

DEBRA DALEY



# bodymoves

**Choose the  
right exercise  
to improve  
your health  
and prevent  
illness**



**from asthma and arthritis to diabetes and high blood pressure**

# body*moves*

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CICO BOOKS  
LONDON NEW YORK

Published in 2010 by CICO Books  
An imprint of Ryland Peters & Small Ltd  
20–21 Jockey's Fields 519 Broadway, 5th Floor  
London WC1R 4BW New York, NY 10012

[www.cicobooks.com](http://www.cicobooks.com)

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Design © CICO Books 2010

Photography pages 29, 40, 41, 49, 52, 53, 54, 55, 66, 67,  
68, 72, 73, 81, 95, 96, 102, 103, 104, 105, 108, 109,  
118, 119, 120, 124, 125, 128, 129, 132, 148, 149, 150,  
164, 165, 166, 176, 182, 183, 190, 191, 203, 204

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A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the  
Library of Congress and the British Library.

Paperback ISBN-13: 978 1 907030 31 4

Hardback PLC ISBN-13: 978 1 907030 53 6

Printed in China

Editor: Marion Paull

Designer: Roger Hammond

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# Feel better—live longer

My mother suffered from angina. That's the chest pains a person gets when their heart muscle is low on oxygen-rich blood. It's a symptom of coronary artery disease, the most common type of heart disease. One day while we were out shopping, my mother had a particularly scary angina attack. She was in her late-forties at the time and I was about 24. As we stopped at a traffic light on the way home, she turned to me, her face pale, her forehead damp with sweat, and said, "Bad hearts run in our family." Then she added, "You'll probably get angina, too."

I was struck by her tone of inevitability. The women in our family were predisposed to heart disease. Therefore hardening arteries and the possibility of untimely death must be my fate. Having witnessed the way in which my mother's life was curtailed by chronic sickness, by pain and fearfulness, I made a decision right there and then. Before the traffic light changed to green, I swore to myself, "I refuse to get angina. I reject my inheritance of heart disease."

Then I forgot all about it—at least, on a conscious level. I kept up with exercise, not out of any dedicated health promotion plan, but just because I enjoyed the feeling I got after running or going to the gym—the oxygen fizzing in my blood, the mental clarity, and the sensation of being limber. Exercise, and my work based in a large public health organization, also reminded me on a regular basis how incredible the human body is. Its capacity for repair is immense.

On turning 50, I found myself in good health, but I signed up for a complete physical check anyway. After the cardio workup, attached to electrodes, running on a treadmill that gradually sloped uphill, the technician told me that my stats were those of a person at least ten years younger than my biological age, and I suddenly remembered that long-ago moment in the car with my mother. I really hadn't thought about it in all those intervening years, but now I realized that I had passed through my forties without even a hint of angina. No chest pains. No high cholesterol. No angioplasty. No early grave. My heart was in good shape and I had altered my medical destiny.

**Looking back, I believe I owe my fundamentally good health and my productiveness to a lifelong habit of exercise.**

Not all of that exercise was super-intense. For long periods, especially when I was busy with a growing family and a full-time job, my routine consisted of brisk walking—but walking regularly maintained my baseline fitness, so that when I swung back into more challenging forms of exercise, it didn't take long to get up to speed.

Exercise has made a positive difference in my life. I exercised my way out of antenatal depression twice, and was able to deal with accidental injury and get through some stressful moments without collapsing. Now I am enjoying

not only the benefits of exercise, but being able to keep up with my kids. Believe me, going for a hike with a fit 20-year-old calls for stamina.

Exercise is brilliant. It's the best and simplest way to insure ourselves against the onset of debilitating, chronic ill-health and it's also a straightforward, cost-effective way of managing existing health conditions. Better still, you can use exercise to target specific health conditions, such as arthritis, diabetes, stress, or irritable bowel syndrome. Even people with conditions such as fibromyalgia or epilepsy, who were once considered too vulnerable for exercise, have been shown in the latest health-care studies to benefit from cautious physical activity.

### **What this book does**

*Body Moves* examines more than 50 common health conditions and describes how specific exercises can help to reduce their symptoms and stave off illness. It explains why exercise benefits these conditions, which kinds of exercise are best for specific infirmities, and how often you need to exercise to make a positive difference to them. *Body Moves* also offers best-exercise suggestions for life's normal experiences, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and aging.

