

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Fitness & Health Section
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Get Out! Get Fit!

“Check this out!” I said, eager to continue my streak. Interview subject Melanie Dean was graciously indulging me. What had started as a primer on home workouts had devolved — or at least been momentarily hijacked — into a personal training session. Sweet deal for me, since Dean, a wellness instructor at Rex Healthcare of Cary, was also a personal trainer. That is, she gets paid (the going rate for local personal trainers is \$35-\$100 per visit) to go to people’s homes and set them up with a tailored workout. I was simply weaving a little personal experience into the story.

To this point, Dean had made only slight tweaks to my technique. One of the main reasons she feels it’s essential to have a personal trainer come to your house at least once (one a month of possible, more often if financially feasible) is to teach you the correct way to exercise from the start. “It’s a safety issue for one,” she said. Poor execution can also leave you more vulnerable to injury.

So far, I appeared to be in good shape with the modest, half-hour to 45-minute routine I’ve been doing for seven years now. Until I signed up for the inaugural Cycle North Carolina bike ride — a two-week trek covering more than 800 miles from Manteo to Murphy — in 1999, I’d never seen the need for a strength and conditioning workout. The prospect of riding cross-state at age 43, though, changed my way of thinking. I began a varied workout involving weights, yoga, stretching and abs work.

I inserted myself subtly into the interview. “Well, what would you think of someone who did pushups like this?” I asked, tossing my reporter’s notebook to the side and dropping to the floor for five.

“That’s not bad,” she said. “The main thing you want to do is keep your hands in line with your chest, then widen them to a comfortable distance.”

She analyzed my squats, another problem area for a lot of people (they tend to bend their knees forward of their toes; not good, Dean said). She liked my leg lift and she thought I had a pretty solid nucleus for a basic crunch, noting that the shoulders should always be off the mat and the neck should not move.

Then I got cocky. My check-this-out moment was an advanced crunch I’d picked up somewhere. Maybe from an angry high school football coach. Maybe a Marine Corps training film from the ‘50s. It was a cross-crunch, actually, in which hands were laced behind head and left elbow was brought up in a jerky motion to make near-contact (OK, maybe within a foot) with right foot, and vice versa. I ripped off a couple of those babies.

Dean was quiet, her eyes narrowed. “I don’t usually recommend that,” she finally said with admirable tact. Then, seeing the glass half full of lemonade instead of half empty with lemons, she offered an alternative: Lay on my back, knees bent, then roll the hips and knees to one side, being sure to keep my torso as straight as possible. Now do a crunch. Ooowwww, That felt much better.

I’d been journalistically skeptical when Dean, a personal trainer, said it was a good idea to hire a personal trainer. But already she had amended my abs workout to the point that just a few days later I was noticing more tone along my sides. This personal trainer thing was gaining traction. Unfortunately, the interview ended before I had a chance to display my curl technique to Dean.

Looks like that’s gonna cost me.
