

2009 • a special publication of the Danville Weekly and the Pleasanton Weekly

STAYING Healthy



GETTING IN SHAPE

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a marathon or cycle
a century? **PAGE 8**

Hospital hero checks hearts and minds

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Catching some zzzz's

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STAYING Healthy

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Editor: Dolores Fox Ciardelli

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On the cover: Greg Thurston, a certified personal trainer and competitive bodybuilder, 53, says someone who is committed to running a marathon can definitely get in shape to do so, even if he or she is not used to exercising. "If there is something you want to do, you can do it," he says. "When it comes to the physical body, it's the only thing in this lifetime that we have control over."

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Catching some zzzz's

Ten tips for periodic insomniacs on how to create a haven for sleep

You know the feeling. You're in bed, but you can't fall asleep. Your mind is racing and you're tossing and turning so you read a book or watch television until the wee hours of the morning. Getting good quality sleep is vital to our health, so it pays to create a sleep haven and improve your rest.

A recent sleep survey conducted for AmeriInn Hotels found that six in 10 U.S. adults (62 percent) had trouble falling asleep at least one night per week and nearly 10 percent had a tough time sleeping every single night. That's a total of 3.1 billion hours of sleep lost in America each week or 161 billion hours per year.

So what are the leading causes of all this lost sleep in our country? The survey found economic fears (36 percent) lead the reasons for American sleeplessness followed by high energy prices (29 percent), health and medical concerns (28 percent), stress over politics (22 percent) and concerns about war and global terrorism (12 percent). No wonder America is having a hard time sleeping.

"With all the worries and concerns of modern life, sleeplessness is happening whether we like it or not," said Dr. Christopher Drake, bioscientific investigator at Henry Ford Hospital Sleep Disorders and Research Center. "But continued bouts of insomnia can wear down the immune system, leaving the body vulnerable

to illness. The key is to get a handle on the source of the stress causing sleeplessness before it becomes a full-blown medical issue."

Stressed out Americans need to create their own bastion of peace so they can rest and renew their mind and bodies to handle the demands of modern life. Drake recommends turning your bedroom, or hotel room when traveling, into a sleep haven, a place of peace and serenity that gives your body every possible advantage of achieving a restful night's sleep.

Here are 10 easy tips periodic insomnia sufferers can use to create their own sleep haven, whether at home or on the road:

1. Cut out all caffeine. If you're caffeine-sensitive, it's not just coffee that is your biggest sleep culprit. Avoid tea, sodas and anything with chocolate.

2. Make your bed. Ever noticed how much more comfortable a freshly made bed is? The uniform snugness of the sheets can create a cradle effect around the body and the fresh smell of clean sheets can mimic the feel of a luxurious hotel bed.

3. Leave work out of the bedroom. Keeping your bedroom free of anything work-related is key in creating a true sleep haven. That means leaving files, laptop computers or PDAs on the kitchen table, not the nightstand. This may be difficult when traveling, but try to

keep the bed and side tables free of work-related clutter.

4. Eliminate outside noise. If you live in a noisy neighborhood, shut your windows and use air conditioning during the summer months. If you reside in an apartment or are staying in a hotel that doesn't use soundproofing construction, invest in noise-canceling headphones, white noise or sound effect machine.

5. Block out all light. When at home, use double thick curtains like the ones you find in hotels. Make sure you turn off all electronics in your room that emit light, including DVD players. A piece of masking tape over the display works great.

6. Avoid using alcohol and nicotine before bedtime. Even though alcohol may initially help you fall asleep due to its sedating effects, it causes severe sleep disruption during the second half of the night with frequent and long duration awakenings. Also, studies have shown that smoking before bed delays the time to fall asleep and is associated with a worsening insomnia in some individuals.

7. Banish the TV. Watching TV while in bed stimulates the mind, encouraging restlessness. Consider listening to classical music, but stay away from news or talk radio.

8. Distract your mind. Break away from daily stresses by reading a book before going to sleep at night. Counting sheep isn't just a



ARA CONTENT

Six in 10 U.S. adults experience insomnia at least one night a week, but making your bedroom a haven for sleep can help you get to sleep and stay asleep.

silly remedy. The combination of the counting and the visualization distracts your mind and lulls or bores you to sleep.

9. Workout in the morning. If traveling, take advantage of your hotel's exercise room. By adding an extra hour in your morning for some cardiovascular exercise you will stay energized throughout the day and sleep better at night. Beware

of working out too close to bedtime, as it can leave you over stimulated.

10. Pay attention to your eating habits. Try picking healthier food options and you don't have to clean your plate even if your mother used to make you. Finally, make sure you don't eat more than two hours before bedtime, so your food has time to digest.

—ARAContent

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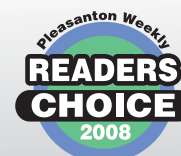


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Hospital 'hero' checks the hearts of hundreds

By Jeb Bing

Hundreds of patients who have been treated in the cardiology department at San Ramon Regional Medical Center are alive and well thanks to the diligent analysis of registered cardiac sonographer Ajay Jain.