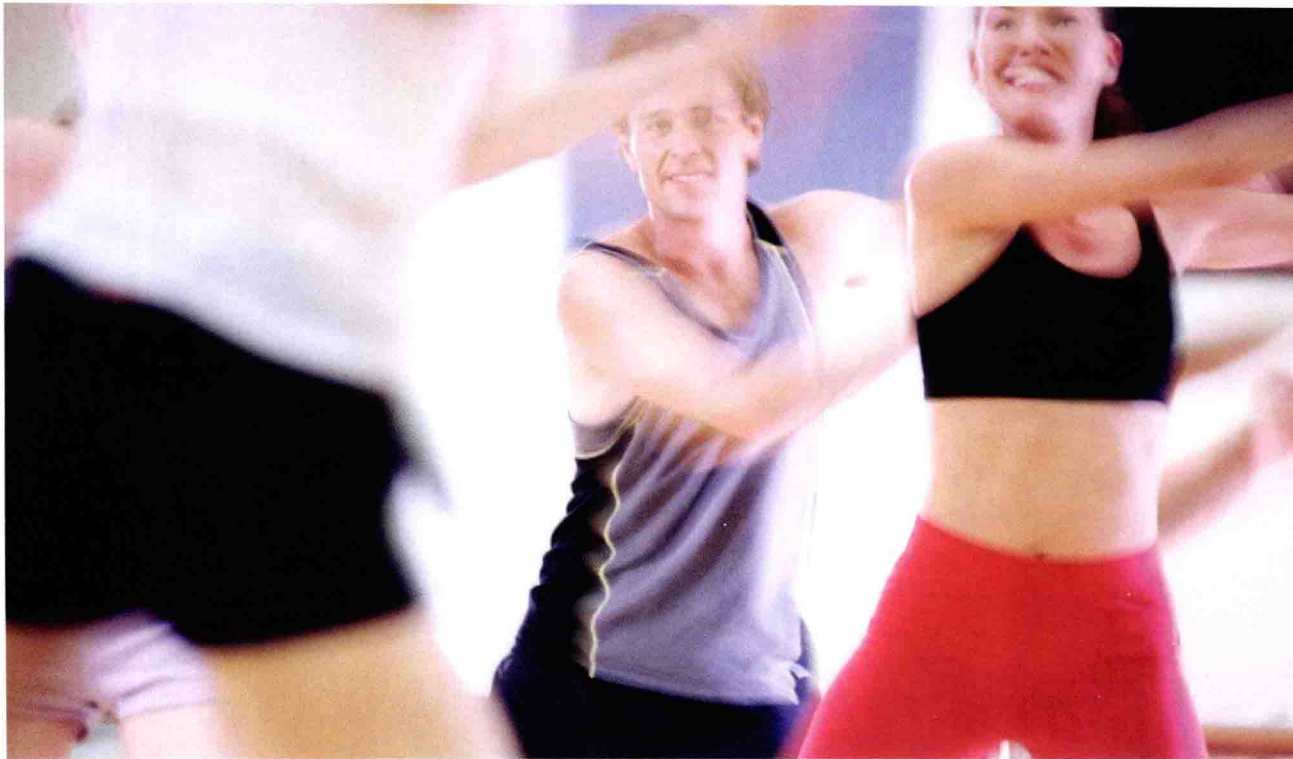
Some recommendations are aerobic, or muscle-strengthening, while others focus on flexibility, stretching, and balance. Variety is important. Everyone gets bored eventually, doing the same thing over and over. If the shine wears

off your aerobics classes at the gym, try salsa dancing for a change, if that is appropriate for your health status, or aqua aerobics. If you've always dismissed yoga because it's too "soft," try ashtanga or power yoga. Discover the conviviality of team sports or the mind-body pleasures of low-impact, non-contact martial arts. There's nothing more life-enhancing than a flexible mind in a flexible body.

In addition to researching the literature regarding exercise recommendations for common chronic conditions, I also found that online discussion groups were invaluable for hearing "from the horse's mouth," as it were, which exercise works for people with a particular ailment and which does not. For example, if I read that yoga was beneficial for a person with essential tremor, I then went to view the essential tremor online forum to see what people with ET actually had to say about their experiences with yoga and other forms of exercise.

