

'Why Exercise Alone Won't Save Us'

This is the time of year when trainers are mined from under beds and gym kits are disinterred from the bottom drawer. Google searches relating to physical fitness peak in January. Many people even trawl the web to find out about “desk exercises” and “workouts on the go” in case they are too busy to use their new gym memberships.

Paragraph 1

- **What impression is given about people and exercise at the start of the year, with ‘mined’ and ‘disinterred’?**

‘mined’- creates the impression that their gym kit must be excavated from beneath the bed, exaggerating the idea that they have not done exercise for a while

‘disinterred’- refers to the idea that the gym kit is so far down the draw that they must ‘dig it up’; acts as a metaphor for how long they have not exercised

Our relationship with exercise is complicated. Reports from the UK and the US show it is something we persistently struggle with. As the new year rolls around, we anticipate having the drive to behave differently and become regular exercisers, even in the knowledge that we will probably fail to do so. Why do we want to exercise? What do we expect it to do for us? We all know we are supposed to be exercising, but hundreds of millions of us can't face actually doing it. It is just possible the problem lies at the heart of the idea of exercise itself.

Paragraph 2

- **Do you think the writer points more blame to people or exercises itself?**
- **What effect does ‘hundreds of million’ have?**

The writer doesn't entirely blame the individual but places some responsibility. ‘Our relationship with exercise is complicated’ could demonstrate a sympathetic tone. ‘Persistently struggle with’ suggests people may not be getting it right as it is a continuous problem. This is extended with ‘probably fail to do so’. The final sentence suggests it may not be us, but ‘exercise itself’.

‘hundreds of millions’- this unifies society and it could be argued, much of the world, where the writer suggests we all struggle with exercise, especially in terms of motivation.

Exercise is movement of the muscles and limbs for a specific outcome, usually to enhance physical fitness. As such, for most of us, it is an optional addition to the working day – yet another item on a long list of responsibilities alongside the fulfilment of parental duties or earning money to put food on the table. But because the principal beneficiary of exercise is ourselves, it is one of the easiest chores to shirk. At the end of the working day, millions of us prefer to indulge in sedentary leisure activities instead of what we all think is good for us: a workout.

Paragraph 3

- How does the writer bring about the idea of self-sabotage and exercise?
- Why does the writer describe exercise as ‘chores? What are the connotations of this?

The writer says ‘because the principal beneficiary of exercise is ourselves, it is one of the easiest to shirk’- the writer suggests that although we benefit from exercise, it is also easy to go against this and avoid doing what is good for us.

This is also seen with ‘indulge in sedentary leisure activities instead of...’, where the writer explains we tend to prefer to do what is easy or more pleasurable. The adverb ‘instead’ also serves as a contrast and emphasises the point that we don’t always do what is good for us. ‘chores’- this suggests that people can view exercise as a task or burden and something to think negatively towards

Fitness crazes are like diets: if any of them worked, there wouldn’t be so many. CrossFit, the intensely physical, communal workout incorporating free weights, squats, pull-ups and so forth, is still less than 20 years old. Spin classes – vigorous group workouts on stationary bikes – have only been around for about 30. Aerobics was a craze about a decade before that, although many of its high-energy routines had already been around for a while. (The pastel horror of 1970s Jazzercise is probably best forgotten.) Before that, there was the jogging revolution, which began in the US in the early 1960s. The Joggers Manual, published in 1963 by the Oregon Heart Foundation, was a leaflet of about 200 words that sought to address the postwar panic about sedentary lifestyles by encouraging an accessible form of physical activity, explaining that “jogging is a bit more than a walk”. The jogging boom took a few years to get traction, hitting its stride in the mid- to late-80s, but it remains one of the most popular forms of exercise, now also in groups.

Paragraph 4

- What does the writer’s tone sound like in the first sentence?
- The writer makes a comparison between fitness crazes and diets, do you have any opinions around this?
- Do you think the fitness type and its time of popularity, reflect anything about society of that time?

The writer's tone sounds quite negative. He uses the if + conditional to show his lack of trust in fitness crazes.

He compares fitness crazes to fat diets, which people tend to know as being unsuccessful because they are hard to maintain. The writer makes this comparison to show that fitness crazes are similar; they tend to not stick around for very long because they are a fad.

Different exercises could reflect what was ‘in’ at the time. Most of the exercises have continued but are experienced differently. e.g., CrossFit is popular today and has grown to national and international events, Aerobics is perhaps less popular, jogging has become running and is an extremely competitive sport today. Accessories like the belt tend to not be so popular because technology has advanced and so has research around fitness.

The exercise craze that dominated the 1950s was, oddly, not even an exercise. The vibrating exercise belt promised users could achieve effortless weight loss by having their midribs violently jiggled. It didn’t work, but you can still find similar machines available for purchase today.

Paragraph 5

- Do you think the writer likes the exercise belt? What language helps to express his view?

The writer is not in favour of the vibrating belt as they state it is ‘not even an exercise’, this clearly tells the reader he doesn’t categorise as part of fitness and excludes it entirely. This is later seen with ‘it didn’t work’, expressing it in a more plain, factual way. ‘Violently jiggled’ also doesn’t make the device seem appealing as ‘violently’ makes it seem painful.

These fads even came with their own particular fashions – legwarmers, leotards, Lycra. So is our obsession with fitness doomed to be the stuff of embarrassing passing “phases”? Is exercise itself a fad?

Paragraph 6

- What is the connotation of ‘doomed’ in this context? What might the writer be suggesting about modern day fitness?
- Why do you think the writer has expressed ‘phases’ with inverted speech marks?
- What effect does the final question have on you as the reader?

The writer may be saying that its very likely fitness with see other fads in the future. ‘doomed’ suggests we are to expect something bad to happen

The writer may have used inverted speech marks because usually when this is used, it can show sarcasm, as if the idea is being made fun of in some way. The writer may be using this here to also express that the phases are not actually very short, but fitness fads seem to go on for long lengths of time

The final question encourages the readers to think about how they feel about exercise and the trends it has been through, and possibly think of where else it could go

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jan/03/why-exercise-alone-wont-save-us>