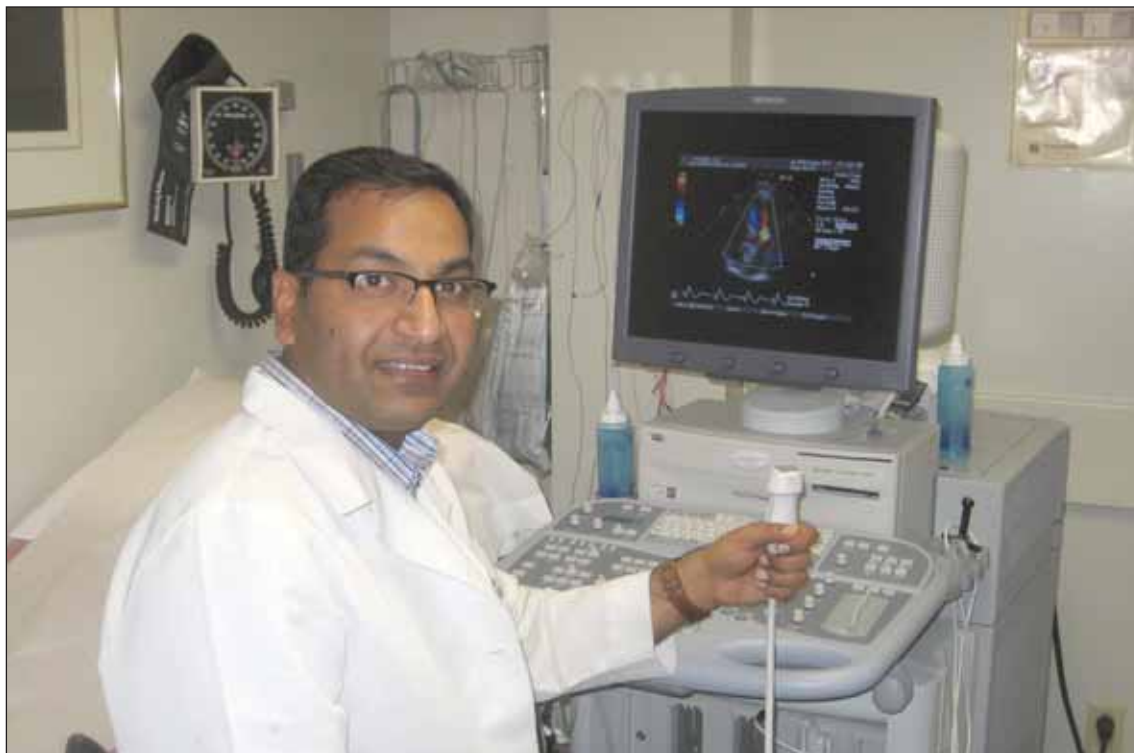
Jain, a native of New Delhi, India, recently won the 2008 Tenet Hero award for providing "quality, compassionate care" to the steady stream of patients he analyzes and tests daily in his role as the hospital's echocardiography technologist. While most of those whose hearts he "investigates" (the medical term for what he does) score acceptable points on the non-invasive echo cardiology processor, it's those who don't that have Jain to credit for early detection of troubling problems.

Most who are referred to Jain by their personal physician have experienced some type of chest pain or have become tired after just a brief walk. Medicine, exercise, and a better diet and lifestyle usually cure the condition after Jain has determined there's no damage to the heart or surrounding arteries. But every once in a while, he'll spot trouble in the way the heart is functioning or even its shape. He quickly calls in a cardiologist, and procedures or surgeries are scheduled to open up a nearly blocked artery or repair more serious heart damage.

Patients with high stress, hypertension, high blood pressures and previously undetected heart murmurs are the ones Jain spots readily with the advanced diagnostic imaging, ultrasound and echocardiography technology now available. Recently he found infection from a patient's recent gum surgery had worked its way down to the heart, threatening serious damage until stopped by antibiotics.

For patients, though, it's Jain's skillful "bedside manners" that have made him a winner among the hospital's technical staff. Easy-going with a calming influence on often-nervous patients, Jain talks them through the visuals of their hearts that show up

If there's a problem, Indian-born Ajay Jain can find it at San Ramon Regional



JEB BING

Ajay Jain, award-winning cardiac sonographer at San Ramon Regional Medical Center, shows live image of patient's heart he's "investigating" with hospital's advanced echocardiography technology that can show miniscule, but vital, flaws in heart and related vessels.

on a computer screen. He's careful never to say "You're fine" or to convey bad news, however, leaving that to the medical cardiologists at the San Ramon hospital, but a smile and pat on the shoulder can put the patient at ease.

"I'll just say that I have very good views of your heart and good information," Jain said. "I tell them that I am not a doctor and our cardiologist will have to review the imaging, ultrasound and echo results and pictures before going over the results with them. But everybody who comes into a hospital has wor-

ries and I do my best to make them feel comfortable."

Many patients Jain has examined have returned in good spirits and healthy after the heart conditions he detected have been corrected. One woman whose right ventricle pressure showed up on Jain's screen as 110—when the normal is 25—was at risk of what doctors call a "blow out" had she gone much longer without surgery. She came back in good health and jubilant, asking Jain to also check her daughter because of her family's history of heart disease.

Another patient was wheeled into the hospital's emergency room at 2 a.m. with severe chest pains and the cardiologist on duty called Jain at home to rush to the hospital to investigate the problem. Jain found fluids leaking around the heart which only the echo sound technique could pinpoint. Surgeons operated to release the pressure and the 36-year-old, who had been near death, was recovering and even joking with her worried husband before Jain went back home.

For Jain, his work and the good results he has brought to patients

at San Ramon Regional is part of a continuing success story that started back in New Delhi, India, where he was born in 1966. Raised by his grandmother after his parents died when he was a teenager, Jain saved enough money and made the right contacts to come to the U.S. in June 2001, just before 9/11 when most visas became hard to obtain. Moving in with friends first in New York, an acquaintance persuaded a relative with a restaurant in Walnut Creek to pay Jain's travel here, where he worked at the new Indian eatery for a while.

