

No Pain, No Gain

Should exercise ever hurt?

A few years ago, business was slow and I took a job as a trainer at a ladies spa in Northeast Portland. Right off the bat, the boss went after my tenuous version of femininity by suggesting that I have a professional portrait taken to put on display for the club members. Visions of me in pancake makeup and lipstick filled my head. Horrified, I ran screaming to my faggy-butth friend Trista, who, unbeknownst to me, was pro-waxing.

Keep in mind that my entire family is butch: my parents, brothers and sisters. No one ever pinned me down to pluck out my eyebrow hairs one by one. (In all fairness here, I am pro-mani/pedicure, but even my nails, when primped and painted, are colors found only on a machine shop floor—chrome or black.) So off I went to the recommended salon, having received the well-intentioned advice of my friend: "Makeup: no. Wax: yes."

I sat in the chair and had a nervous, nonstop, mostly one-way conversation with the attendant.

She then placed the strip of paper on my upper lip, leaned close to my ear and said, "No pain, no gain," while ripping what felt like half of my cerebrum out.



Dear Ethel
BY MARIA CALLAHAN

I wasn't sure she understood what I was saying, and looking at my face from various angles with devious intent, she resembled a person I once encountered at a party who had taken Ecstasy. She nodded when I told her I was a trainer, then said flatly in broken English, "Lay down, and keep your mouth shut." My kind of girl.

What happened next was a blur. Out came the Popsicle stick and steaming vat of goo onto my face. Way too hot. She then placed the strip of paper on my upper lip, leaned close to my ear and said, "No pain, no gain," while ripping what felt like half of my cerebrum out. Determined not to whimper, my eyes watered uncontrollably as she finished the job with the largest pair of tweezers I've ever seen, likely purchased at a feed store.

Long story shortened: On my way into work, I handed my boss my professional photo. Looking

through her office window, I watched her perfectly manicured eyebrows rise as she noticed my now burned-on mustache. She later suggested that we just go with a bio.

DEAR ETHEL:

I have a friend who is an athlete and coach. She is very driven, and she likes to have me do the same exercises that she does, which sometimes hurt both of us. When I protest, she says things like, "No pain, no gain." I'm trying my hardest, but sometimes I feel like I'm going to pop out a kidney. I'm new to all of this. Should exercise ever hurt?

First, let's talk about your friend. She sounds ultra competitive, and that can be frustrating and even dangerous. You're not being a wimp by setting limits. If your friend can't respect your limits, for your own safety, you should stop exercising with her for now.

Since you two are friends, I want to bring up another subject, anorexia athletica, aka exercise addiction. People who continue to exercise regardless of pain and injury might be suffering from it. This disorder goes hand in hand with the eating disorder anorexia nervosa. Athletes and trainers have a much higher incidence of this condition, and I have seen a lot of very well-disguised cases. Question her further—away from the gym.

Now, on to your question. No, and maybe. If I am exercising and the exercise hurts at the time I am performing it, I stop immediately. I then check my form, adjust my physical position or drop the

weight accordingly. Start with a 5 percent to 10 percent decrease. If I still can't perform the exercise with proper form and comfort, I abandon the exercise altogether. Pain is not necessary when there are so many effective ways to work your muscles.

Muscle soreness the next day, on the other hand, is normal and even desirable. It's a great way to tell what muscles you've worked. Some clients never get sore, but others are sore after every single workout when they first begin, or not sore for two to three days after the workout, which is perplexing. This type of post-exercise soreness is known as delayed onset of muscle soreness, DOMs. Eventually they adapt and rarely get sore anymore. Contrary to what you'd think, the clients who complain the most about soreness complain even more when it stops happening. When my clients are "normal" sore, I tell them good job, stretch, and drink lots of water.

I recommend that you consider working with a neutral source to learn via class, personal trainer, etc. Focus on creating positive associations with exercise. They will only increase your chances of adhering to an exercise program. **JO**

For new exercises visit www.exrx.net.

Information in this column should not be used in place of advice from a licensed health care professional. If you have a health or fitness question, e-mail DEAR ETHEL at mariacallahan@gmail.com or visit www.mariacallahan.net.

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