

## GYM RAT OR JUST FAT

It had to happen and it did – how could I not be effected? In a world full of perfect bodies and ‘healthy-meaning- starved-slim’ TV ads AND those drop-dead gorgeous clothes in the shops which will fit only the ‘Barbie’ creatures amongst us, how could I remain immune? And then, the self-development books also keep reiterating the importance of a healthy and fit body – they don’t talk about ‘weight loss’ or ‘being thin’ very candidly but then they insinuate the same when they stress upon regular exercise and a healthy diet.

Then, there’s this ‘regular sweat- lovers’ brigade at the moms club – you can identify them by their tracks and trainers – who extol the virtues of having your endorphins secreted on a regular basis.

“Such a high!”, they gush

‘Oh My God! The feeling of sweat trickling down your body and your cheeks flushing’, they reverentially sigh.

‘Nothing matches the radiance of an extensively worked out face’, they vociferously declare!

Now, which lady in her the prime of her middle age, wouldn’t want a face flushed with radiance and have her endorphins dancing around?!! I was convinced – yet again!

I toyed with the different options I had to induce my ‘still dormant’ sweat glands to work overtime – some possibilities suggested by the ‘sweat-lovers’ brigade at the club were – jogging(to turn into sprinting), cycling, yoga, Zumba etc. My utterly confused and yet, fascinated face must’ve given me away- because soon I was taken to a corner by a well-meaning member of that brigade and advised to join a gym. ‘The music and the machines will get you into the mood’, she said. And so, the latter part of the same day saw me enrolling into the neighborhood gym – it’s easier to have a trainer to guide you, she had also suggested.

So, there I was in front of my newly enrolled, upscale state –of – the- art gym – in comfortable track bottoms and a tee- ready to take on all these sweat- machines. And then, there’s something about these high-energy places with their ‘pump-up’ music, glistening machines, shining and sweat-soaked bodies that just gets you geared up. I was so raring to go that the trainer had to almost hold me back from going and back-slapping people and egging them on...I would’ve let out a war-cry – or maybe a gym-cry when I looked around and took in a good, realistic view...

Have you ever had the feeling that perhaps you're in the wrong era? Or maybe even the wrong eon? I distinctly felt like a fossil – maybe of the Paleozoic era- who's accidentally stepped on the accelerator of the time machine and has sped off into a very distant future. The gym looked right out of a sci-fi movie and all the humans huffing and puffing – very easily it seemed, didn't need to be here! Each one had a perfect or maybe a near perfect body and my guess is that they were planted here by the marketing division of the gym for their ornamental value!



A young man (with a perfect body) ambled over – and gave me a broad welcoming grin and asked me to complete a few formalities of the form and such – ‘and such’ being a hefty monthly fee! Oh well! All for the cause of a fit body!

And then, it started. He asked me about my activity level – I was very active, I said – daily rushing about the house etc.

“No, no” –he said, he wanted to know in terms of any sports I played or any workouts that I did.

“Well, I used to be on the basketball team in school”, I proudly declared.

He sighed – maybe he didn't like basketball! – And put me on the treadmill. I was excited – this looked fun – I had the earphones and could switch radio channels – felt very chic and swanky! On my right was a young ‘ornamental value’ woman running at break-neck speed, it seemed. I was assigned a way lower speed and asked to get on with it.

'This is going to be easy,' I thought, 'I can so easily walk at that speed' – but no, ten minutes into swift walking and I was ready to call it a day! Ok, so maybe I needed more time –it had been few years since I had seriously walked a mile or two!

Finally done with it, I quickly moved to thank the trainer and headed for the door, but he had other ideas. There were still floor exercises and weights to be pumped. Well –I was not one to buckle down and so we started. He demonstrated a few leg raises- helped me with a couple and told me to complete a set. But no, my legs had not heard him – they refused to rise up straight or even come down without a thud! And the crunches left me feeling that maybe I needed to go in for another abdomen – the one I had was saying abusive things in a language of growls and grumbles!

The squats left me bewildered – who would've thought they'd invent an 'exercise' out of what was meted out in high schools as a punishment! Believe you me, this one, if done the way the young trainer was explaining, belonged only to the third-degree torture chambers.

Finally, came the time to do the weights – I was taken to this huge contraption with weights and pulleys and such. Finally, I could sit and just pull the weights – and admire myself in the mirror. I looked – and then quickly decided not to look! I certainly did not fall into the 'ornamental' category – I would go as far as to say that, now, even the other Paleozoic fossils would also probably squirm at the thought of me being one of them!

Anyways, a few pulls and my arms also started the abusive exchange – I wanly smiled at the Mohammad Ali next to me and asked if I could stop. He looked at me, and then at the weights slot and grinned impishly, 'but ma'am, you've not taken any weights!' That might've been humorous, had my arms not been asserting something totally contrary! Anyways, I subjected the great M. Ali to a disdainful scowl and proceeded to sneak out of the door. Goodbyes could be saved for another day- and maybe, a better mood!

All in all, the experience had been 'entertaining' – for the others at least! As for me, I was finding it difficult to maneuver my feet to execute the task of walking and breathing at the same time! The rest of the day went in finishing tubes & tubes of muscle relaxants and soothing my sore muscles with bags & bags of hot water- and a lot of positive talks! But yes! My endorphins were very much there and through the oohs and ahhs of every movement, I could feel the flush!

It's been a week of daily calisthenics now – I manage quite a bit– I feel much lighter (am sure I've already shed a few kilos – the weighing machine at the gym needs repairing!). AND there's even a spring in my step – has to be because I weigh less! Besides which, I have a perpetual grin plastered on my smug face that almost stretches from ear to ear – and manages to irritate one and all around me! There's something very self-satisfying about completing a challenge and living through it to brag to others 😊

As for my progress, from being a Paleozoic fossil, I've graduated to becoming a modern day relic – and the dream of getting to the 'ornamental' level keeps me riveted!