

Muscle Head

March 27, 2014

The New York Times:

“Feel the burn!” That was Jane Fonda in 1982, exhorting the viewers of her first-of-its-kind workout video to engage in an exotic pursuit called exercise. In her striped leotard and legwarmers, Fonda led the charge against the generally held opinion that exercise was a weird waste of time. (In those days, lifting weights was for Charles Atlas aspirants, and jogging was for quirky “health nuts.”) The tireless exertions of Fonda — and of tiny-shortened Richard Simmons and toothy Judi Sheppard Missett, the founder of Jazzercise — were ultimately wildly successful, making what was then an eccentric choice into what is now practically an obligation. Today we all exercise, or at least know we should.

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In May 2008, the Swiss researchers Susanne Jaeggi and Martin Buschkuhl reported on an experiment in which college students practiced the N-back exercise 20 minutes a day, five days a week, for four weeks. The students took a test of fluid intelligence before and after the training occurred. “Unlike physical conditioning, which can transform 98-pound weaklings into hunks, a hundred years of scientific doctrine insisted that fluid intelligence was impervious to the effects of training,” Hurley notes. But after a month of working with the N-back, students’ scores on the test of fluid intelligence increased, on average, by 40 percent.

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Hurley also offers airtime to critics of the claims made for cognitive exercise. One of the fiercest of these is Randall Engle, a professor of psychology at the Georgia Institute of Technology. Of Torkel Klingberg and Cogmed, Engle tells Hurley, “If you Google it, it looks like Cogmed can be used to solve everything from arthritis to lumbago. Pearson is making a fortune off this, and the researchers are in on the cult.”

Read the whole story: [*The New York Times*](#).