of the aches and pains that come with running? At this point, I don't know. I *do* know, however, that I'm now armed with the knowledge I need, thanks to my experience with a personal trainer. **B**

Test Results: A Personalized Training Program

Here is a closer look at the personal training program recommended for writer Dick Davis by Maureen Horvath, adult fitness coordinator at the Youngstown YMCA. She emphasizes that a doctor should be consulted before undergoing a fitness test and starting an exercise program.

Fitness program objectives:

- Build muscle.
- Maintain or increase cardiovascular endurance.
- Maintain or possibly increase flexibility.
- Gain three pounds.
- Add muscle in the hope of minimizing a painful, persistent problem with neck and upper back.

Daily:

Isometric and isotonic exercises for neck and shoulders. Because I sit from eight to 12 hours a day in front of a computer, these exercises are especially important. The isometric routines are designed to restore and maintain muscle strength while the isotonic exercises should improve movement and pain associated with stiffness.

Three Days a Week:

A program of either free weights or a Cybex-type system, depending on how my neck responds, every other day. The goal is to build muscle, especially in my

upper body. This is accomplished, Horvath explains, through proper stimulation of the muscles, proper rest and exercise. She suggests swimming or exercising in the water to reduce jarring and stress on my joints.

Weekly:

Continue to run at least three times a week for 20 minutes each time, maintaining a heart rate between 104 and 148 beats per minute. This heart rate is my personal "training zone," which is from 60 to 85 percent of my "maximum heart rate" of 174 (the MVR is calculated by subtracting chronological age from 220).

First, however, comes a warm-up period of 5 to 12 minutes of activity until I feel the "heat" produced by my body. This is essential to reach my training zone, Horvath cautions; it's not productive to step out the door and start sprinting. On the other end of the run, stretching, done as part of the cool-down process, will increase flexibility, promote circulation and reduce stress.

Diet:


Continue eating pattern of 2,600 calories-a-day, with emphasis on low-fat foods that include plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pasta and water. This diet, Horvath says, should allow for muscle growth and some weight gain throughout the weight-training program.

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