

NAAFA Newsletter

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NEWS AND COMMENT

FDA INVESTIGATES GASTRIC BUBBLE

The Food and Drug Administration, which last fall approved the gastric bubble (balloon) for use, has begun an investigation into the safety of that weight loss device.

According to Dr. Jay Adlersberg of WABC Television News in New York, in a broadcast on September 12, the FDA opened the investigation this month after receiving 54 complaints about the bubble, including a reported death in the state of Florida. During the course of the investigation, the FDA will attempt to determine if the bubble was directly related to that death.

Other complaints received by the FDA included 28 cases in which the bubble had to be removed surgically (the bubble is normally extracted through the mouth), one case in which the patient's stomach was perforated, one case in which the bubble could not be found at all, with the balance of complaints involving cases of the bubble being expelled while vomiting, or through the intestines.

There are currently 15,000 bubbles "in place" according to WABC news. The report also mentioned that the procedure should be used only on patients who were over 100 pounds above their chart weight. One physician interviewed reported that he has used the bubble on many patients but has noted that only 15% achieved any substantial weight loss. Two other New York physicians stated that they have inserted the bubble in 50 patients with only a few minor problems, but that they were toughening up their criteria for accepting bubble patients after they received a letter from the bubble's manufacturer stating that seven bubbles had to be removed surgically.

Dr. Jay Adlerberg's conclusion to the report was a warning to anyone considering such a procedure to wait until the FDA finishes their investigation.

COMMENTARY

We agree with Dr. Jay Adlersberg's advice to wait before going ahead with the gastric bubble implant. In fact, in the May 1986 Newsletter (Vol. XI, Issue 6) in a article entitled "BALLOON PROCEDURE BEING WIDELY PROMOTED--BUT LONG-TERM SUCCESS DOUBTED" we stated "Are you tempted to try the bubble...? Don't do it yet."

We also reported that Dr. Albert J. Stunkard of the University of Pennsylvania described the bubble as being "worthy of further study", predicting that it will be "too widely used with a minimum of information about it"; and that Dr. Theodore Van Itallie of St. Lukes-Roosevelt Medical Center (NY) referred to "possible complications" and stated his opinion that the FDA "acted prematurely in approving the device." Perhaps these experts were right.

The possibility of surgery to remove the bubble, plus the other previously known complications such as stomach ulcers and gastrointestinal blockage should be a major concern to anyone considering the bubble. These complications should also be of major concern to the physicians who provide the bubble and we think they should be discussed with all patients seeking the bubble procedure.

The bubble business is big business. At an average of \$3,000 per procedure, just the 15,000 bubbles that are currently in place represent \$45 million in health care costs paid by either fat patients or their health insurance carriers. American Edwards, the manufacturer, could show gross sales of \$6 million just on the 15,000 bubbles in place today, at \$400 per bubble--and that would not include those which have been sold, inserted, and already removed. It should also be pointed out that the bubble has been available for only one year, and it wasn't as widely promoted in the beginning as it is now.

We hope that the FDA pursues its investigation vigorously, and that it examines the bubble not just for its safety, but also for its long-term effectiveness. Fat people are risking too much, and spending too much, to warrant any less than a thorough investigation. □

We encourage NAAFA members to insist that any health professional who discusses dieting with them be fully knowledgeable about the latest research on dieting. If a health professional attempts to give you advice about your size and why it should be changed, it is pointless to discuss weight loss with them until they become more educated.

Insist that they read The Dieters' Dilemma by Dr. William Bennett and Joel Gurin, before they talk to you further about dieting. If you are fond of a particular physician, consider giving him or her a copy of the book. An inexpensive paperback version is now available.

To discuss dieting with a person who has not studied setpoint theory is as pointless as discussing geography with a member of the Flat Earth Society.

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COB'S CORNER...by William J. Fabrey, Chairman of the Board

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO NAAFA'S PROPOSED NAME CHANGE? - The facts are these:

1) Many NAAFans aren't happy with our name. The strongest objections seem to be to the words "Aid", "Fat", and "Americans". "Aid" doesn't describe very well what NAAFA, as a self-help group, really does. "Fat" is a painful word for many people, so much so that many people do not join NAAFA because of it. "Americans" is limiting, since NAAFA solicits Canadian and also worldwide memberships.

2) All this has been discussed in past Newsletters, especially since 1984. There was a debate about such names as "National Association for the Advancement of Fat Acceptance" (NAAFA), and several others. Some people don't like "advancement" and others don't like "acceptance". Still others do not wish us to retain "fat" in our name. And some people think that, whatever its limitations, our present name is the best of the available choices.