A directory at the back of *Body Moves* lists the physical disciplines recommended throughout the book and offers descriptions of them and their variants. If you are new to exercise, please seek advice from your doctor and then from an instructor in the appropriate activity. When you begin a new exercise regime with an instructor, always inform him or her if you have a condition, disease, or impairment that may place limits on your physical ability, so that he or she knows to find ways to keep you safe.

# Move your body and change your life



Some people would rather lose weight by starving themselves than burn fat through aerobic activity. “Exercise is so boring,” they say. “I can’t be bothered.” Others would rather deal with stress by exercising their drinking arm, or give their thumbs a workout on a remote control device, than head out for a run or a swim. “I need to unwind,” they say, “and with a workload like mine, I’ve got no time for exercise.”

It’s true that dedicated physical activity does take time and effort, two expenditures already

*Challenge your preconceptions. Search for new ways to be active rather than getting bored and quitting.*

under pressure in our demanding, overscheduled lives. It’s normal to find exercise a little tedious after the first flush of enthusiasm passes and we make the transition from the beginner phase of a program to the reality of sustaining the exercise long term. (What?! You expect me to abandon this snuggly, toasty bed to go out and run in the rain? Are you kidding?!)

There can hardly be a person alive who doesn't know that hauling your butt off that couch can help prevent chronic disease, manage infirmities, and almost certainly prolong your life, but we wouldn't be human if we didn't ignore sound advice. Four out of ten cases of breast cancer in the United Kingdom could be prevented right now if women eased up on alcohol consumption, lost some weight, and got involved in regular exercise. It's that simple. But probably three out of those four women would rather take the risk of contracting cancer than make the effort to pull on a pair of sneakers and get started on a walking program. These are not bad women. These are human women. It's in our natures to be contrary, to say, "Yeah, cigarettes are harmful," while smoking a cigarette.

Our brains love to trick us into thinking that Buying The Thing (new running shoes, tennis racket, workout clothes) and Talking About The Thing ("They say yoga's brilliant!" "One day powerwalking will change my life!" "In the future, I intend to swim!" blah-blah-blah) are the same as Doing The Thing. They are not.

**The point about physical activity is that you have to do it. It doesn't work to say, "I own a rebounder therefore I rebound."**

But once you embark on exercise, you will find that exercise becomes its own best advocate for continuing to work out, even when you have one

of those slumpy days when you don't particularly feel like doing it. It takes about 12 weeks of regular physical activity to wire the doing of it into your body's cellular memory. After that, your body gets used to moving around in a meaningful way. In fact, your muscles come to expect the swim or the bike ride, the run or the tai chi class. You certainly notice the difference in how you feel when you miss your regular session. When you can't exercise, you feel less energetic and life seems to be a little more uphill than it was the day before.

It can be frustrating when you begin on a new course of exercise and have to confront your limitations and your issues with self-belief and self-image, fear and negative thinking. But sometimes you need to move out of your comfort zone (as long as you are not pushing yourself too hard and risking injury or fatigue) to achieve the quality of life that you deserve. Committing to exercise as a sustained relationship with life requires the same kind of big-picture thinking and one-day-at-a-time actions as any other significant long-term undertaking, such as marriage, professional development, or bringing up children. The experience will have its ups and downs, joys and doubts, difficulties and breakthroughs, but when you stick with it, your sincere effort will be rewarded. It is absolutely worth the investment of time and energy. The payoff is that you will transform and preserve your life.

# Sooner or later your body will send you a message



One Christmas morning a few years ago, a 46-year-old friend of mine was lying in bed with a hangover, after a staff party, trying to gather all of his mental and physical resources to get out of bed. He's a good person who loves his family and is a conscientious provider, but the demands of running his own business had got out of control. Business trips, entertaining clients, and long hours in his workshop had taken their toll on his health and his marriage. He had hardly seen anything of his kids for the whole of December, but he had promised that he would take time off over the holidays to be with his family.

*Exercise patience. The benefits of physical activity tend to arrive in the form of a slow-release reward rather than a lottery-winning bonanza.*

So he made the effort to roll out of bed and something cataclysmic happened to his spine. He fell onto the floor in excruciating pain from a slipped disk pressing on nerve roots and causing paralysis of some muscles. He lay there for the next hour unable to move, his calls for help unheard as the preparations for Christmas dinner went on downstairs without him. Eventually, one of his children found him, an ambulance was