

# health + fitness **body** mind **spirit**

by marisa iallonardo illustrations by paula romani



## A RUNNING START

**M**ove over, Boston. Step aside, New York City. One of the oldest—and most difficult—marathons in the country happens right here in Yonkers, and it takes place on the third Sunday in September. The Yonkers Marathon is the second oldest in the country (Boston's is the oldest) and was once used as a qualifying marathon for the Olympics. In

fact, John J. Kelly, a member of both the 1956 and 1960 U.S. Olympic teams, won the Yonkers Marathon eight years in a row, and it was after his record win in 1960 that he qualified for the Rome Olympics.

But it's small: about 500 people run the full 26.2-mile and mini 13.1-mile race. In comparison, some 37,000 people run the New York City race. So, why so few participants? "Yonkers is a tough marathon," says spokesperson August Cambria. "It has more than its share of hills. It's really popular with die-hard marathoners, but those looking for fast times usually stay away." The course, a double loop, begins near the Yonkers Riverfront Library, winding along the Hudson at various points, up to Hastings, and through the downtown area before ending back at the library. This year, the 83rd running of the race will be held on September 21. For more information, go to [yonkersny.gov](http://yonkersny.gov).

**Beware of hot, dry, windy days and welcome rainy days that wash the pollen to the ground.** →

## DECODING POLLEN COUNT

**EVER WATCH THE WEATHER REPORT** and wonder what in the world the pollen count means? So did we. To find out, we consulted Dr. Kira Geraci, a board-certified allergist in Mamaroneck, and News12 Westchester weatherman Joe Rao.

**What it is:** While there are various outlets that count pollen, the most noted is the National Allergy Bureau, a division of the American Academy of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology, which has 69 counting stations throughout the U.S. The Westchester station is located in Armonk.

**How it is measured:** Dr. Geraci, who was a pollen counter for 10 years, explains that certified counters use special equipment to capture pollen samples from the air. Under a microscope, they count the number of grains found on the slide and then, using predetermined formulas to account for wind, air, etc., they calculate the number of pollen grains per cubic meter. The higher the number, the higher the pollen concentration.



**What it means:** The count usually runs on a four-point scale—low, moderate, high, and very high—with the higher the number, the more pollen in the air. Numeric measures are also sometimes given, with again, the higher the number the higher the concentration.

**What to do:** If you have allergies and the count is particularly high, Rao and Dr. Geraci recommend keeping windows and door closed, running your air conditioner or air purifiers to minimize pollens circulating indoors, showering, and changing your clothes after coming in from outside.



## THE ULTIMATE FITNESS SHOWDOWN:

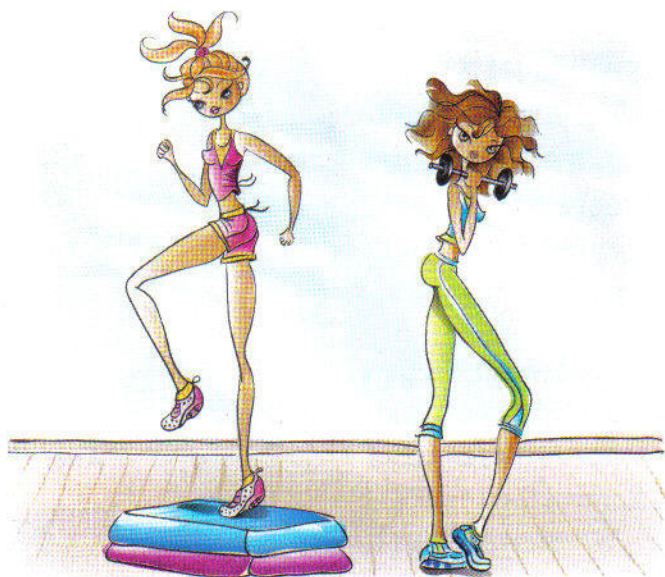
## CARDIO VS. WEIGHTS

**W**hich is better for burning calories, doing cardio or lifting weights? The answer is as difficult, it seems, as running long-distance and bench-pressing 50 pounds.

You will burn more calories doing cardio, says Lenny Sarrero, a personal trainer in Briarcliff Manor. "Even though I love weights, you're not going to burn as many calories. With aerobics, your heart rate rises and stays there the entire time you work out. You end up burning more calories because your heart rate stays elevated."

But... "Cardiovascular activity, let's say running or biking, will burn more calories," says Dr. Michael Cushner, an orthopedic surgeon with practices in White Plains and Yonkers. "But the calories will burn more effectively if you lift weights." The reason?

Muscle tissue requires a lot of energy to exist and function. So the greater your muscle mass, the more calories you need to sustain that musculature. Therefore the more muscle, the more calories you'll burn doing the same cardio activity you did before you added the extra muscle. Plus, strengthening muscles helps avoid common cardio-related injuries, such as joint sprains. So, while you may want to hit the treadmill to burn off that extra slice of cheesecake, make sure to also pick up the weights to help burn it off even faster.



