[IMAGE]

Secrets to Staying Healthy

By Editorial Staff

Sometimes, knowledge comes from experience; sometimes, it comes from listening to someone who's experienced it firsthand. Learn the secrets to staying healthy in this interview with Sarah Harding-Traverso, two-time Ms. Fitness USA and a true advocate of natural health and wellness.

You were Ms. Fitness USA in 2004 and 2006. Tell us about the contest. Ms. Fitness has three judged rounds: spokesmodel, physique and routine; they resemble a traditional beauty pageant's respective three rounds: evening gown, swimsuit and talent. What makes the Ms. Fitness contest unique, and especially pertinent to today's modern woman, is its focus on women's health. Each round celebrates a contestant's decision to prioritize her health, get in shape and nurture a positive self-image.

Fox Sports Net televises the routine round, which consists of a 90-second dance and gymnastics performance. Contestants demonstrate their physical strength, flexibility and endurance. In the physique round, contestants wear a bikini to show their muscle tone. Ms. Fitness strives to encourage a healthy body image and requires women to maintain reasonable levels of body fat. Unlike bodybuilding, there is no flexing. During the spokesmodel round, women wear elegant gowns and give speeches on their philosophy of fitness. This round allows the judges to hear why each contestant values health and prioritizes fitness.

Sarah Harding-Traverso with her Ms. Fitness USA award. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Photo taken by Jo Ann McKee. **Given the many years that you've competed in gymnastics and fitness, has an injury ever potentially prevented you from continuing your career?** Yes. In 1996, my freshman year at Stanford, I suffered from a stress fracture in my lower back. I couldn't walk without pain. I couldn't even sleep through the night. At the time, I was on a full-ride athletic scholarship. I didn't know if I could continue my gymnastics career.

I never would have thought that 10 years later, I'd not only be pain-free, I'd also be a professional acrobat performing two shows a night, 10 shows a week, 480 shows a year! Through that difficult injury, I learned how important it is to go to a chiropractor and have regular maintenance on your spine, like you do your eyes and teeth.

Our bodies have to last us the rest of our lives. The best medicine is preventative. Thanks to chiropractic, I was able to increase circulation, strengthen my core and align my entire body. Sure, I get my fair share of bumps and bruises as a professional acrobat. However, now I have the tools to take care of myself and enjoy the career that I love.

Tell us a bit about your physical training and how you prepared for the fitness contest. Regular visits to the chiropractor are part of my physical training - just like proper nutrition and adequate rest. It's important to keep my body physically in balance while I recover and refuel after an intense workout. And let me tell you, these fitness contest trainings were hard!

My coach, a former world-class Hungarian gymnast, led my physical training. Zoltan Miklos Hajdu, who I called "Uldi," put me through 25-minute interval workouts. We'd jump quickly from one exercise to the next. The assignment went something like this: 10 pull-ups; 1-minute jog; 50 "V-snap" sit-ups; 1-minute jog; 25 push-ups; 1-minute jog, etc. These were explosive sets. It was imperative to execute the set quickly with clean form. Even my toes were pointed. Instead of just working one body part, I flexed my entire body.

This style of anaerobic exercise is the most efficient way to naturally release human growth hormone (HGH). Research shows HGH is considered the modern-day "fountain of youth." It combats aging by building muscle, burning fat and speeding metabolism. It keeps our skin elastic and our energy high. As we grow older, we produce less and less HGH. By choosing to exercise - whether we're training for a fitness contest or just looking to stay in shape - we can naturally release HGH. No matter how old we get, we can look and feel younger.

What do you recommend people do to get healthy and stay physically fit? There are seven things people can do to live a healthier life. Perhaps the easiest way to remember all seven is to think of what three verbs are at the heart of any healthy relationship: respect, communicate and love. If you can imagine you are going to have a healthy relationship with your body, you would do the following: Respect your body's needs, communicate a positive self-image and love your unique qualities.

I teach these three principles to my clients. Last year, I started Sarah Harding Fitness, Inc. (www.sarahhardingfitness.com) to encourage others to find *their* fitness. Our body is our temple. It houses our mind and spirit. If we nourish our body, we can feed our mind and nurture our soul. Many people are afraid to develop a healthy relationship with their body, for fear it could be considered vain or self-centered. But how vain is it to have more energy to spend time with your kids? Is it really self-centered to feel more

affectionate toward your spouse? Our health affects our relationships. When we take care of ourselves, we can give more to our loved ones.

Which supplements and herbs would you recommend? When it comes to supplements, it's important to research what is right for your individual body. I personally take supplements. As much as I would like to get all my vitamins and minerals from food, I've found my body needs more than the food alone can provide.

Every morning, I take a multi-green powder that contains vitamins, minerals, high-fiber vegetables, probiotics and essential fatty acids. It starts my day off right! I like to mix it with diluted, unsweetened cranberry juice, which reduces water retention and promotes proper urinary tract function. Antioxidants, sublingual vitamin B (folic acid, B_6 and B_{12}), hyaluronic acid, chlorella, and bee pollen are also a part of my daily routine.

You won the Ms. Fitness USA contest twice - that's quite an accomplishment. What was different about the second time you won? The greatest difference was I got married. Getting married opened my eyes to what health really means: There's only one thing better than having good health and that's having someone with whom to share it!

At the end of the day, we may not remember what we did, but we know who we were with. Our relationships fill us with joy and fulfillment. It's important to nurture those relationships with others. That is why it is so crucial to prioritize our health. We need to feel good before we can help others feel good.

My 90-second fitness routine during the 2006 contest depicted a bride-to-be preparing for her wedding day. Through her dance and gymnastic skills, she expressed her excitement to start her life with her beloved husband. She found new motivation to take care of herself. She found someone to live for!

My routine's music was a Michael Buble song. The lyrics said, "It's a new dawn; it's a new day; it's a new life. And I'm feeling good." In order to make the most of life, we need to feel good from the inside out.

Your Body is a Temple

Here are seven ways people can respect, communicate and love their bodies and their whole selves, courtesy of Sarah Harding-Traverso:

Respect your body's needs:

1. *Ensure Proper Nutrition.* Eat small portions, five or six times a day. Have breakfast. Avoid eating just before bed. Read food labels to understand what's in your food. Compare serving sizes. Make sure that what you *think* is healthy *is* healthy.

2. *Eat Whole, Natural Foods.* Eat foods on the low glycemic index diet. Avoid trans fats and sweeteners. Drink water. Consume enough protein, essential fatty acids and fiber.

3. *Exercise Regularly.* Set goals. Find a coach or trainer. Join a class or exercise with a partner. Stay motivated! Your workouts should include:

- Stretching - to increase circulation and set a good mood for the entire day;
- Multi-Joint Exercises - to maintain flexibility and optimal function; and
- Interval Workouts - to naturally release human growth hormone.

4. *Get Enough Sleep.* Prioritize your rest, recuperation and sleep. Sleep helps manage stress.

5. *See a Chiropractor.* Start learning how to keep your body in alignment. Practice preventative medicine.

Communicate a positive self-image to yourself:

6. *Keep a journal to stay focused on your goals.* Remind yourself daily that you have a choice; it's up to you to determine how you want to lead your life. Communicate your goals to your friends and family. Let them help support you and be a part of your success.

Love your unique qualities:

7. *Part of love is acceptance, appreciation and forgiveness.* We are the toughest judge of ourselves; it's hard to forgive ourselves when we make a mistake. Recognize that a mistake is an opportunity to learn. Grow from conflict and appreciate your strengths. We are given the gift of life. Find the courage to take risks and develop your unique qualities.

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