FIT FOR LIFE with Carol Westmorland

Those who play together stay together...

Isn't love a funny thing? We celebrate Valentine's Day, then, rather like the blooms, things fade when really we must continue to invest in our valentine long term and for the good of our health.

It is said that those who play together stay together.

Newcastle University's Human Nutrition Research Centre concluded that a husband makes you 4lb fatter.

I am a big fan of marriage so I wouldn't wish to put anyone off and, when all said and done, a few pounds between loved ones hardly matters too much.

However, over a ten year period it creeps up to 15lb if you don't have a child and 20lb if you do.

It's about contentment and the desire to please husbands in the kitchen.

As I write, my husband has settled into the kitchen and has proceeded to tuck into a cheesy dip with his Kettle chips. Point made.

Dynamic, healthy time together is just what couples need most. Cancer Research UK found that about 62 per cent of couples asked spent no time exercising, and less than 32 per cent claimed to feel challenged in their relationship.

To remedy this, the charity devised a campaign in 2009 with the aim of encouraging 50,000 people to pair up and go running together.

Training, if done à deux, I can promise is never dull. Keep your competitive streak in check and keep to your normal pace. Remind your partner that you are running with them, not against them.

I spent many years cycle training with my father. We had a very strict regime and it worked really well. We shared our aim and had respect for each other. Some of the following helped us:

- Agree a time to train and avoid uncertainty. Spontaneity doesn't work if you both want the best from your session. You need to prepare your fuel intake and rest period so have to work around a plan.
- No day is the same. Never intentionally make your partner feel uncomfortable. Healthy encouragement, if really necessary, is fine but taking delight in someone else's pain is not. I enjoy being silently pushed. Your partner, husband or not, should be intuitive enough to understand you.
- Play to strengths – if you like the hilly bits then take the lead. If your partner likes the flats then bed in and let them pace you.
- Don't chat too much. Focus on technique then settle in. You will soon judge who is feeling stronger and if it is you, don't expect idle chit chat until your partner is comfortable. It takes concentration to train effectively so you may find it easier to leave the chat for when you get home.

And remember, that post exercise high is more potent than any beautifully packaged Valentine Day fragrance or blooms - and it's free!

Carol Westmorland lives in the Eden Valley. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates. www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk

LIFE COACH with Marion Dunlop

Want to stop smoking? First work out why you smoke

Go on, admit it. Was quitting one of your New Year resolutions? The smoking habit affects around 20 per cent of the population according to government statistics and is the greatest single cause of illness and premature death in the UK. As with any habit it is easy to hear the messages about health and then dismiss them as not relevant to you.

It's human nature to think we're invincible and what goes for everyone else will somehow pass us by. Unlike many habits, smoking doesn't just affect us individually. People round about us may have to experience passive smoking; employers have to cover the cost of smoking breaks; and the NHS picks up the cost of caring for smoking induced illness.

So what keeps you smoking?

Begin to really understand what the habit means for you. Why did you start? What effect is it having on your family as well as you?

If you believe it helps you "to relax" then consider the fact that a cigarette contains 4,000 chemicals, none of them conducive to good health or calmness.

If the health risks don't motivate you then work out what it costs you financially. How many do you smoke a day? Multiply by seven for a week and then by 52 for a year. How many years have you been smoking?

If you smoke 20 a day research shows that this equates to approximately £2,800 a year for a taxpayer. What could you do with the money you've spent over the last five to 10 years?

It's easy to say "I'll stop, sometime."

Why not consider the change this month? You are the most precious thing on the planet to yourself and your family. If your stopping smoking allows someone you love to never start smoking or to have you in their life for longer… think about it.

If you need support then ask. There is NHS support, private therapy support and friends and family to help you. What are you waiting for?

- www.nosmokingday.org.uk

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