## COUNTING CALORIES

**WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE:** AFTER A GRUELING workout on the treadmill, we glance down at the calorie counter and are particularly satisfied with the number we've burned. Or, at least, the number we *think* we've burned. Because, as it turns out, the digits displayed are not a very accurate measurement at all.

"Calorie counters are usually set to calculate calories for a certain size person," reports Andrew Guida, exercise physiologist and fitness director at the Saw Mill Club in Mount Kisco. So, let's say the person is a 150-pound male. Specific scientific data will be used to calculate the number of calories that man will burn at a given speed, difficulty, and time. That result is what is displayed on the screen. As can be imagined, if a 100-pound female and a 250-pound male are running at the same speed, difficulty, and time, their caloric outputs will be vastly different. Accuracy increases when machines allow you to enter your age, weight, height, and gender but, again, the number will never be an exact numerical measurement because of varying fitness levels.

Jim Zahniser, spokesperson for Precor, a fitness equipment manufacturing company, notes, "Basically, the workout machines are extremely accurate as generalized norms. But they are not absolutely accurate to an individual." The company recommends a fitness test be done for an exact measurement. "Only with that detailed information can you make tight correlations."

Another important factor, Guida notes, is calibration of the machines. "As machines get older, they tend to get a little out of whack, which will affect the formulas put into the machine." This can go so far as to affect the speed at which you're running. If you set the machine to run at a speed of 6.0, and the machine is not calibrated correctly, you could in reality be running only at a 5.6 speed.

So, how do you avoid the need to watch the numbers? "The point is that, as long as you're out there working for the right amount of time and at the right intensity for you, you're doing well," Guida says. Or, just throw a towel over the display and keep on moving.

STAYING HEALTHY  
AT THE GYM

While working up a sweat on the treadmill, most of us are not thinking about the germs we might be contracting. But the gym, with its close quarters and large number of people using the same equipment, can actually cause the spread of the flu, fungal infections, or even MRSA (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), the much talked-about form of staph infection that is resistant to common antibiotics. But this shouldn't be an excuse to avoid the gym. We consulted two of the county's leading infectious-disease specialists to find out what you can do to protect yourself.

**WASH YOUR HANDS** "The best thing you can do is wash your hands with soap and water, or carry a bottle of Purell hand sanitizer," says Dr. Peter Berkey, the chief of infectious disease at St. Joseph's Medical Center and St. John's Riverside Hospital in Yonkers. Dr. Peter Welch, who has an office in Armonk, explains that most germs are spread by touching and not through the air. And, he warns, "washing your hands thoroughly does not mean a three-second rinse. It means scrubbing for about a minute so you can really decontaminate your skin."

**WEAR SHOES** "Showers are a nice place for bacteria and fungus to grow," Dr. Berkey says. The moist air and heat in communal gym showers (as well as in hot tubs) can be a breeding ground for bacteria. Fungal infections such as athlete's foot or onychomycosis, an infection of the nails that can cause them to become yellow and brittle, can be contracted if you don't take the proper precautions. Both doctors advise wearing flip-flops in the shower and locker room.

**WIPE DOWN MACHINES** Although Dr. Berkey stresses that wiping down machines before and after use is not enough (wash those hands!), he says it is still a good idea to do it. "It's good, but it doesn't really get done," he explains. To start the trend in your gym, wipe down the machines before and after use to, as Dr. Welch explains, avoid the spread of germs through touch. If someone is sick and then sweats on the machines or wipes their nose and then touches the equipment, you can contract their germs—that can cause staph, which can survive on machines for a few hours, or other infections.





## IS FOOD WRITING FATTENING?

By Robert Schork

**I**s writing about food for a living an inherently unhealthy line of work? We turned to our own food writers, Judith Hausman and Julia Sexton, to share insights from their personal experiences.

"Practically all careers have inherent dangers," Sexton notes. "Artists are prone to respiratory illnesses from the chemicals they use, truck drivers have a high incidence of kidney injuries, air-traffic controllers have stress-related illnesses like hypertension and heart disease."

And food writers? "In my experience, it's the writing aspect of my work that's unhealthy," Sexton says. "When I was cooking for a living, I ate more richly, plus drank like a fish, yet my weight and general health were fine. I was moving constantly and running up and down a double flight of stairs back and forth to the prep kitchen. It was only when I started to spend my days staring at a laptop, interspersed with bouts of indulgent eating, that I began to gain weight. My writing-makes-you-fat theory was proven last year when I spent two weeks in Emilia-Romagna, essentially touring all day and eating Italy's richest food at every meal. I lost weight because I wasn't spending my days in front of a computer."

"While there are fat people in the food world, I always think it's more surprising how many *thin* people there are," adds fellow food writer Hausman, who blames age more than occupation. For her, the weight issue is universal. "No magic secrets: calories in, calories out, and a lucky metabolism, which I don't have, but William Grimes and Ruth Reichl at least do. I did always wonder, though, if I could deduct a spa week as a business expense." Sexton's cholesterol has remained in check thanks to good genes, "but I have gained weight since becoming a writer. I'm not, however, in the four-hundred-pound Drew Nieporent/Jack Perlow/old Frank Bruni league...yet. Reichl made it a rule to walk to every restaurant she visited. My philosophy is to exercise and to have two different eating styles — 'working' and 'non-working.' This means that I eat simple, low-calorie breakfasts of cereal and fruit, and equally modest lunches and dinners—unless I'm tasting something or visiting a restaurant for work."