3) When I estimated that the cost of a name change might be as much as \$1000, two or three members implied that we had a lot of nerve running fund drives, and at the same time, preparing to "squander" money on something as trivial as our name...

4) There may be substantial benefits to staying with the "NAAFA" acronym, and that poses limitations on potential names.

5) Since no clear concensus of opinion has been formed among NAAFA leaders and members favoring any one of the suggested names, no action has been taken thus far to actually change it. To do so requires a Constitutional amendment, no simple task unless almost everyone on the Board favors one name.

But now, I'd like to get on with it, so that we can know what our name will be for the next few years. I'd almost settle for any reasonable name at this point, even if we have to dump the initials NAAFA. How about ICMOP? ICMOP...it has a certain ring to it...the International Coalition of Morbidly Obese Persons. (Only kidding, folks!) Or, how about a new word for fat, that starts with the same letter "F"?

There are a lot of interesting "F" words, some of which may describe some of us: Fabulous, fecund, feisty, flabby, fleshy, flirtatious, floppy. Then there's fluffy (some fat people may appear "fluffy", but it's a word that applies better to scrambled eggs). Foxy, full-figured. Full-Figured? That's the closest euphemism I've heard, and it's even preferred by the fashion industry!

If we don't resolve this soon, I will become fretful, feisty, and furious, and will end up feeling like the whole thing is futile, fruitless, and frustrating.

THE FAT CHALLENGE - I would like to personally challenge all members to come up with a suitable replacement for the word "fat", preferably that starts with the letter "F", so that we can take care of the "F" problem in NAAFA.

Or should we stay with the word "Fat"? Perhaps we should continue our original goal of eliminating the pain the word causes some people, by using it enough. (For example: The word "black" is now an acceptable word when describing Americans of African descent. Forty years ago, before the civil rights work of the 1950's and '60's, the word "Negro" was considered proper, but "black" was an offensive word to many people...)

Due to space limitations, we cannot promise to publish letters on the subject, but your suggestions will be read, and filed for consideration in the near future.

Articles in this Newsletter do not necessarily reflect the official policies of NAAFA, Inc., unless specifically noted. Please contact the NAAFA office if you require information about specific NAAFA policies. Commentaries in this Newsletter were prepared by the Editor, and/or Chairman Fabrey.

MEDIA AND PUBLICITY WATCH - Most items will be held for next month's column. For now, these items:

The winner of the National Enquirer "Biggest Belly in America" contest is Indian Chief Wise Owl, of the Drowning Creek Reservation, in Maxton, NC. His girth measures out at "a whopping 111 inches", to use Enquirer terminology. (Nat. Enq., 9/9/86) The Chief, who says he weighs 850 pounds, is well known as a promoter of unusual schemes to raise money for his reservation.

Watch for NAAFAn Rosezella Canty-Letsome on the Phil Donahue show. Canty-Letsome, founder and creator of Light on Your Feet, a "full body workout and non-impact aerobics" program for large women, will be on a show to be aired in Atlanta and some other cities on September 30. Many NAAFAn will recall reading about her program in Radiance magazine. There is a long list of cities where the Donahue show is seen delayed one, two, three, or even four weeks. Those wanting to view the show should consult their local listings, or call the local station that carries the show.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR...Nancy Summer

We have received many positive comments about the monthly **Newsletter**. Members have reported feeling more in touch with NAAFA, and enjoying receiving timely information and news. But there have been a few complaints about the fact that we no longer carry photographs and graphic designs in every issue. It's unfortunate, but some things had to be given up in order to produce a timely monthly publication within our current constraints of the number of members and our annual budget...

Just the same, we have listened to those complaints and plan to reactivate the NAAFA Yearbook (one was produced in 1972!) as an annual pictorial. The next one will feature photos from the 1986 convention, national fund-raising events like the Holiday Happening of last winter, and regional events of 1986 sponsored by chapters or SIGS (for example: the upcoming Mid-West Conference or the Feminist Caucus meeting held last spring). We also want to publish the wedding photographs of NAAFAn who have married in the last two years whose pictures were not previously published. Our target publication date is March 1, 1987.

The **Newsletter** Editor has invited Jim Brown, a member of NAAFA's Printing and Production Committee to be Production Manager on this special edition. Jim's expertise in photo reproduction should help make this a quality publication.

But we need YOUR help. We can't do it without your photographs! If you would like to share your photos with your fellow NAAFAn and help make the Yearbook a success, please do the following:

1. Select photographs that are from the events mentioned above. Photos should be in focus and not too dark or too light.
2. Identify the photographs by writing lightly on the back of the photo (be careful that the writing doesn't harm the photo itself). Write your name, the event at which the photo was taken, and the names of everyone in the photo.
3. Mail your photos to the NAAFA office in care of the **Newsletter** Committee as soon as possible. Photos received after December 15th may arrive too late for consideration.