Later, he enrolled at City College of San Francisco, both to take a series of courses that eventually led to passing his registry exams in medical technology and to perfect his English. All the while, he worked at a 7-Eleven store in Walnut Creek to pay the bills. In September 2003, he was hired by San Ramon Regional and at that time brought his wife Meenu and their two children to Pleasanton, where they bought a home. Meenu is a teacher aide at Hidden Hills Elementary School in San Ramon. Their son Raja, 14, attends the eighth grade at Harvest Park Middle School in Pleasanton; daughter Bhavya, 9, is in the third grade at Mohr Elementary School.

In naming him the recipient of Tenet's Hero award, Sandra Sanfilippo Ryan, marketing manager for San Ramon Regional, a Tenet Corp. hospital, said:

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New approaches to treating breast cancer

By Michael R. Forrest, M.D.

Research breakthroughs in the field of radiation oncology are improving medical treatment for breast cancer, a disease that will strike an estimated 180,000 women and almost 2,000 men in the U.S. this year.

Radiation oncologists—cancer doctors who also oversee the care of patients undergoing radiation treatment—are increasingly able to diagnose breast cancer in its earliest stages, and to offer new radiation regimens that may help women forego mastectomies.

While they are not advised for all women, MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scans are proving to be an effective diagnostic tool that enables physicians to pick up the very early signs of breast cancer (when they are used in conjunction with mammograms). Currently, this use of MRIs is recommended only for women with a strong family history of breast or ovarian cancer, and for those who carry a genetic mutation (known as BRCA1 or BRCA2), or who have already been diagnosed with the disease.

In terms of new treatment regimens, one that shows promise in clinical trials, though it is still experimental, is called accelerated partial breast irradiation. With this approach, radiation is delivered to a specific target area rather than the whole breast, using techniques such as 3-D conformal external beam radiation or brachytherapy (in which doctors implant radioactive sources into the breast). This shortened schedule of treatment, however, is only appropriate for women with early-stage cancers, in which tumors have been removed by lumpectomy and the cancer has not spread to the lymph nodes.

Typically, breast cancer patients undergo radiation treatments after a lumpectomy (in

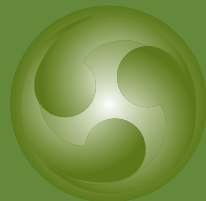
which the malignant tumor and a small amount of breast tissue surrounding it are removed) or sometimes after mastectomy (surgical removal of the whole breast). Unlike other whole-body cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy or hormonal therapy, radiation is a localized therapy confined to one part of the anatomy. To treat breast cancer, patients are positioned in a CT scanner to map out the best angles for protecting the lungs and heart from radiation; then, patients are usually exposed to a treatment beam for only one to two minutes per session.

Typically, breast cancer patients have been treated five days a week for five to seven weeks. Recently, however, Canadian research shows that three weeks of radiation treatment may be just as effective.

While not every breast cancer patient may be eligible for some of the new treatments, all women can benefit from breakthroughs in mammography technology. Today's digital mammograms and computer-aided diagnostic capabilities enable radiologists to pinpoint the areas of the breast needing surgical biopsy. Further, software used with digital mammograms makes it easier to identify subtle changes in breast tissue when a patient's mammograms are compared year to year.

Annual mammograms are recommended for women age 40 or older; and those in a high-risk category for breast cancer should not only schedule an annual mammogram, but also talk with their doctors about the benefits of an MRI scan as well.

Dr. Forrest is board-certified in radiation oncology. His office is located in Dublin, at the EPIC Care Cancer Center.



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Goodbye junk food, hello smart food choices

Buying nutritious foods for yourself and your family can be difficult. We are all familiar with the food pyramid, but once in the grocery store, the incredible amount of options is overwhelming. How do you know what is best and how can you be sure to make the healthiest food choices? Here are the top strategies for shopping smart at the grocery store:

Plan, plan, plan

Planning is key for nutritious shopping. First, plan to eat before you go to the store. When you're not hungry you'll be less enticed to buy snacks and other foods you really don't need. Second, make a shopping list of the meals you want to make throughout the week. By thinking ahead, you can incorporate healthy foods and you'll avoid buying prepackaged, often high-fat and high-sodium dinners. Finally, have a shopping budget. For example, allot \$200 to feed your family for the next two weeks. This will help you avoid going overboard with unnecessary treats.

Shop the perimeter

The perimeter of the grocery store usually holds the most nutritious items like fresh produce and meat. The majority of your budget should be allocated to foods located on the perimeter. When shopping for fruits and veg-



etables, choose a variety of colors. Different colors equal different vitamins and minerals so a colorful selection is best. When choosing meats, lean cuts and skinless poultry are healthier choices. And don't forget about fish—a great source of healthy omega-3 fats.

Know what to look for

Although you might stock your cart with a lot of fresh produce, meats and dairy items, you will inevitably buy some type of processed foods. This doesn't have to be a bad thing as long as you know what to look for. For example, when buying cereal and pastas, look for whole-grain options. Items with long lists of ingredients you can't pronounce should generally be avoided.

Foods that are labeled 100 percent juice or 100 percent whole grains are better choices. Chips and other snacks should not contain unhealthy trans fats, which you'll find listed in the nutrition label. Finally, a little indulgence is fine, but look at the serving size on your favorite treats.

That morning beverage you enjoy on the way to work might really be three servings, or you might be eating four servings during your afternoon snack fix.

