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Fitness fads not new, exhibit reveals

THE EXERCISE guru says, "Go for the burn." The surgeon general says, "Don't smoke." Grandpa says, "Eat your oatmeal." Mom adds, "Chew your food." Health and fitness advice is everywhere, but that's nothing new.

Where did it all begin? According to a new exhibit at Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn called "Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society, 1830-1940," Americans have embraced almost every health and fitness craze that's come along in the last 150 years.

Using objects that range from a portable violet ray generator to a glass leech cup and an "electro-

body belt," the exhibit shows what has changed and what hasn't in the American quest for perfect health.

Organized by The Strong Museum of Rochester, N.Y., and funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities, "Fit for America" reveals the beginnings of a fitness-conscious society.

The exhibit looks at how Americans thought about their health, the self-cures they adopted and their desire to achieve the ideal physical form during the era of industrialization.

HEALTH REFORM began as a widespread movement in the 1830s

and was most visible in the form of temperance campaigns against "demon alcohol." Those Americans who "stimulated" themselves with tobacco, strong drink and even table condiments, such as pepper and mustard, were castigated by religious reformers of the days.

The exhibit uses artifacts, including 19th-century whiskey bottles, tobacco tins and spice containers to depict the devils that plagued society.

The advocated alternatives to sloth and gluttony included renewal through diet, cleanliness and action. Advertisements for electrical notions and herbal potions, as well as some of the actual apparatus and containers, show how Americans were enticed into healthier behavior.

Between 1860 and 1890, "survival of the fittest" became an American preoccupation.

As concern grew for the fitness of a middle class performing less and less manual labor, calisthenics, gymnastics and recreational sports evolved as an important part of American daily life.

A set of "Indian clubs" and an 1875 baseball bat are among the items that represent fitness interests of late 19th-century everyday folk.

By the 1890s and through the 1940s, the contemporary American image of health and fitness began taking shape.

Teddy Roosevelt provided a rugged role model with his support of the "the strenuous life" while the rise of amateur and professional sports combined to embody the health reform movement of the early 20th century.

Photographs of football and bicycling teams depict fitness-minded Americans who sought a middle ground between fanaticism and neglect.

"FIT FOR AMERICA" follows American fitness movements while reintroducing the health gurus of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Through photographs, magazine articles and written testimonials, visitors encounter such personalities as muscle man Charles Atlas, swimmer and "bathing beauty" Annette Kellerman and diet reform advocates Sylvester Graham (of cracker fame) and Horace Fletcher (who suggested chewing every mouthful of food 80 times). Although perfection may have had a different look a century ago,

"Fit for America" shows that the pursuit of physical perfection is nothing new.

A Jane Fonda workout kit and other modern fitness-related objects reflect all that has gone before and will probably come round again.

"Fit for America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society 1830-1940" is on view in Henry Ford Museum's special exhibits gallery through Oct. 31. A book of the same name accompanies the exhibit and is available in museum stores.



A postcard, circa 1907-15, depicts the streamlined form that replaced the 19th-century hourglass figure as a feminine ideal.

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British soldiers stationed in India introduced Indian clubs to the western world, where they became popular in the mid 19th century. This reproduction of an 1866 drawing illustrates proper use of the clubs in a fitness workout.

Photo exhibit traces life of jazz musician

One of Detroit's most valuable contributions is its legacy as one of the world's most prolific producers of jazz musicians and music.

The Detroit Historical Museum's 1991 exhibition in celebration of African American History Month in February will present "The Life and Photographs of Milt Hinton, Jazz Musician."

This traveling exhibition of more than 26 black and white photographs taken by the "dean" of jazz bassists, Milt Hinton, opened to the public this month.

Extending through May, the exhibition will have special meaning for the Detroit area because nearly half of the photographs feature Detroit musicians.

"This exhibition has received a very enthusiastic response from Detroit's jazz community, even before it has opened," said Sylvia L. Williams, museum education curator.

"We enlisted the assistance of several of Detroit's most respected and well-known jazz musicians and experts to present two days of symposia. Through lecture, demonstration and videos, we explored the origins of jazz, the Detroit jazz tradition and the future of jazz."

HINTON'S CAREER spans more than 60 years. He has photographed many of the giants of jazz for nearly as many years.

Some of the "jazz legends" pictured in the exhibition include Billie Holiday, Lester Young, Ron Carter, Kenny Burrell, Major Holley, Archa Franklin, and Dinah Washington. Personal commentary by Hinton, providing anecdotes and an insider's view of jazz history accompanies the photographs.



This photo of Aretha Franklin, circa 1960, in a New York recording studio, was taken by Milt Hinton. It's included in "The Life and Photographs of Milt Hinton, Jazz Musician."

The exhibition is sponsored by the Acta Life and Casualty Co., which also sponsored a private reception for the exhibition and Hinton, where he signed copies of his autobiography, "Bass Lane."

He also was honored with a bass choir recital and induction into the Greystone International Jazz Museum Hall of Fame. The Greystone Jazz Museum is providing supplemental artifacts for the exhibition.

The Detroit Historical Museum is a Detroit Historical Department institution. It is at 5401 Woodward at Kirby in the University Cultural Center. The museum's hours are Wednesday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.



Milt Hinton is the dean of jazz bassists among African Americans.

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