



RUBENSTEIN PUBLIC RELATIONS, INC.

DR FISCHER  
THE PARK AVENUE DIET

## THE NEWS & OBSERVER

March 17, 2009

### Weight lifting

By Joe Miller

It's only a theory, and there are no reams of research or intensive clinical trials to back it up. But it makes sense to those in the know: Spring is a better time to lose weight and get in shape than the dead of winter.

"It's absolutely true," says Jeff Wooten, a Raleigh personal trainer and owner of The Body Mechanic. "Just in my neighborhood, you see more and more people going outside. It's nice, you're feeling good. There's just more of an incentive to get out and do something."

That seems true now more than at the first of the year, when daylight is scarce and the temperatures more conducive to curling up with a tub of popcorn and a movie than lacing up the Nikes and going for a run. Well-intentioned though they may be, New Year's resolutions are often destined to fail. A study by Britain's University of Hertfordshire found that only 12 percent of 3,000 Brits and Americans surveyed succeeded with their resolutions.

For some, the spring is more conducive physiologically to getting fit. People who have seasonal affective disorder, or SAD, turn to carbohydrate-rich foods -- starchy pasta and potatoes, and sweets -- to stimulate the production of serotonin, a chemical in the brain that affects sleep, mood and appetite. Serotonin production is stimulated by sunlight.

"Carbs can be used for a quick lift," says Diana Koenning, a nutritionist with WakeMed, "but you end up putting on all that weight."

For others, the motivation to get moving in spring is psychological.

➡ Dr. Stuart Fischer was associate medical director for the Atkins Center, home of the low-carb Atkins diet, from 1988 to 1997. During his tenure, he noticed a curious trend.

"The phone would not ring for the first two months of the year," says Fischer. "Then in late March, early February people would start calling to make appointments."

"People suddenly started to realize that they were going to be seen more in public. When you start to take off some clothes, then you get down to business."

That revelation prompted him to develop the Park Avenue Diet, which, in addition to nutrition and exercise, encourages people to consider their overall appearance -- including their hair, skin, clothes.

"The incentive," says Fischer, "is image."

That's a message likely to resonate with any North Carolinian who's planning a beach vacation.

In addition to longer, warmer days, there's another thing feeding our appetite for healthier living this time of year: "We're getting into the season when more wonderful fruits and vegetables are available," says nutritionist Koenning. Less pricey local leafy greens are hitting markets, and before long they'll be joined by broccoli, strawberries, blueberries and other healthful produce.

A caveat or two about the spring-is-better theory:

While a spring-activated lifestyle does require more calories, Koenning says, "sometimes people mess with that, giving themselves permission to eat extra, beyond covering for the extra fuel they need."

Adds Keri Glassman, a nutritionist and contributor to Women's Health magazine, "Some research suggests ... warmer temperatures increase the need for temperature regulatory mechanisms to kick in, keeping the body cool, increasing the need for calories."

And, she says, nice weather has no bearing on one of the main bugaboos that keeps us from staying healthy: discipline.

Still even if there is no empirical evidence to support the notion that spring is a good time to get fit, there's something undeniable about the season.

"The reality is that spring is actually one of the best times to make the life changes necessary to control your weight," says Charles Platkin, host of the series, "I Want to Save Your Life," which debuts next month on the WE cable network. "It's a time of rebirth; the flowers are blooming, the days are longer, it's getting warmer, there's more energy in the air and you have a sense of renewal -- exactly why people get the bug to do their 'spring cleaning' during spring time."

Even Dr. Cathi Weatherly-Jones, an obstetrician and gynecologist with the Wake County Child Health Clinic, agrees there's something about the season. She lost 137 pounds over a 20-week period beginning in October 2006 after joining Weight Watchers and adhering to a daily walking routine -- at her local climate-controlled mall.

"Spring and fall are the best," says Weatherly-Jones. "The weather's nicer, the temperature is not so hot. It's a good time to be out."

Even so, she's sticking with the mall.