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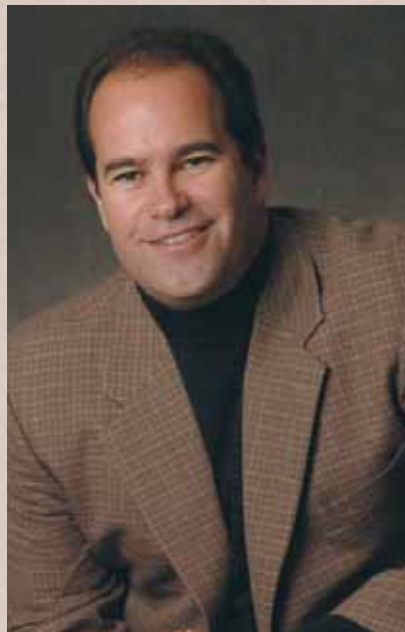
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Getting ready to hit the road

Couch potato to distance runner? It could happen!

By Geoff Gillette

Milestone birthdays often prompt people to go for the grand statement to belie the fact that they're getting older. As some folks hit a decade—30, 40 or 50—they might decide to run a marathon to prove they're still young where it counts.

Can a person who hasn't exercised much transition to the level of physical fitness necessary to face a grueling challenge, such as the annual San Francisco Marathon? Personal trainer and competitive bodybuilder Greg Thurston, 53, says the answer is a resounding, "Yes!"

"If there is something physical you want to do, you can do it," Thurston said. "When it comes to the physical body, it's the only thing in this lifetime that we have control over. We don't have control over the economy, or the government or who loves us, but we do have control over our own bodies."

Thurston said one of the most important aspects of taking part in something like the San Francisco Marathon, which takes place July 26 this year, is just making the decision to do it. "Stand up and say you're going to do it. Tell everyone you know. That gives you the motivation to keep going—people will be asking you about your training and how you're feeling. It will keep you coming back."

Step 1: Learn to run before you 'run'

To get on any sort of a physical training track, you have to have a goal in mind. Are you looking to lose weight and burn fat? Are you hoping to tone up, give yourself a more sculpted look? Are you building up to take part in a marathon or something similar?

Thurston, a certified personal trainer, is the owner/operator of Fitness Together in downtown Danville. He said that having those priorities already set is one of the cornerstones to any successful physical fitness program.

"If you're getting ready to do a long distance event like a marathon, you need to get those muscles stretched out, strengthened and get the body's endurance up where it all works together," he explained.

When beginning a training regimen, Thurston said it's best to start with the basics. "When I first start working with someone, I approach them as though they've never done it before. Whether you ran a little in high school, or you're an occasional trail runner, we start like it's the first time."

A beginning workout will start with stretching, to get the muscles warmed up. Stretches that help with the calves, hamstrings and quadriceps are a good start. Care should be taken when stretching not to bounce. Inhale at the start of the stretch and exhale as the stretch begins. Hold the stretch at the furthest point for a few seconds and then release.

Stretching the back, shoulders and core are helpful, too, as running requires all of those muscle groups in order to create a smooth gait and a healthy stride.

Thurston said in many cases he will have new runners get on a treadmill to analyze their running style. "I know it sounds pretty basic, but a lot of people don't know how to run correctly," he said. "They hold their hands too high or they don't swing their arms. Some people run in sort of an up and down way, bouncing down the road. They need to lengthen that stride."

A common injury among beginning runners is shin-splints, a painful condition along the lower front shin. Thurston said that can be caused by running too much on a hard surface but also because many new runners run on their toes too much. "You need to learn to run on your whole foot and kind of roll with it."

Step 2: Get out on the road

Other than for initial testing and for some continuing training, Thurston doesn't recommend the treadmill for beginning runners because results can be misleading.

"Running on a treadmill uses a totally different mechanical group. You have muscle groups that you're not really using that you do use on the road," he said. "You want to train in

the environment you're going to be racing in." Thurston said that in preparing for a run like the SF Marathon, runners should get out on the same types of roads, run some hills to get used to the climbs in the city, and in general train for the race course.

Initially, runners should choose a short distance for a workout run, a half-mile to a mile depending on how well they can run and their level of physical fitness. Time how long it takes and then time it the next time you try it. Thurston said at the beginning a runner should try to cover the same distance in less time rather than keep adding on mileage. Over time, you do add distance, but it is a gradual increase rather than leaping from five miles to 10 miles over the course of two workouts.

In addition to running, Thurston recommends working with a jump rope, resistance training and some light weights. A typical workout might consist of a short run, then skipping rope, followed by squats and lunges. "You want to mix it up to keep it fresh, so you don't get burned out and you're still building muscle and endurance."

Step 3: Eating clean

Training for an endurance competition requires fueling your body with foods that can be readily processed without slowing you down. "The main thing you want to do is eat cleaner," Thurston said, "potatoes, rice, yams, things like that."

Thurston suggests six small meals a day. The purpose is to keep the body's digestive system running all day, instead of eating a large meal and slowing down digestion. While some athletes require a very high protein/low carb diet, he said that runners need to maintain a balance of the two.

"An endurance athlete needs a body that will sustain their energy level. To do that you need to have carbs before a workout and then replace the carbs after the workout as well." Each mini-meal will consist of 200-500 calories, depending on the size of the person.

He pointed to Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, who at the height of his training would consume as much as 12,000 calories a day.

Step 4: The goal in sight

Generally speaking, Thurston said the average person just starting out should train for at least three months prior to an event like a marathon. He suggests that a training regimen start slowly, perhaps two days on and then one day off. He said that much of it depends on the person. "If you're feeling good and you want to go three days on and then take a day off, go for it. Or if you aren't feeling good after the two days, take two days off. Come to the gym when your body is ready to work," he stated.

