

Fitness: On the Rise

By David Sloniegora

The fitness industry is an ever-evolving industry that is partially determined by human interest, as well as injury prevention and science. For example, when Jane Fonda started selling exercise video tapes in the early 1980s, she probably had no idea as to how she would greatly affect the fitness industry in such a positive way—if she didn't already help to create the fitness industry. Fonda was in the right place at the right time, and she had definitely created an interest.

Time for Change?

During the late '80s and early '90s, however, there had been a lot of evolution in exercise modifications as a direct result of injuries people sustained through certain exercises of this era. Bouncing movements such as toe touches and full sit-ups were suddenly "out," replaced by controlled movements and crunches. There also was the implementation of Nautilus machines, bringing weight training into the mainstream.

The year 1970, Nautilus was founded, but the '80s created baby "body-shaping" boomers. Before the fitness boom, the only people that would even touch a dumbbell were serious bodybuilders. Joe Weider (and his brother Ben, in Montreal) had become one of the

founders of bodybuilding and fitness, as everything he had touched (be it magazines, equipment, or what have you) became gold. Other exercise pioneers include Jack Lalane and Jake Steinfield (aka Body by Jake). Along with the boom in exercise popularity, there had been an influx of exercise fads and trends—giving leeway to many a charlatan to make a quick buck.

Speaking of charlatan, there were a lot of skeptics when a certain chiropractor developed one of the first abdominizer infomercials in the mid-80s, claiming his piece of hard plastic equipment (which looked like a blue mini snow-sled) allowed people to work their abdominal muscles with full sit-ups without hurting themselves. The fact that the marketing was in the form of an infomercial probably cheapened the credibility of this product that actually did do what it claimed. These days, infomercials seem to be the medium of choice to pedal an exercise product.

Peek into the Future

From fitness to bodybuilding to supplements, the future looks bright for the industry. To understand where the industry is heading, however, it is first important to realize how fitness trends are forecasted and determined. A few governing bodies in the exercise field (IDEA, ECA, Can-Fit-Pro)

hold conferences and workshops where a vast assortment of exercise classes and lectures in which fitness professionals take part. The speakers are the ones who present the different exercise classes or workshops and are the ones who try to implement new ideas to make exercise not only interesting but scientifically sound and injury-free. From there, fitness instructors and personal trainers bring these new ideas and concepts about exercise to fitness facilities, where they can generate possible interest. If they do, then they are on their way to creating a trend and possibly a mainstay exercise.

"Because of core conditioning's benefits, it is becoming very popular."

Fitness Trends

The IDEA Health and Fitness Association creates an annual fitness trend report, where it concludes which types of exercise programs and classes are the most popular amongst fitness facilities, including big and small fitness chains, as well as university- and YMCA-based programs. Thus far, IDEA has determined the following types of fitness regimens to have the highest member participation:

Core Conditioning. This is a serious exercise class for dedicated

exercisers, attracting people who are familiar with other core classes such as pilates and yoga. People are realizing how important it is to train the core—referring to the abdominal and lower back muscles—in order for the body to work as a whole and become stronger and more resilient because of it. Because of the so many positive benefits of core conditioning, core classes are becoming very popular among the mature population as well—something for everyone to think about at any age.

Flexibility/Stretching. An older population that is also interested in yoga has shown a great interest in keeping limber throughout the golden years, which can explain why stretching classes have become so popular that they needed to be a class on their own. They also have become integrated into other types of classes.

Group Strength Training. People now know that weight-bearing exercise is essential for strong bones and bodies, so these classes have become very popular. Variations of this class can be offered with the use of equipment such as free weights, stability balls, balance boards and machines.

Yoga. So many kinds of yoga classes are being offered, from gentle Hatha Yoga to Ashtanga Yoga and even kids' yoga, and it

remains a popular mainstay at fitness facilities.