We will return any photo that we cannot use within 30 days of receipt. Photographs that are held for consideration but not used will be returned after production. However, we cannot guarantee return of photographs that are selected for the yearbook, as production procedures may harm the actual photo.

Be part of the Yearbook. Its success depends on you.

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OBITUARY

We note the passing of two people, John and Harriet Fabrey. They were not NAAFA members, but as the parents of NAAFA's founder, William J. Fabrey, they indirectly gave to NAAFA more than most. John passed away on September 8, 1985 and was followed by his wife Harriet this September 4th.

For the courage they gave their son to pursue that which he felt was right; for the values they instilled, the ideals they modeled; for the lessons in perseverance which has carried their son through 17 years of fighting fat oppression; for their confidence in their son's judgement and their support even when they didn't understand...they will be missed.

They have given something to all of us, and their passing should be noted in this **Newsletter**.

--N.S.

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NEXT ISSUE: 1986 Convention Comments; 1986 Awards; The Declaration of Fat Independence by Russell F. Williams; Resetting Your Setpoint-Part 3 by Dr. Paul Ernsberger...and more! Watch for it!

In the aerobics industry, most everyone is size conscious. If you look at the advertisements for health clubs and spas, you will see only slim people. Where is the person with just a bit of a tummy? You don't see one large person in those commercials, and because of this, many large people do not try to join these clubs or spas.

But prejudice against size also pertains to instructors. I was once told that anyone could teach aerobics. Not true! It seems you have to be a certain size to be an instructor. If I hadn't the determination I would have been discouraged from becoming a certified instructor or even in participating in an aerobics class.

Larger instructors like myself who seek employment have one of two things happen to them. Either the interviewer laughs at them, or the interviewer will let them audition for the position and then tell them, "You have the background, the technique and the necessary certification but you don't fit the image or the size." This kind of attitude is nothing new to the large-size instructor; we have had to deal with it for years.

Since we were shunned by the established exercise community, we large-sized instructors had to turn to other populations who were also ignored. Back in the mid-1970's, while in high school, I started working with the Special Olympics. I met some very enthusiastic women who helped the athletes exercise before each activity. All of them were size 18 or larger. Many of these women formed exercise groups or clubs. Some have opened spas. And some like myself have become certified. We want the same respect that other instructors receive.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED...

Students who are large should demand respect and understanding. They need classes led by instructors that take into consideration that flexibility and endurance varies from individual to individual. They need access to large size comfortable leotards or other suitable exercise clothing. Classes can be tailored to suit their needs.

Plus-size students need an instructor who is willing to work with them as individuals. The instructor should also possess the quality of patience.

Before enrolling in a class you should be able to observe the class and talk to the instructors. Take note of the following:

- the size of the students --number of students in the class
- the age of the students --how the instructor gives directions.

Ask how often the classes meet, the cost, and, most important, the qualifications of the instructors on staff. Injuries could result when exercises are done incorrectly. That's why it is so important that your class instructor is caring and well-qualified.

Next, ask if you can participate in a class. If so, ask yourself these questions: Do you feel comfortable doing the exercises? Do the other students look like they can do the exercises comfortably? After the class, talk to the instructor. If she/he is not plus-sized, ask questions that might give you an idea about her/his attitudes towards larger people.

Wearing loose fitting clothing such as shorts or sweat pants and shirt is appropriate if you can't or do not want to wear leotards and tights. Most army/navy stores and big men's shops sell sweat pants and tops in larger sizes.

If finding a class you like is a problem, check your local YWCA, YMCA, community centers and churches. Many of these places around the country have classes just for the large-sized person. Many Y's have water exercise classes which are excellent for large persons because exercising in the water causes less strain on the joints.

If there are no classes in your area, try to get your own group started. Many instructors would consider starting a group for plus-size people if you can gather a small group people who wish to join. Let the instructors know there is a market for such classes and they might take it from there.

Lastly, it is very important for large-size people to participate in some type of regular aerobic exercise (aerobic dance, swimming, or walking). It is good for your heart and helps to relieve emotional and physical stress. Once again, take your time and look around for the right class or activity for you. Remember, no matter what size you are, you can fit.

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Noelle Sewell is a Certified Aerobic Dance Instructor and a member of the American Aerobics Association. Send a SASE to the NAAFA office if you would like a listing of aerobics classes for larger people. If you would like to become an aerobics instructor, write Noelle for information through the NAAFA office.