Over time, those periods of exercise will increase. The distances will be longer and you will attempt steeper climbs and more difficult courses. Eventually it leads to the event itself.

"That last week, you need to rest up. Maybe do a workout on Monday and Tuesday, and then some stretching and a light jog on Wednesday," he said.

Overtraining can backfire on an athlete, which can hamper performance. "Exercising is addictive. You need to know when to take a little time off. When you come back you'll be amazed at how good it feels," Thurston explained.

Step 5: The race

During the marathon itself Thurston recommends keeping to a comfortable pace, rather than allowing the excitement of the moment to carry you into a pace you might not be able to sustain.

He said the thing to keep in mind is that the goal is not to win the Marathon, it's to cross that finish line.

"That's it. Just finishing is the gold medal. For that one day you get to be Michael Jordan." With a smile he added, "You get to walk in the shoes of people at a very elite level for a day. It's awesome." ■



Personal trainer Greg Thurston demonstrates what he would teach the road to train for a marathon, including (above) jumping rope and





GEOFF GILLETTE

a person to do to warm up prior to getting out on
d (below) extensive stretching.



Reflections on learning to ride

By Geoff Gillette

Two years ago I made a momentous decision. I decided I was going to participate in the AIDS Lifecycle ride, a 565-mile trip down the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles in the beginning of June. It took me exactly one training ride to figure out just how out of my depth I was.

I got out on the Iron Horse Trail, one of the flattest pieces of pavement you are likely to find in the Tri-Valley, and pointed my trusty steed south. I gave myself a three-hour time limit and set off. I turned back at Alcosta Boulevard, tired and sweaty, certain that the wind must have been blowing at least 30 miles an hour right in my face. Sure the trees weren't moving, but I reasoned that it was just a momentary lull.

Somehow the wind was blowing in my face the whole way back, too. Queer weather we have here in Danville. Imagine my disappointment when I realized I'd only ridden about 15 miles. How the heck was I going to make an 80 mile per day average when I could barely clock in at 5 mph?

I didn't know Greg Thurston then, I belonged to a gym that I sort of vaguely knew where it was, and I generally spent about 10 minutes a day in the saddle, mostly ferrying my kids to and from school.

But six months later, I rode every inch of The Ride and a little extra (I got lost, but that's a different story).

How did I do it? What miracle training lessons do I have to share? By comparison with what a pro like Greg can tell you, not much. But the things I worked at hardest in training were endurance and listening.

You can work on both of those during training rides. If you are participating in a big event, chances are pretty good that there's a support system set up to help you train. Whether it be online forums, scheduled events or free access to a gym or training facility, you have the opportunity to be around other people doing the same training you are.

For me, training rides were a life-saver. They taught me how to ride and use my bike the way it should be. Training rides start out in January with lower speeds and fewer miles, and by the time you get to May, you are riding 70-80 miles at a time, with back-to-back long rides to simulate the conditions of The Ride.

I learned a lot from these rides. How to properly shift, the importance of keeping a good cadence when pedaling, and when to eat or drink. The credo of the training ride leaders was always: Eat or drink before you get hungry or thirsty. The idea being that if you are already feeling the signs, your body is already reacting to the lack of food and it's too late. The key, many said, was to keep your fuel tank topped off as much as possible so you had plenty of energy

Continued on **PAGE 10**

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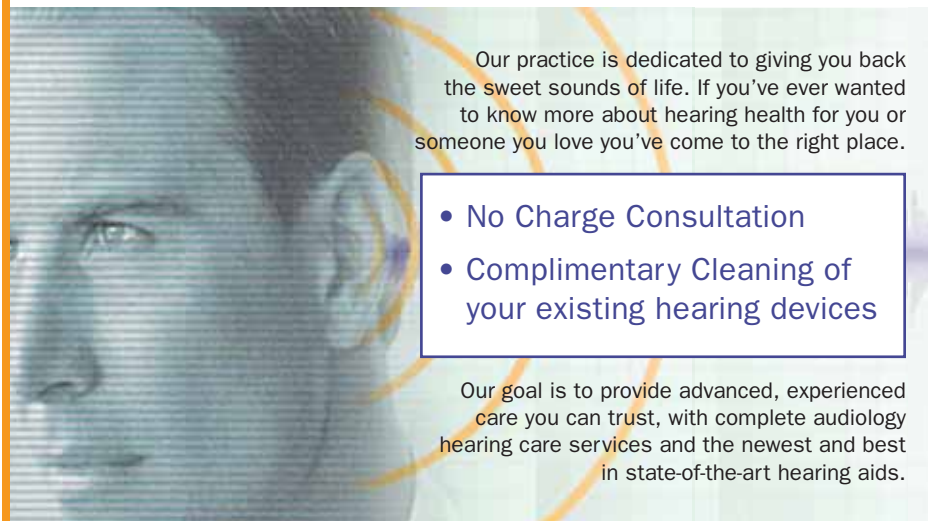
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REFLECTIONS

Continued from PAGE 9

for long flat stretches or the grueling climbs along the route.

Another thing I learned from listening to other cyclists is getting good quality gear. It's not necessary to have a \$3,000 Giant road bike to do a long distance ride. You just need to have a decent bike with a relatively light frame and good components. Especially brakes. When you're going down a hill at 40 mph, you don't want to be scrimping on the machinery that lets you stop safely.

Bike shorts are a must. If you're concerned about how you'll look in spandex with a cushioned seat, replace that image with one of how you'll feel trying to sit down with your nether regions bruised and abraded to the point of bleeding. It's not fun, especially when you will need to be in the saddle and on the road for another 80-mile ride the next day.

