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1962

You : The American Woman

Merle L. Gunsalus

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Recommended Citation

Gunsalus, Merle L., "You : The American Woman" (1962). *SDSU Extension Fact Sheets*. 1383.
https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/extension_fact/1383

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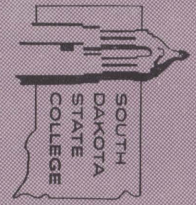
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Cooperative Extension Service

The American Woman YOU

You—the American Woman

At some time past the age of twenty, most women begin to feel an uneasiness about themselves as persons and about their pattern of living. Some may feel pushed for time, more fatigued than necessary, tense, unconfident, and discouraged with their appearance and the demanding role of just keeping up to being a woman. At this point a good self-check is in order. Living fully as a whole person is within the reach of every individual but it does take effort and thought.

Being healthy and charming is the prerogative of every woman regardless of her age. In fact, she has a responsibility to be both if she is to adequately fill her many diverse roles in benefiting herself, her family, and society.

No one needs to be “left behind by time.” Today a woman is all the better for her extra years, advertisements or Hollywood standards to the contrary. Today’s woman doesn’t look sixty-one, but if she does, it’s a handsome sixty-one. No one would choose to be the main character in the play, “Mrs. Moonlight,” who was granted her wish to remain always twenty-two—she found she lived unhappily ever after wearily, unalterably, and boringly. Aging can mean growth for each woman. Her “evergreen” interests in all sorts of living experiences can add **LIFE TO HER YEARS**. How much more satisfying than merely adding **YEARS TO HER LIFE**.

There are all kinds of fascinating women who are fun because they know how to be attractive in all sorts of ways. There are eight or nine million pretty girls around but being pretty isn’t what it takes. A woman should look her own age and it should be the best she can produce both physically and mentally.

Men do not like acts, bizarre makeup, a look of artificiality or the “too fresh from the hairdresser” look. Neither do they like a woman who looks like every other woman—she needs individuality and not imitation. Elia Kazan, the famous theatrical director, in writing of women said, “If I were a woman I would try to look as much like myself as possible and as little like everyone else.” He also sees the near-perfect woman as one who is “rugged without being tough, opinionated but not obnoxious, charged with energy, perception, and a nice fast shot of humor.”

A doctor has said that two things will keep a woman young—an intelligent way of living and an uncrushable spirit. Put these two items together with a

by Merle L. Gunsalus, Extension Family Life Specialist

willingness to participate fully in the living process and success is assured. Youth is inward rather than outward. The woman who is bitter, envious, frustrated and tired is far from youth while the woman who is outgoing, curious, sympathetic, eagerly interested in life looks young.

To keep attractive a famous psychiatrist suggests that an individual must:

- Have flexibility and adjustment
- Be functioning (alive every minute)

He also feels that certain attitudes keep the mind young. A person must feel **commitment** to his activities and his chosen way of living. This implies interest and a willingness to take risks in new experiences.

Another writer suggests a need to develop **interpersonal competence** which is the ability in social relations or relationships with others. It can develop favorably through its components: health, intelligence, empathy, autonomy, judgment, and creativity.

Less concern with birthdays and a little more attention to health and fitness
to grooming and beauty care
to living with other people harmoniously
is more to the point.

Do you have a desire to make the most of what you have? Is this wish strong enough to actually check up on yourself in all the areas of living and start on a plan of action?

Being a woman, your answer is yes. After all, you know there is no reason to have to go on doing things the same way year after year. You also recognize the stimulation of trying something new. You want to have the feeling of well-being that comes with interesting activity and with self-confidence. It's never too late to improve your health, your general appearance, and your personality.

As you check yourself physically:

- Be realistic about how you look to others. Don't exaggerate your good points and don't see double when you look at your imperfections.
- Grooming must be thorough—figure, hair, skin, cosmetics.
- What about your posture? Would you look and feel better if it were improved?
- Health is the basic essential. Do you follow good practices in nutrition, rest, exercise, cleanliness? Do you have a regular check-up with your doctor at least once each year?
- Avoid stress and strain: refuse to become a hypochondriac.

In checking yourself mentally, remember:

- Emotional stability provides the firmness necessary to take shocks and dilemmas in stride.
- Adaptability helps in accepting new situations with a minimum of fretting and delay.
- Endurance protects against new strainings and emergencies and prevents breakdowns.
- A good sense of values together with a sense of humor wards off depression or despair.

PHYSICAL FITNESS

An increasing emphasis on physical fitness is evident for persons of all ages. A recent conference in an adjoining state found, "In these United States there exists a definite lack of physically active, vigorous and enthusiastic manpower." This is the result of living in an age of ease and luxury, inactivity and spectatoritis, soft living and obesity. To halt this trend, "it is the duty of a good citizen in a democracy, the responsibility of a parent in his home, and the pleasure in living for everyone" to attain that goal.

Physical fitness is a state of physical well-being which adds to enthusiasm for living. It consists of strength, endurance, speed, agility, balance, and flexibility. The sufficiently fit person can accomplish each day's work with a minimum of fatigue and can remain active far into the later years.

Physical fitness is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is more than a show of strength, large muscular physique, proficiency in a sport, or ability to accomplish unusual feats. Physical fitness is a relationship between the mind and the body. The mind can perform at its best when the body cooperates. Dr. Ernst Jokl of the University of Kentucky says, "Those who maintain activity have better performance records, less degenerative diseases, and probably a longer life expectancy than the general population."