Bodybuilding Trends

With the many ways to build the body, people are always looking for workouts that give more results. Super-slow resistance training has become popular lately as a safe way for anyone to shape the body, regardless of training level. This training protocol increases muscle tension during a workout by decreasing the speed of each exercise movement. Super-slow training was developed in 1982 by Ken Hutchins, using this method with mature women who had osteoporosis and needed a safer speed to workout with weights or machines.

With regular resistance training, 8-12 repetitions are usually performed, moving the weight up for two seconds, pausing for one second, and then slowly lowering the weight for four seconds. Each set of this regular method takes about 55-85 seconds. Super-slow training uses four to six repetitions, raising the weight up for ten seconds, then down for four seconds, each set also taking 55-85 seconds to complete.

Supplement Trends

Supplements, or ergogenic aids, are, for some people, an important part of the fitness and nutrition regimen. Many believe there is a magic pixie dust that will give them everything they want in terms of

performance and looking good, so they will try every new pill or powder that comes out. Whether these products actually work is sometimes unknown, due to a lack of quality controlled studies. Of the reported ergogenic aids that have come and gone, a few of them have remained, with a loyal following of people who swear by them.

HMB. Short for beta hydroxy beta methylbutyrate, HMB is a compound found in foods such as alfalfa and catfish that is also produced by the body. Derived from the branched-chain amino acid leucine, HMB (sold as calcium-HMB) is claimed to prevent muscle breakdown and, thus, increases muscle mass when used in conjunction with regular weight training and an adequate diet.

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Glutamine. Glutamine is a nonessential amino acid (ie: the body can produce it) that is produced by the muscles, liver and fat tissue. It is believed that during periods of stress—including exercise, fasting or illness—the demands for glutamine are much higher than the body can produce itself, so supplementing may offset the need and, therefore, prevent muscle protein loss.

Creatine. Creatine, methylguanidine-acetic acid, is

composed of the three amino acids: arginine, glycine and methionine. It can be obtained in foods such as meats and fish, and its primary use is to provide energy during short-term, high-intensity exercise, such as weight-training or sprinting, which in turn can lead to increased muscle size.

Chromium. Chromium is an essential nutrient found abundantly in meats, grains, cheese and nuts. Sold as chromium picolinate, chromium plays a role in metabolism by helping the body use insulin better. Therefore, it is believed to aid in fat loss.

“... Fitness is important for everyone.”

Androstenedione.

Androstenedione (4-5-androstene-3 beta, 17 beta-dione) is the steroid hormone produced by the adrenal glands and gonads (testicals). It can be converted by testosterone in the blood, and it is responsible for increases in muscle size and strength. Although androstenedione supplements are sold in health food stores in the United States, they are illegal in Canada and are banned by the International Olympic Committee, the National Football league and the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

A Look Back

A lot can happen in five years. In particular, more and more

special populations have emerged over the past few years, sending the message that fitness and bodybuilding is indeed important for everyone. The elderly are finding out that lifting weights, combined with a good stretching program and aerobic exercise, is important for vitality at a later age. People with HIV/AIDS have been strongly urged to participate in weight training/bodybuilding to offset the effects of the disease or medications, which tend to cause muscle wasting, and corporations are realizing the benefits of investing in corporate wellness by means of implementing exercise into the workplace, to forego expensive health insurance bills.

As the technology and process for fitness improve and society becomes more aware of the benefits of a regular fitness regimen for whole-body wellness, the industry will only continue to grow. The increasing options will help all sectors of society find a way to keep fit that they can benefit and enjoy. **PMPR**

David Sloniegura is a Montreal-based fitness expert with schooling in exercise science and nutrition. He incorporates basic fitness and nutrition concepts as a personal trainer within a gym setting, but also travels to people's homes to work with them on a one-on-one basis. His expertise includes weight training and bodysculpting, focusing on proper biomechanics and injury prevention, Aeroboxe (cardio kickboxing), Spinning (Cycle Reebok) and Pilates. Sloniegura also recently released his first core-fitness video, Abnotomy. www.abnatomy.com