

December 12, 1984

CONTACT: Kevin Orlin Johnson
OFFICE: 688-3403
HOME: 357-2165

** Lose Weight the Old-Fashioned Way--By Yawning

DALLAS--Forget it, Fonda. Get with it, Simmons. If you want to lose weight and stay in shape, aerobics is out. Dieting, too, according to a book by John Quincy, M.D.

Basically, the Quincy Weight Loss Program is: sleep a lot, lie very still and yawn whenever you can.

But don't dash out to your local bookstore for Dr. Quincy's book. You won't find this cheerful little tome outside of a really good collection of 18th-century medical books, like the one in the library of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Dallas.

Dr. Quincy was the editor of *Medicina Statica, being the Aphorisms of Sanctorius . . . with large Explanations*, published in London in 1720. Sanctorius was the Latin pen-name of Santorio Santorio, a 17th-century physician whose work was still standard in the early 18th century. And in today's exercise-mad world, it seems about time for a new look at Sanctorius.

Sanctorius, aided and abetted by the enthusiastic Dr. Quincy, tells it like it is--or was, in those lace-cuffed days before these Johnny-come-latelies got hold of exercise and made it all hard and tiresome.

Drs. Sanctorius and Quincy were terribly concerned about Perspiration. "Both as to the Matter of it and its Quantity," they said, Perspiration "is absolutely necessary to the well being of a human Body." Health cannot be maintained, they said, unless Perspiration "be rightly performed." This was evidently in the nature of a cautionary statement, in case any of their readers hadn't joined a Perspiration Class to learn how to do it rightly, or had decided to give up Perspiring altogether. You see, Perspiration--if properly done--removed all of the nasty things your body didn't need, and thereby kept you healthy and reduced your weight.

But you couldn't just sit around in your periwig on a hot day and sweat. These boys aren't discussing Sweat. "It is necessary to distinguish between Perspiration and Sweat," wrote Sanctorius. "Perspiration preserves Health, Sweat is always injurious . . . of it." And the rest of the 300-page volume, heavily padded with Dr. Quincy's Large Explanations, teaches us the Principles of Right Perspiration.

Unlike the steamy bodies in today's exercise classes, the gentlemen of the Age of Reason concentrated on "Imperceptible Perspiration," "that insensible Steam or Vapour, which in Winter time exhales to about fifty Ounces in the space of a natural Day," as Dr. Q. put it. So right there, just by imperceptibly perspiring on a cold day, you could drop about three pounds. A weight-loss system this logical would make you revise your personal program immediately, wouldn't it?

Of course, it wasn't enough to simply start Imperceptibly Perspiring; you had to know how and when to do it. Exercise was out of the question. "By too much Exercise," Drs. Sanctorius and Quincy tell us, "the Excrements are for the greatest Part distributed through the whole Habit of the Body, by which the Belly becomes costive . . ."

(More)

Now, you wouldn't want to go around with a costive Belly, would you? And that's not the worst of it. "By too much exercise the Fibres become hard," said Dr. Quincy, and who wants to be all hard and firm? Violent exercise, admits Dr. Q., "renders Persons lighter, but it hastens an old Age, and threatens untimely Death; for according to the Philosopher (Plato to you), those who are exercised, die sooner than those who are not." There you have it. No more exercise for you. Plato said so.

Fortunately, the venerable doctors offered a less hazardous alternative. "Sleep," they wrote, "is so necessary for a right Perspiration. . . By Exercise a Body Perspires the less, but the more by Sleep," Dr. Q. assured his readers, "What is well digested and fit to part with, mostly flies off during Sleep . . . for after Sleep one may perceive himself lighter; because he really is so, by about three Pound." In case the scientifically-minded reader didn't believe this right off the bat, Sanctorius gives a clinical explanation: "By Sleep the Humours are concentrated," he said, "and the Body is rendered lighter." Dr. Quincy adds an even Larger Explanation, but let that pass. You wouldn't believe it.

But losing weight by Sleep wasn't as easy as it sounds; it took dedication and strict adherence to a demanding schedule. Sanctorius prescribes ten Hours in Bed after Supper, to really Perspire well. "An Hour's Sleep at Noon after Meal," he adds, "sometimes occasions a Body insensibly to perspire a Pound." Since these pounds slip off insensibly, you'd have to check, afterwards, so you could keep tabs and wouldn't waste away before you knew it, but according to Drs. Sanctorius and Quincy you wouldn't have to step on the scale or try to gather your baggy waistcoat. "When the Head seems light after Sleep at Noon, it is a sign that no part of the former Day's Perspiration hath been obstructed."

Keeping up with the Sanctorius Sleep System could make you positively giddy.

But no matter how light-headed the imperceptible loss of all those pounds makes you feel, you musn't fidget during those ten-hour nights and noontime naps. That would ruin the whole thing. "Frequent turning in Bed, so as to exercise all the Muscles by it, weakens the Constitution, and lessens Digestion and Perspiration. The best Remedy is resolutely to keep in the same Posture," prescribes Dr. Sanctorius. But Dr. Quincy is nobody's fool. He dismisses his predecessor's advice, smugly asserting that this kind of inertia "is not practicable." Surely more field research, employing the most resolute sleepers obtainable, is indicated.

Still, the good doctors didn't advocate avoidance of all exercise. Sanctorius allowed that "a good Deal is insensibly discharged, when Nature endeavors to get rid of the retained Perspirable Matter, by Yawning and Stretching of the Limbs." And lest this information seem laughably obsolete to his enlightened readers, Dr. Quincy gave an 18th-century update: the Perspirable Matter, he explained, accumulated in the "cutaneous Passages," and gave such "little Irritations" as to "excite Yawning and Stretching." These movements, apparently, "shake the Membranes of the whole Body, and shifting the Contacts of their Fibres and the enclosed Matter, by degrees throw it off." It's the kind of exercise that appeals to everybody, but it's hard to imagine that a videotaped Yawning Workout would sell in today's market.

In fairness, it should also be mentioned that Sanctorius was one of the first advocates of the systematic study of metabolic functions, as well as the use of the oral thermometer and the pulse rate in diagnosis. Dr. Quincy was no mere quack, either, since he advocates regular scrubblings in a warm bathtub as a basic hygienic measure and flatly denies that ticks and lice were spontaneously generated from Perspirable Matter--not bad for 1720. Certainly Quincy's professionalism is apparent in one last piece of advice he gives for extending life span: "Old Persons by frequent spitting protract their Lives."

Heck, it's worth a shot.

--30--

(Editors note: Picture enclosed.)

(Typesetters note: Preserve capitalization throughout.)