Few women develop or care for the potentialities of their bodies. They would like an enviable figure but settle for less because they won't take the time necessary to understand their body's needs.

The firmness and tone of a good body can be sustained throughout life and the figure in need of correction can be changed and controlled at any age. The most common figure woes belonging to women are: sagging bosom, protruding abdomen, heavy thighs, drooping buttocks, heavy calves and ankles, double chin, bulging hips.

Those who wish to be physically fit can do so through sports or calisthenics engaged in consistently. Sporadic bursts of activity are more harmful than helpful.

A physical examination by a qualified doctor is necessary before starting an intensive program. The doctor can also suggest specific exercises for your individual requirements.

Do not begin with an overly ambitious program but rather with a series of mild exercises and as the degree of fitness improves, advance to a more strenuous program. Using music from radio, phonograph, or TV makes for fun. Try doing exercises with family or friends and you'll stick at it longer.

A simple program used regularly is best. Keep periods of exercise reasonable. If you are out of condition, don't attempt the pace of a vigorous sport. Work gradually to a level of good conditioning. If you feel weak, if fatigue persists after engaging in activity, or if the heart pounds or breathlessness occurs longer than it should after resting, the exercise is too severe or prolonged.

There are many simple exercises to be practiced in a chair, on the bed or floor, or while working. No elaborate equipment is needed.

Simple home facilities for exercise offer encouragement to exercise for the entire family. You will think of others than those on this list:

Driveway—shuffleboard, basketball, hopscotch, badminton, tetherball.

Basement—table tennis, square dancing, chinning bar, tumbling mat, weight lifting.

Backyard—putting green, basketball, volleyball, aerial darts, stunts and tumbling, swimming, skating.

Other facilities for exercise are offered in most communities by churches, clubs, parks, recreation programs, camps, and various commercial facilities.

FATIGUE

Women have many roles—wife, mother, homemaker, assistant bread-winner, career woman, worker for community good—to name a few. Because these roles are constantly intermingled, it is difficult for her to concentrate fully on any one of her goals. Her days are filled with such activity, choice, and pressure that it is small wonder she is fatigued. In addition, a great deal of fatigue comes from such unsuspected sources as loneliness, frustration, or the compulsive drive of modern life. Normal fatigue follows physical activity and it vanishes with rest or a good night's sleep. The type of fatigue that builds up without release will demand other measures and should be guarded against.

RELAXATION

Tension is a reminder that the body needs the "pause that refreshes." Learning to relax takes time and our schedules find little place for it. It is necessary to learn how to relax if fatigue is to be dispatched. A change of pace, a change of interest, taking a warm bath, listening to favorite music, doing some little satisfying job with the hands—these are techniques and each must find the ones that will be satisfactory.

To relax one needs to know how to let go. Relaxing is literally that—easing up all over. When the body is rested and normal, the mind responds to its ease and life somehow looks better.

Try these for a starter when feeling tired or tense:

A floor rest—simple and effective. Just lie on the floor with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Let your mind float.

A quick thorough wriggle—just shake, stretch, squirm, and wriggle from head to foot. Shrug your shoulders, rotate your head, twist around in your pelvis.

Sit in a chair and simply flop over from your thigh joint letting your head and arms dangle down between, your knees, rag-doll fashion. Come up for air and flop again.

POSTURE

Good posture makes for good health and good appearance. The way a person stands and walks tells much. The woman who demands a second glance has good posture. By working on improved posture and developing a smoother way of carrying yourself, you

will feel better, look lovelier, and be more self-confident. Good posture can literally remold your figure.

If yours needs some improvement, start at ground level and move upwards with a posture check.

Feet should be slightly apart with toes pointing straight ahead and the body weight falling directly through the center of your ankle bones.

Knees should be slightly flexed. Resist the temptation to stiffen them in a rigid position. This causes the hips and stomach to pop out and the entire body tenses.

Push hips slightly forward and attempt to "make yourself small" by tucking the buttocks under and pulling in the stomach muscles.

Raise your head. This pulls up the chest. Don't overdo. Be sure your shoulders are relaxed rather than carried high—let them float.

You should now be neatly stacked! If you have lost control someplace along the way, you need to work at body alignment. Ideally your body should show an ear-to-ankle lineup. Keep checking until you are satisfied that your newly-established posture is an instinctive part of you. You'll look and feel better. You will also go through the day's motions with ease and be proud of your streamlining.

To walk gracefully, point toes straight ahead, place your weight on the balls of your feet and step quickly and lightly on your heels. The length of your step should be approximately one and one-half times the length of your shoe. Practice walking with a book of equal weight in either hand rather than on your head. Hold your head high when walking and your rib cage up. In motion your body should walk from the thighs down. Swing your legs from the thigh with each step that you take. Don't squeeze your arms to your body, keep your elbows turned out.

WHY WAIT FOR TOMORROW?

Every woman comes to a time when she should take inventory and get rid of the accumulated bric-a-brac in her way of living. She should check up on the things she has always thought she wanted, or feared, or regretted; free herself of intangible desires and prejudices.

She must face the future candidly, try to determine the real problems that lie ahead, and prepare to meet them. A willingness to do so will, in itself, give a new feeling of well-being. By improving her fitness and her appearance, she achieves new morale along with self-acceptance and self-approval.

Learning new skills, reaching out for new adventures, living more completely—that is the ideal. The more things tried, the more alert and alive you will become. Why wait for tomorrow?

