

## ***Resolution or Lifestyle***

### **Tina Smith**

For the millennium, perhaps 80-90% of women will vow to instill a better diet, exercise consistently, and lose weight. Certainly, I applaud the goal, and hope that everyone can maintain their motivation well past February! I think the most important key to success involves an understanding of what goals are realistic. I also think it is crucial for women to know exactly how to achieve their physique goals, and thus incorporate such information into a **lifestyle**. The notion of *quick fad diets*, *magical supplements*, and *easy exercise* are simply never going to work!! I'd like to address some of the misconceptions that are out there, and offer suggestions that may help.

As a competitive bodybuilder, I spend hours in the gym, and as I approach contest readiness, I present a noticeable physique with very low body fat, especially for a woman. I wear only workout shorts, and a sports bra in effort not only to view my progress, but admittedly, also to show off all of my hard work! I am extremely tan (which is odd in itself even for a Californian in November), and I attack the weights and cardio with obvious determination. In all of this, I remain very approachable in my gym, and nearly every woman will at some point muster the courage to ask "Please tell me how you get your abs to look like that". Even most men will ask the same question for themselves, and sometimes to gain the "secret" for their wives or girlfriends.



I always begin the explanation with "I don't always look like this, and remember I'm a competitive bodybuilder preparing for the World Championships". I go on to explain that for abs, or any particular body part, there is no way to simply "spot reduce" fat. I know I have great abs, some of which comes from a lifetime of competitive sports, including gymnastics from the age of four. Unlike many people, I also actually enjoy working my abs, and will often do extra crunches while watching television! Anyway, I explain that many people also have great

abs, but they are hidden under a layer of fat. A comprehensive plan involving a strict nutritional regimen, a lot of cardio, and weight training is the way to bring them out. I maintain to all the people I talk to that if they can incorporate at least some of my pre-contest techniques into their lifestyle, in time, they will see results. The more they do, the faster it will come. By "faster", I mean like in about **one month**. You may certainly feel better almost immediately, but real physique changes take me 4-6 weeks. A realistic expectation for weight loss is about 1 pound per week. Be aware that weight will also fluctuate with lean body mass development, as well as water loss/retention. I think this bears repeating, and I am sorry, but all of the "*ten-day diets*", "*5 minutes per day workouts*", or "*revolutionary new fat-burning pills*" advertised everywhere are just **LIES!!!** The sooner you understand that, the better. If it seems too easy to be true, it is!!

As I continue such conversations, particularly with women, I've noticed that "Tina the bodybuilder" soon becomes "Tina the psychologist" (I really do have an M.A. in Psychology, and I work as a school psychologist). I find that many women have intense control issues with food, and also that particularly those who do not have an athletic background find themselves rather uncomfortable inside a gym. The first thing is to understand that changing one's physique is difficult, but attainable over time. I again emphasize the issues of consistency, and what's realistic. I encourage women to look at their diets, and try to incorporate some bodybuilding principles including:

- Eat 5-6 smaller meals per day, all of which should include some protein, some carbs, and only a little fat. If exercising (which you really must do to change your physique), try for between 1200-1600 calories per day. **Do not** go any lower, or you'll really mess up your metabolism! You're also likely to set yourself up to eventually engage in some bingeing, which can quickly diminish overall results, as well as being quite psychologically destructive.
- Limit carbs and fat overall, and especially at night (veggies are o.k. at night, but no starchy carbs like bread or pasta). You do need carbs for energy though, so the Dr. Atkins protein and fat stuff is not recommended! A reasonable situation would include 40-50% carbs, and 10-20% fat within your total diet.
- Limit "junk" like high fat food (butter), or refined sugars (candy) **entirely**, or at least to once per week.
- Drink **lots** of water, like close to a gallon per day!
- Do cardio exercise! Maintain a **fat-burning heart-rate** rather than high intensity. My target rate is about 140 beats per minute (I'm 32 years old), and go for 30-45 minutes. With a lower heart-rate, you should be able to continue for this duration of time, and if not, try to work up to it.
- Cardio is most effective at fat burning while on an empty stomach, first thing in the morning. If you add another session at night after dinner, then you'll really see results.

- Increase lean body mass (MUSCLE) which will boost metabolism, and improve appearance. Do not be afraid to lift weights!!!! Unless you're also using anabolic steroids, you simply will not blow up into some huge man-thing!!! For reference, I gained **two pounds** of muscle in 1999, and that's with very intense heavy lifting, and a strict diet regimen all year as I competed in three pro contests!!

If you can try to incorporate some of these things into a daily lifestyle, you will see results that will truly last. What's amazing is that once you've developed habits, it really is very easy. Without the stress of a "diet" to control you, you can learn to control your own physique.

What's really important to understand, is that even this kind of lifestyle change does take time to set in. When you fail to stick exactly to your plan, which everyone will do sometime, do not consider yourself a total failure! Do not go off on a binge of ice cream and pie because you are upset about a bad day, or feel terrible that you didn't get to the gym for a week! Explore your own psyche, and figure out really why you're upset, and ask if food really will make you feel better. When you feel the urge to cheat, try to consider all of the positive choices you've made about food, or remember all of the sessions of cardio that you did get through. Use such positive thoughts to motivate yourself. I think that often we are much too hard on ourselves for failing, and simply give up on our goals once we've had any kind of setback. Realize when you may be focusing on the negative things like "I'm still not at my goal weight" or "I really just don't like to work out", and find some way to bring yourself around to the optimistic side of things. Remember self-affirmation, and believe in yourself! I find it especially helpful to surround myself with other positive, goal oriented people, rather than a group of girlfriends that will always just want to go out to pizza.

Changing one's lifestyle is difficult, but definitely possible. I wish everyone the very best during our competitions, and never give up on your goals! If you have any questions, or would like additional information, feel free to contact me at [cnm@californianaturalmuscle.org](mailto:cnm@californianaturalmuscle.org)