Physically, I was on the bike at least twice a week for the six months leading up to the event, sometimes even more. In poor weather I found my way to the gym and used the stationary bike to supplement my training rides. Weekends were spent all over the Bay Area, riding with groups all working toward the same goal.

Having that commitment also helps on days with low motivation. If you know you've signed up to participate in a scheduled event with a dozen other people, it's a lot harder to just look out the window, convince yourself it's too darn cold, roll over and go back to sleep. It helps maintain that perseverance. A positive use of peer pressure, I suppose.

If you do persevere, put up with the aching quads and sore glutes, you will find that your ability to ride longer distances will increase. I found a sort of threshold for myself, that no matter how tired I might feel in the morning, once I passed that 20-mile mark my body seemed to slip into a rhythm. Call it muscle



COURTESY GEOFF GILLETTE

Geoff Gillette reaches the halfway point on the AIDS Lifecycle ride two years ago, a grueling 565-mile trip down the coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

memory or learned response, my body adapted to the rigors of distance riding.

My breathing steadied to the point where only the most daunting hills caused me to breathe heavily. And my legs hit a state where they almost seemed to complete rotations without conscious thought.

That's when riding is the best thing in the world. There's a calmness to it, a stillness on the road when you hear only the drum of your heart, the hiss of your breath and the clicking of your gears. It feels good, moving smoothly through early morning fog or bright California sunshine. It's not heaven, but it is bliss. ■

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Me time

Create a tranquil environment to get away from it all without leaving home

Just 19 minutes out of the 1,440 minutes in a day—that's how much time the average American spends relaxing or thinking, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Is 19 minutes of relaxing "me time" really enough? Where can people go within their home to escape the stress that surrounds them? Personal spaces are becoming increasingly scarce with extended families and friends living together under one roof. As a result, some people find it more difficult than ever to create a tranquil environment where they can "get away from it all" and perhaps increase their essential "me" time.

"Relaxation is a significant antidote to stress and potential health problems. Although ongoing emotional upset around issues in one's life may not be the single root cause of an illness, there is now abundant evidence to prove that unresolved feelings and pressure can be a major contributor to bodily distress and most health-related issues," notes

"Relaxation is a significant antidote to stress and potential health problems."

Dr. Harriet Haberman,
psychotherapist

Dr. Harriet Haberman, practicing psychotherapist with over 30 years experience and author of "Emotional Wisdom: A Compassionate Guide to the Messages Hidden in Your Feelings."

"Personal and global economic events can easily create havoc with our health," Haberman continued. "This troubling reality emphasizes the importance of finding a safe place to allow oneself to feel nurtured."

Quiet relaxation zones in back yards and bathrooms built around a water theme continue to provide a highly desired residential sanctuary, and "hydrotherapy" is increasingly popular. Homeowners are choosing jetted whirlpool bath tubs or air baths because of the transformative experience they deliver. Bathrooms are viewed as one of the last truly private spaces in the home and the one destination that people can count on to get away.

The back yard can be a great place to have a home spa retreat as well. Zen gardens and fountains are popu-

lar as are outdoor hot tubs that can be used all year long, even during cold months. Privacy is enhanced with creative landscaping for a discreet hot tub experience.

Having a backyard hot tub provides the opportunity to enjoy hydrotherapy in a controlled and convenient environment. Homeowners gain access to a private space where

they can relax and be away from the rest of world. Unlike facilities at hotels or gyms, body-conscious individuals don't have to worry about who will see them.

Besides providing some private relaxation time, hot tubs and steaming baths deliver many health benefits. The heat improves circulation and speeds recovery in damaged



ARA CONTENT

Bathrooms are one of the last truly private spaces. Additions like this whirlpool bath provide an easy way to boost your "me" time.

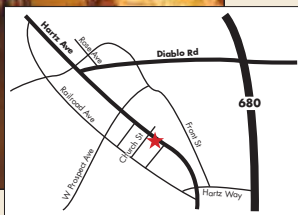
tissue and the buoyancy of the water reduces pressure on joints and the spine. Finally, the massage elements relieve muscle tension and alleviate stress.

"It's important to increase those 19 minutes of personal time no matter how busy your household is," Haberman said.

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ARA CONTENT

Immunity boosting foods can strengthen the immune system and help fight off flu and cold viruses.

Ammunition for the fight

Feed the immune system to fend off colds and flu

The immune system is smart. The immune system, when exposed to new flu and cold viruses, learns to recognize and react to seasonal strains of the invaders. The system also remembers bugs it has seen before. But we're a mobile society—each year, world travel brings new strains of germs and virus home, forcing the immune system to deal with new invaders it has never seen. This is why the Centers for Disease Control makes yearly changes to the flu vaccine, hoping to predict which bugs will arrive in the U.S. on a seasonal basis.

A flu vaccine may help during cold and flu season, but there's no guarantee for full protection. Extra efforts are needed to avoid seasonal germs—including a healthy diet, exercise and nutritional supplements.

Diet can make a difference. Prevention Magazine recently published a list of immunity-boosting foods, including: lean beef in moderation for its zinc content; orange vegetables including sweet potatoes and carrots (for vitamins A and D); mushrooms such as shiitakes, which may help white blood cells act more aggressively against foreign invaders; and a cup of black or green tea daily, which provides powerful anti-oxidant activity.

Also included in the list was yogurt containing active probiotic cultures, which help

balance the immune system in the digestive tract.

According to ABC news, turmeric, a rich, flavorful spice, "has been used for centuries as part of Ayurvedic and traditional Chinese medicines, in addition to being used for cooking. Turmeric is found in every yellow curry, and its golden color is the result of curcumin, a polyphenol with strong cold and flu-fighting properties.