Both Sexton and Hausman refute the assertion that most people are in their profession simply as an excuse to overindulge. "You have to eat bad food, too, that you had to drive far to eat," explains Hausman.

# 8

## GLASSES A DAY?

*Just water under the bridge*

**"DRINK EIGHT GLASSES OF WATER A DAY,"** or so we've been told for decades. But do we really need to?

"No," says Dr. Karen Reznik Dolins, a registered dietician and nutritionist who is also a professor of nutrition at Columbia University. "A few years ago, a researcher decided to read the literature and see where this advice came from. And there's nothing that supports the recommendation." A December 2007 study published in the *British Medical Journal* reviewed the literature on drinking water and came to the same conclusion: there's no scientific basis to the famous "8 x 8" (eight eight-ounce glasses of water a day) rule.

So, how much should we drink? There is no set answer. If you're healthy—your kidneys, heart, and thirst mechanisms function well—trust your instincts, experts say, and drink when thirsty. There is no scientific evidence



that drinking lots of water helps skin tone, wards off headaches, helps your organs work better, or makes you eat less. It will make you run to the bathroom more (so perhaps you'll expend more calories that way). Plus, we get our fluids in many, many other ways—not just H<sub>2</sub>O.

"We used to say that if you're drinking something with caffeine in it, you'll urinate more and lose fluid," Dr. Reznik Dolins says. "But it was found that in the short term you may urinate more, but at the end of the day it will balance out. So, caffeinated beverages contribute to your daily water intake."

If you are very active, however, the American College of Sports Medicine recommends you weigh yourself before and after exercise to measure water loss. One pound is equal to two glasses of water, so if you've lost two pounds while exercising, you'll need to drink four glasses of water to replace what you've lost and keep yourself hydrated.

When it comes to drinking water, the best advice Dr. Reznik Dolins offers is: "Drink enough so you're urinating regularly—every two to four hours—and so that your urine looks clear."





**F**eel the urge to take an afternoon catnap? Do. "The evidence is starting to mount that taking a nap is beneficial for normal, healthy adults," reports Dr. Bruno DiCosmo, a Westchester Medical Group pulmonary critical-care doctor and internist with a sub-specialty in

## Take a Nap

sleep medicine. "There are studies that indicate that memory, the ability to learn, and your general alertness dramatically increase after a nap."

Napping can be good for your heart as well. A study published in 2007 found that participants who took 30-minute naps at least three times a week were 37 percent less likely to die of heart disease than those who didn't nap. The study, which for more than six years followed 23,681 Greek participants with no history of heart disease, cancer, or stroke, found napping most beneficial for working men, and researchers cite the reduction in stress levels as a possible explanation.

According to Dr. DiCosmo, who also is the associate director of the White Plains Hospital Sleep Lab, keeping the nap short is key. He explains that sleep comes in four stages plus REM sleep, and we move progressively from stage 1 to REM. "Stage one is about ten minutes and stage two is another ten-to-fifteen minutes. It's those first two stages that appear to restore people."

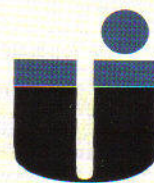
It's important to note that napping is beneficial for healthy adults with no evidence of sleep problems. Dr. Rochelle Waldman, the medical director of the White Plains Hospital Sleep Lab, explains that if you cannot sleep through the night, taking a nap will only mask what could be a larger problem. "If you experience excessive daytime sleepiness, it may be a sign of, for example, sleep apnea," she explains.

If you can sleep through the night, Dr. DiCosmo says the ideal time to nap is between noon and 3 pm. Don't have time to catch some mid-day ZZZs? Then he recommends getting in at least eight to nine hours of uninterrupted nighttime sleep to help you stay alert and awake throughout the day.



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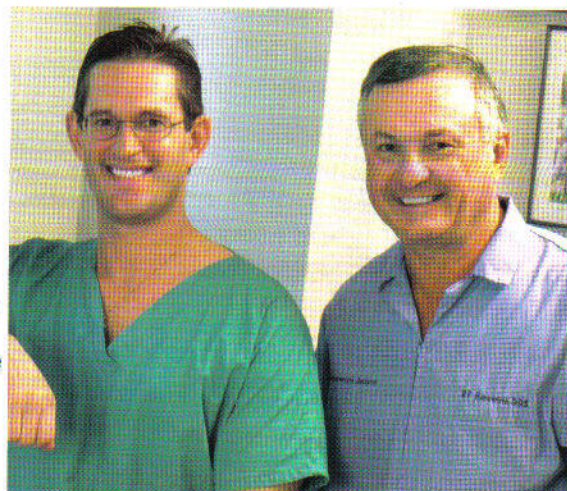
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