

# In Defense of Languor



High priest of the exercise group is a fitness fanatic named Jack LaLanne who exited the womb with a full set of steel abs some 94 years ago.

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ILLUSTRATION  
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My 20-year search for the perfect diet pill — i.e., one taken daily that melts fat like warm butter on a hot pancake — is officially over.

There is no such thing.

In spite of mountains of hype and publicity, every diet pill manufacturer, by federal edict, must place on its package in the most inconspicuous place possible, the following caveat in print easily readable with 5x power loupes “Guaranteed to produce results when used in conjunction with proper diet and a vigorous exercise program.”

Aha! If the diet scam people could manage it, the key word “exercise” would be visible only with an electron-scanning microscope. This insistence on exercise as an integral part of any successful weight loss program instantly splits the populace into two camps, into the larger and drowsier of which, I fall. My camp’s credo reflects Mark Twain’s views when he avowed, “I have never taken any exercise except sleeping and resting.”

High priest of the exercise group is a fitness fanatic named Jack LaLanne who

exited the womb with a full set of steel abs some 94 years ago. Speculation arose that his postnatal diet must surely have been liberally laced with anabolic steroids as sinew and Mr. America-type muscles prematurely replaced his baby fat.

During the following decades, these muscles developed muscles of their own until, for some inexplicable reason, at age 61 he felt compelled to swim the entire length of the Golden Gate bridge underwater. Handcuffed and shackled, he towed a 1,000-pound boat behind him, even though nobody asked him to. There is little doubt that LaLanne could have easily towed the QE2 from New York to Southampton clad in a full suit of armor, needing no more motivation than Nike’s “Just Do It” slogan.

Mark Twain exercised his exit option at just a bit over 74; Jack is currently jumping up and down with excessive energy at 94 as if experiencing the geriatric throes of St. Vitus’ Dance. Actuarially, he should have dropped off the twig at about 77.8 years of age. This is offered by workout aficionados as irrefutable evidence

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that, statistically, what really happens if you exercise daily is you die healthier.

What gets the wind up with us couch potatoes is the term itself.

We always prefer a recliner to a couch, preferably one with a cup holder and the massage-vibration option. It should be positioned so that an unobstructed view of the 50-inch LCD/HD TV is had between our outstretched legs. We have taken as our mascot the sloth. A perfectly lovely, agreeable woodland creature whose characteristics of peaceful coexistence and conservation of energy were unfortunately included in the seven deadly sins by some salvation-happy bluenose with a paid-up annuity in Paradise.

Another seemingly difficult request in-

volves never having to hear the terms “Pilates” and “cardio” issue from the mouths of 23-year-old celebrities who consider any personal weight in excess of 110 pounds as being morbidly obese. Pilates (from the Latin *pileatus*, i.e., “wearing the pileus,” which was the badge of a freed slave) is a system of exercises involving elements of yoga and check writing.

Confusion arises when one of the earlier Pilates (Pontius) is sometimes linked with the present-day pursuit of the perfect body. His Roman family name was Pontii. For nearly 2,000 years genealogists have tried unsuccessfully to link the Pontii name with that of Charles Ponzi, a world-class crook who popularized pyramid schemes in the 1920s.

It was Joseph Pilates (1880-1967), a Greek/German who proposed a series of rehabilitation exercises for returning veterans of World War I. He gets full responsibility for the too-often heard claim among hyperthyroid people that “Today I did 1,200 Pilates; 60,000 crunches; 45,000 one-handed pushups” ad tedium.

The nation’s 15,000 Pilates instructors are currently enjoying a bull market, surpassed only by Botox, liposuction, and innovative silicone applications. They are dedicated to teaching awareness of breath and alignment of the spine to strengthen the deep torso muscles, among other things. Basically, Joseph Pilates held that forced exhalation is the key to full inhalation. Sometimes this is mistakenly referred to as “heavy breathing,” but is essentially the same phenomenon experienced when activating the lever at the side of every La-Z-Boy recliner, accompanied by the expression, “Ahhhhh!”

The dilemma for us Barcaloungers professing regard for our deep torso muscles and our continued dedication to inhaling and exhaling is clear. Diet pills are only valuable for their placebo effect and exercise is no less a deadly sin than “pride” and “envy.” Our only hope to achieve and maintain our monthly Social Security largesse is diet.

The cheeseburger quadumvirate of Wendy’s; Carl’s, Jr.; Burger King; and In-N-Out enthusiastically obeying the basic industry canon of Give ’Em What They Want, supplies us with our daily requirements of vegetables, dairy products, meat, and grease. It enjoys the support of the American people, only 78 percent of whom are considered overweight. Accusations of greed or gluttony hurt and are uncalled for. I suppose we could forego the drive-up window and exercise the option to walk inside for our food. But hey! What’s the point if your cardio program requires conserving your finite number of heartbeats for something more important down the road? ■■■■