"Although the mechanism is unclear, a 2008 study published in Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications found that curcumin prevents some immune cells from responding to stimulants and so has modulating and anti-inflammatory effects. Other studies have also shown the immune-boosting properties of curcumin in turmeric, however these have not been confirmed in humans."

Turmeric is found naturally as the rhizome part of the turmeric plant and it looks very similar to ginger. The powdered spice is made by boiling, drying and grinding the root. The powder has antiseptic qualities when applied topically and often is used on cuts, burns and bruises. This spice is available as an encapsulated supplement at health food stores.

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Got cellulite?

Danville doctors address this common problem for women

By Sonia Badreshia-Bansal and Vivek Bansal

Commonly known as "cottage cheese thighs," the unsightly, lumpy and dimpled skin on the thighs and buttocks known as cellulite is what women try to hide. It is caused by fiber adhesions that bind down the skin against swollen fat cells, similar to a quilt blanket. It can resemble the surface of an orange peel or cottage cheese and look like skin irregularities such as puckering and dimpling.

How do I know whether I have cellulite?

You may or may not want to know! Most women can see the dimpling very readily. You can easily do a self evaluation by using the "squeeze test." It is best performed in a dimly lighted room holding a flashlight held about six inches away. Gently squeeze the skin on your upper thigh and the lighting will accentuate shadows that represent skin dimpling and irregularities. This is cellulite.

Why must this happen to women?

Hormones, especially estrogens, influence the formation of cellulite. It is normally seen in women after puberty to maximize fat deposits to ensure enough calories are available during pregnancy and lactation. This storage is also essential for nutrition, energy, support, protection and insulation. Cellulite is often localized to the thighs and buttocks, likely due to decreased circulation and lymphatic drainage.



Sonia Badreshia-Bansal



Vivek Bansal

caffeine to destroy fat cells. However, evidence supporting efficacy is not available. Vitamin C, retinoic acid, and related Vitamin A derivatives can stimulate collagen synthesis. Retinoic acid also stimulates circulation and decreases the size of fat cells.

Systemic therapy includes an emerging approach utilizing mesotherapy, the injection of pharmacologic agents and vitamins into deeper layers of the skin by directly destroying fat cells. However, reports show that untrained non-physicians are performing this procedure, which can lead to severe complications. The safety and efficacy of this therapy is also controversial.

Physical therapies include Endermologie, an FDA-approved procedure developed in France that uses a rhythmic suction massage device to increase blood and lymphatic flow; it requires several sessions with subjective and temporary results. Lasers are available, including the FDA-approved devices Triactive, which mimic Endermologie with more emphasis on circulation, and VelasMOOTH, with emphasis on heat production to increase blood flow and destroy fat cells.

He says: For more severe cases, which are often difficult to treat, Board Certified Plastic Surgeon Dr. Vivek Bansal recommends other options. The simple surgical procedure called subcision helps moderate-to-severe cellulite by using local anesthesia and a catheter to break up the fibrous adhesions responsible for the skin puckering.

Another very effective treatment is the most advanced medical technology, which is a minimally invasive procedure called laser liposuction. This procedure is increasingly popular for body sculpting in targeted areas, which uses heat energy to remove local fat deposits while achieving skin tightening, resulting in a smoother and firmer aesthetic body contour with minimal downtime and discomfort.

The verdict: Dr. Sonia Badreshia-Bansal and Dr. Vivek Bansal agree that a combination of treatments that targets different aspects of cellulite formation will offer the best results along with a balanced diet and regular exercise. This emerging topic will likely lead to greater understanding and proven efficacy of evolving treatments in the future.

Dr. Sonia Badreshia-Bansal, a Danville dermatologist, is medical director of Elite MD Inc., Advanced Dermatology, Laser and Plastic Surgery Institute; her husband Dr. Vivek Bansal is a plastic surgeon.

Are there other causes?

Cellulite is most common in females with a family history. Because the cause is hormonal, it can be made worse during pregnancy, nursing, menstruation and estrogen therapy from oral contraceptive use and hormone replacement. All ethnicities are affected. Finally, being overweight causes greater fat deposit storage, which can enhance the appearance of cellulite on the skin surface.

Help! What do I do?

She says: If you're not ready for surgery, Board Certified Dermatologist Dr. Sonia Badreshia-Bansal suggests conservative measures, including lifestyle changes, topical treatment, systemic management and/or physical modalities. Unfortunately, there is no cure for cellulite. Adopting a healthy lifestyle combining a well-rounded diet, regular exercise and avoidance of hormone can reduce the appearance of cellulite.

Topical therapies can include herbal therapy including ginkgo, ginger, green tea and caffeine to improve vascular and lymphatic circulation, red grapes to be used as an antioxidant, and

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Well-being routine

Mental fitness is just as important as physical fitness

As important as a fitness routine is to your physical health, it's just as vital to have a "well-being routine" that focuses on your mental health. Being well-rounded physically and mentally can foster balance between your work and personal lives, and help reduce everyday stress.

Stress is a major and growing health concern in America, according to the American Psychological Association (APA). In fact, a third of all Americans say they are extremely stressed, and 77 percent report experiencing physical symptoms associated with stress, according to an APA study.

"Stress is a normal part of life, and small amounts can actually make you stronger physically and mentally," says Martica Heaner, a health, fitness and wellness expert. "But when stress builds up and becomes overwhelming, it's time to take action to manage its impact on your life. Looking after yourself by focusing on your wellness is one of the very best ways to take care of what's on the inside as well as the outside."

