

Skinny fashion – a role for sports medicine?



A topic which is receiving much publicity as I write is the banning of 5 skinny models from participating in the Madrid fashion week. Madrid's regional government imposed the rules 'to protect the models as well as teenagers who may develop anorexia as they try to copy underweight catwalk stars'.¹ They used a body mass index of 18 as their cut-

off value. The 'anti-thin' move has been criticised in Paris and New York, two of the world's leading fashion centres. However, in Italy the move was supported by the mayor who intimated that she would like to apply the same rulings when the fashion show moves to Milan.

The motive for imposing the ban is noble, as the 'skinny trend' is not showing signs of abating. A recent report by the British Medical Association identifies a link between the images of 'abnormally thin' models that dominate television and magazines, and the increase in cases of anorexia nervosa and bulimia.² The incidence of anorexia is at an all-time high with predictions of 0 - 5% of all females having eating disorders. While eating disorders were previously usually regarded as a female syndrome, the situation is changing with a steady increase in the number of men being diagnosed with eating disorders. A recent estimate predicts that of the 60 000 people with eating disorders in the UK, 10% are male.² This trend can most likely be explained by the contemporary lean, hungry look of male stars. To get a snapshot view of changing body beautiful images of different eras one only has to compare the 'hunks' of the 1960's movies (i.e. Sean Connery as James Bond) to modern day hunks to see how the masculine image has changed. Marilyn Monroe, with her curvy body shape in the 1950s would probably be regarded as too fat for a leading role 50 years later.

While the organisers of the fashion shows should be complimented for taking a bold stand against their skinny, unhealthy-looking models, they can be criticised for the way in which they have gone about it. Using a body mass index of 18 as a cut-off value is inappropriate and may penalise some

models who live normal healthy lives. Instead of this approach the organisers should establish a structure that evaluates the health status of the models including their eating, sleeping and substance abuse habits and make decisions accordingly. The information on how to do this is available; it just needs to be applied.

This third issue of the journal for 2006 has 4 interesting papers. The first paper by Professor Mars and colleagues examines the cooling of skin, subcutaneous fat and muscle with an icepack, at rest and after short-duration exhaustive exercise. This study produced some interesting results with important clinical applications. The next paper by Ian Cook examines the accuracy of different types of pedometers. It is well known that people who use pedometers are encouraged to be more physically active, so therefore there is great value in making pedometers available to the general public. However, the enthusiasm to make and distribute pedometers has exceeded the concern about their accuracy. This study addresses this point with a comprehensive research design. The results make a valuable contribution to the literature.

The third paper, by Dr McHardy and colleagues from Macquarie Injury Management Group, Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia, is a clinician's perspective of the modern and classic golf swing. This paper is relevant to sports physicians, biokineticists and physiotherapists and provides a clear analysis of the different types of golf swing and their possible link to injury, particularly lower back pain.

Finally the paper by Dr Draper and her colleagues describes the state of the fitness industry in South Africa. This comprehensive study gathered data from 442 facilities around the country. The data provide an important benchmark for the state of the industry and will make a significant contribution to the development of perceived weaknesses in the industry.

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1. Milan fashionistas fear Spanish skinny model ban. news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20060914/od_nm/italy_models_dc (accessed 18 September 2006)
2. The changing shape of the model. news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/769460.stm (accessed 18 September 2006)