



Workout works

Plan helps woman lose, learn to train

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MALDEN — Slender and wiry, Carol Severson helps a friend from Princeton work out with proper form in the Seversons' family room. Behind the two stand photos. One shows Severson just about two years ago when she was, well ... plump. The other shows her six months after she started a wellness workout and diet plan that helped her lose 80 pounds and feel better.

Also behind her in her rural Malden home is a glass bookcase filled with various exercise videos — ones that didn't work for her.

"They were boring," she says of Tae Bo, Pilates, "stepping" and "all kinds of things."

"They didn't show results fast enough for me," said Severson, a 43-year-old home-school teacher and a lobbyist for home-school teachers in central Illinois.

The 5-foot-tall Severson says she now weighs about 100 pounds, "give or take a pizza."

Weight isn't the important thing anyway, she says. She feels better, she knows her body better and has a more toned body.

Two years ago, she stuck to a two-week-long "boot camp" regimen and went from a size 14 to a "tight size 10." After 5½ months more following a low-impact exercise regimen popularized by Florida-based physiologist Teresa Tapp she got down to a size 0.

"In high school, I was 98-100 pounds but a size 5. So the workout really does change your shape and you weigh more at a smaller size," she says.

Now Severson has certification to teach T-Tapp and acts as an Internet chat room leader for about 130 T-Tapp followers. When there's a T-Tapp seminar somewhere in the Midwest, she'll show up to help and to meet with members of her chat-room group, Habit Formers.

Her story and before-and-after photos appeared in Women's World magazine in January. She appeared on an Illinois FOX TV report on Feb. 25 and was



taped by a TV crew in Missouri last month as well.

The secret to T-Tapp is a sequence of carefully orchestrated low-impact movements, stretches and positions developed by former runway model trainer and fitness editor Teresa Tapp.

Tapp designed the exercises for rehabilitative purposes, for “pumping the lymphatic system.” She also designed them for inactive people who were on their way to obesity.

The exercises can be more effective and can exercise entire muscle groups if a hand is properly turned or if toes are pointed forward or inward rather than outward like a duck. Tapp’s exercises require people to use balance muscles, stomach muscles and back muscles that have atrophied. Her sequencing of exercises is designed to make muscles tired. So a simple leg lift move might be difficult to perform without also engaging muscles around the stomach.

After working for years teaching home-school teachers and writing curriculum for home-schoolers, Severson has started teaching T-Tapp fitness exercises.

Severson said she experienced so much success in her first six weeks by closely following the program and also by receiving 24-hour guidance and support over a toll-free phone number from the T-Tapp office the past two years.

She and others who report on their progress on a T-Tapp message board started calling themselves the Habit Formers. The group of women chatted and tried to hold each other accountable for doing T-Tapp 30-40 minutes daily while starting out in “boot camp” or doing T-Tapp three times a week for at least 15 minutes and at least walking other days, while trying to maintain weight and size. They started taking up so much space on the message board that Tapp gave the Habit Formers their own space on the site.

Severson emerged as a leader of the group and started working toward receiving International Fitness Professionals certifications. About a year ago, she called Tapp to ask if she could make T-shirts showing “Habit Formers” on one side and T-Tapp on the other.

Tapp said she would design the T-shirts with the copyrighted logo.

“And then she called and said “I’d like to go one step further with it. None of you have met, because you’re all across the country and in Canada and in Europe; I’d like to bring you together and we all can meet face to face since you’ve been together almost a year.”



Many in the group accepted Tapp's offer for the trip to Florida. While there, Teresa bought dinners, took measurements before and afterward and provided them with dark chocolate.

Severson said Tapp aims her marketing toward normal women who think they don't have time to work out. She doesn't try to aim for the fitness fanatics and fitness magazines.

"She wants to get to the women who need her the most," she said.

Severson's workout partner last week, Lisa Turner, swears by T-Tapp. Last week, the Princeton resident was on her third straight day of "boot camp" workouts after taking off three weeks because of a bacterial infection. The pounds hadn't come off yet, but said she already was feeling better, more energetic and healthy.

"This three weeks now that I haven't been able to T-Tapp, I'm aching again, I'm tired again, I can't wait to get started again," she said.

She used to do all sorts of workouts, but whenever she dropped off on "Buns of Steel" or "Tae Bo" she knew she wouldn't pick them up again. She has no intention of dropping T-Tapp.

"It's a wellness workout," she said. She thinks she breathes better, has lower cholesterol and needs less medicine for her blood pressure and fibromyalgia.

Turner also likes the diet plan, which allows her to eat more processed foods, chips and "man-made" foods one day. The key is to do a 3-minute part of the workout called a "hoe-down" right after eating a more fattening meal. Getting the body moving acts as a signal for the body to burn that food instead of storing it, T-Tappers say.

Severson says she tried dieting and it didn't work for her. She said the body will simply store carbohydrates if someone eats nothing but meat and then starts feeding the body carbohydrates, which should be used as energy fuel. Severson favors exercising and eating well over counting calories and diet points.

"...You start out with so many points. As you lose weight, they reward you by taking away food. It's a lovely concept," Severson says sarcastically. "So as you are losing weight, you can only have 18 points, then you can only have 16 points. My thought was 'Gee thanks'.

"The reason they do that is as you lose weight, your metabolism slows down. Your body is a very smart machine," she continues. "If you only eat 900 calories, your body will say, 'This idiot is only going to give me 900 calories.'"



So it drops metabolism. “Then” if you “eat) 1,000 calories, you start gaining.
So you go to 800 and the body cuts (metabolism) back again.”