Americans are more focussed on overall wellness than ever before, a fact that has not escaped the notice of companies like The Body Shop, Heaner notes. The Body Shop, long recognized as leaders in the naturally inspired beauty industry, recently launched a line of Wellbeing products that fit into four key aspects of a wellness regimen—Divine Calm, Total Energy, Deep Sleep and Pure Detox.

Your well-being routine should help you create calm, get adequate rest, re-energize and purify your body, Heaner says.

Creating calm

- Manage small stressors. Try not to over schedule yourself or constantly react to every demand on your time. For example, rather than constantly checking e-mail throughout the day, schedule a few regular times to do so.

- Give yourself time to do nothing at all. Turn off the TV. Don't answer the phone. Or soak in a hot bath seasoned with a calming bath product. Look for products that incorporate naturally calming ingredients such as French lavender essential oil, camomile and soya milk.

Reaping rewards of rest

- Sleep deprivation can leave you feeling "hung over," impair you as much as several alcoholic drinks, shorten your attention span, make you feel sluggish, and even cause you to overeat.

- Follow a calming routine prior to bedtime. Incorporate some pampering in your routine, such as a relaxing shower, soothing moisturizer and a spritz of calming scent in the room, on your pillow or bed sheets.



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One-third of all Americans say they are extremely stressed, and 77 percent report experiencing physical symptoms associated with stress.

- Get extra sleep whenever possible. Set the alarm to go off at the last possible minute, instead of setting it earlier and hitting the snooze button a few times. Your body will benefit more from those extra 20 minutes if they're uninterrupted.

Re-energize your body

From improper nutrition, to lack of sleep or exercise and dehydration, there are many reasons why you might feel fatigued.

- Never skip breakfast. Even a small bowl of cereal or a piece of fruit can help you energize for the day ahead. Eat more if you exercise in the morning and will be expending energy.

- Put nutrition first, and worry less about calories, carbs or fat. Add some colorful vegetable or fruit to every meal—spinach or red peppers on your sandwich or pizza, beans in your salad or pasta.

Purify your body

You can minimize your exposure to environmental toxins with a few simple steps:

- Choosing organic foods can help you reduce the amount of toxins you ingest.

- Eat more walnuts and walnut oil, which are high in Omega-3 fatty acids that help quench free radicals in our bodies.

- Drink more water. To function at their best, every cell in your body needs to be properly hydrated. Getting enough water can help you feel less tired and flush toxins from your body.

- Choose all-natural products in every aspect of your life, from the cleaning products you use in your home to your beauty products.

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Brain boosters

Simple lifestyle changes can improve memory

Do you ever find yourself at the grocery store struggling to remember what you came for? Are you forgetting birthdays and lunch dates? If these situations sound familiar to you, you're not alone. Forgetfulness is one of the most common complaints of those in middle age and beyond.

Memory loss and Alzheimer's disease rank high on the list of senior fears. Alzheimer's was the No. 1 fear of aging, according to research conducted by Bankers Life and Casualty Co., a national life and health insurer that focuses on serving the retirement needs of the middle market. Similarly, a national poll by Research!America and PARADE magazine showed that adults were more than twice as likely to fear losing their mental capacity as their physical ability.

The good news, according to researchers at Johns Hopkins, is most memory loss has nothing to do with Alzheimer's disease. Nearly all of us, they say, take more time to learn and recall information as we age.

There are simple things that you can do in your everyday life to increase your ability to retain information and exercise your brain.

Engage your brain: Mentally stimulating activities strengthen brain cells and the connection between them. You can keep those cells in shape by giving them a workout. Instead of passively watching TV, try something that engages your brain: reading, writing, taking a class, doing a crossword puzzle, or even learning a new game to play with family members.

Stay in touch: Loneliness is linked to depression, a risk factor for memory loss. Try to keep your social network strong by volunteering or simply helping a neighbor. Make

a conscious effort to stay connected with friends and relatives by visiting with them or keeping in touch by phone or e-mail.

Eat healthy: Maintaining a balanced diet, low in saturated fats is said to be better for cognitive functioning. In addition, the Alzheimer's Association notes growing evidence that a diet rich in dark vegetables and fruits—which contain antioxidants—may help protect brain cells.

Stay active: Regular exercise can increase oxygen to the brain. It can also lower the risk for diseases that can lead to memory loss, such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Your doctor can help you develop an exercise regime that's best for you.

When to seek help: "It's important to know the difference between normal forgetting and something more serious," says Scott Perry, president of Bankers Life and Casualty Co., who serves on the board of directors of his local Alzheimer's Association chapter.

Serious memory problems, according to the National Institute on Aging, are those that affect a person's ability to perform everyday activities. A doctor should be contacted if you or your loved one start any of the following behaviors: asking the same questions over and over; becoming lost in familiar places; not being able to follow directions; getting very confused about time, people and places; and losing interest in daily activities such as grooming and eating.

If you have concerns about your memory, talk to your doctor right away. For more topics of interest, visit www.bankers.com and click "Senior Resources."

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Some of our physicians and staff with their infants to 18-year-olds, all born at San Ramon Regional Medical Center.

Each day the Family Birthing Center at San Ramon Regional Medical Center brings the joys of new life – new families begin and others grow larger. We're dedicated to making these moments extraordinary – so much so that many of our own doctors and staff would never go anywhere else to deliver their own babies. Experience great beginnings for yourself: one-on-one family-centered nursing care, Level II Intensive Care Nursery, and 24-hour in-hospital pediatricians from Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland. Close to home and easy to reach when the moment arrives. Call today to schedule a tour and see for yourself why this is a great place to start your family.

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