

“The Cholesterol Blues”

By John DeBellis

I'd just came back from the doctor's office where I found out that my blood pressure was so high that it was causing global warming and my cholesterol was rising so fast that I could suffer a heart attack just from building so many blockages and both added together weren't higher than my bill, which made my blood pressure and cholesterol go even higher, which meant more visits to the doctor which made my bill go even higher, which well, you get the picture. It's the cycle of mid-life. Now if I lied about my age by ten years I'd still be in the age bracket most vulnerable to, corrosive acid reflux, heart attacks, strokes, and sexual dysfunction especially when glancing in the mirror and seeing the hairy lumpy creature growing around my body. So it was time to either commit to taking prescription drugs with enough side effects to qualify me as a biological weapon, or commit to a diet rich in foods that were meant to neuter human taste buds (if not the whole person) and make fasting your only reason to live, oh and worse yet to also exercise 4 or 5 times a week until I suddenly drop dead from natural causes. I felt like I was on death row without the joy of a great last meal or even an edible one.

The first thing I did was to search the internet to find what I could do for my genetically volatile condition. And much to my surprise there were a lot of answers, most of which offered vitamins and minerals to cure not only me, or anyone who I'd ever shared a straw with, but could enlarge my penis in a micro wave. I'd never seen so many Doctors all

members of associations that cure diseases naturally, extend life expectancy and document UFO sightings. I closely compared vitamins, minerals, herbs, manufacturing processes, claims of purity, and finally decided to order from the company that had the fewest pop up ads for porno sites. That done, it was time to find the right diet, one that would lower both my cholesterol and blood pressure, without lowering my will to live or lessening my fear of procreation. (My family tree was used to hang other family members). There was the Adkins diet, the Zone diet, the Mediterranean diet, heck there was even a diet for people who wanted to kill the people who made fortunes from diets. After studying what my condition required I looked for a diet low in fat, high in fiber, with lean meats, plenty of fruits, lots of vegetables, no spices, little flavor, not too nauseating when seen in the light, and one that could be swallowed fast without chewing or preferably taken intravenously while sleeping. Unfortunately none of the diets I found could accommodate my latter desire, so I invented my own by mixing and matching food groups in the hope that I could lower my cholesterol and blood pressure while skipping most of my meals.

My next step was to devise an exercise program. Should I join a gym was my first question. They have all the exercise equipment you'd ever need, enough to keep you from ever using the same muscle twice in year, that's a plus (not that I have more than one muscle). They have trainers to tell you what you're doing wrong and how to do it correctly so you maximize your workout and may even be able to see the results, that is, if you have enough energy left to get to a mirror, again another plus. There are other people at the gym to talk to, even pretty girls to gawk at while the machines designed for

men, put women in positions that were only meant for the privacy of the Karma Sutra and when combined with skin tight outfits could be used to produce enough testosorine to grow a penis on a bowl of soup (without the microwave). At that point the gym looked like a winner. But then I thought do I really want to work out, looking the way I do right at this very moment, in front of women. Women I might actually see, or might even be willing to speak to me on the outside. One I might even be able to date, maybe even reject me before she saw what she would be seeing at the gym now! If I was caught naked and engaged in sex with a woman by her husband, his lawyer, a judge, and a photographer it would never be grounds for divorce, or for establishing my gender, even if the legal system, God forbid, allowed my half of the picture to be developed. No the gym was out until I could get in good enough shape to go to the gym. It was time to find a work out I could do at home in the privacy of my own embarrassment.

I thought of those video tapes you can order from that broad shouldered guy whose upper torso is shaped in such a drastic V it looks like his stomach was taken off a bulimic midget. I couldn't have a stomach as flat and as cut as his if you removed my ribs, all my organs and then pressed it with a waffle iron. So no matter how much better my body looked, I'd look at his video and think I was inflated. In fact no matter whose tape I chose the body on the person in the video would still look thinner then I'd be if I was vaporized. I began to contemplate retrieving my old set of weights from my parent's basement which are still in the exact position I left them in when I gave up lifting in the midst of adding a two and a half pound plate to one side, while stuffing a quarter-pounder into my mouth. Then I chalked it off to depression from not having a date during my

high school or college years. At that time I hadn't yet realized that asking a girl out from the same distance that Lee Harvey Oswald shot JFK, especially during a football game while she was standing on a guy's shoulders cheering, was not romantic even if she could hear me. If back then I was too depressed and lazy to add a metal plate that was just a little heavier than a double whopper with cheese, and I was even more lazy now (or why else would the hardest part of my body be my arteries), there's no way I'd ever change anything heavier than a quarter. What I needed was one of those new fangal machines that made manly noises, had a few easy dials to turn and looked like it was about to attack. Yeah, that was my ticket to hunk hood. That is until I saw the add and it said, "some assembly required." That last thing I had put together was a chair which not only resulted in a large hospital bill but also in a law suit when my neighbor bravely decided to actually sit down. After he was removed from the seat, I failed to con him into thinking that the problem was part of the design and had I attached the optional rectal thermometer it would have served its secondary purpose.

As I thumbed through the yellow pages looking for someone who could assemble a machine for me (while burning the most calories I had in a week), I realized what I really needed was something for cardiovascular exercise. My research narrowed it down to an exercise bike or a treadmill, manly because both could be delivered already assembled and in the probability that they wouldn't be used could be repackaged easily to be resold on Ebay (that was if I ever got strong enough to put them back in the boxes). Also they would fit nicely in my designated exercise space. I could exercise while watching TV and in my youth I had actually either ran or rode a bicycle. Once doing both when I stole a

bike and had to run away when I found it too difficult peddling the tricycle. I was never one to pay attention to detail.

Truthfully as a kid I once finished second in a 100-yard dash. Okay, I know what you're thinking; there were only two runners. Not true, there were eight. Sure, six were disqualified for taunting while they waited for me to cross the finish line – the winner of course didn't point to me and laugh, he couldn't, he was already in the shower. Anyway, you don't have to be fast to use a treadmill. But then again I also loved bicycling. One of my most heart felt memories was in fifth grade riding my bike past the house of a girl I had a crush on hoping to steal a glance at her. One time she actually waved to me from her bedroom window. I was so shy I sped around the block three more times before riding away without noticing that she was calling me because her house was on fire, and then jumped from her third floor window burnt to a crisp. To this day I wonder what would have happened between us if I noticed her room in flames and called the fire department or at least stopped to stamp her out. Oh, well love is blind.

So what was it going to be, the treadmill or the bike? Then it hit me why does it have to be one of the other, why not both. In my research I found out that it was good to vary your routine. For some reason muscles have a memory, which I don't believe since the brain is a muscle and it can't remember a damn thing. Plus none of my muscles ever remembered where they belong as several keep trying to climb outside my cloths.

And I figured just because I had two machines didn't mean I'd really need to purchase two TV's. So I ordered both and four days later they arrived and all I had to do was take

them out of the cartons. I think I actually gained more muscle definition opening the plastic bands around the boxes.

Everyday for the next several weeks I exercised and ate all the right foods. I was one of the few heterosexual males who (even with yogurt on their lips) would be proud to say, “yes, I swallowed.” I’d lost about 19 pounds, I cut off the extensions on my belts, my clothes were now fashionably loose, and my shadow was now small enough to fit in a room.

The day of reckoning was upon me. It was time for my doctor’s visit. Because I was getting a blood test I couldn’t eat for 12 hours, so that night I exercised on both my bike and my treadmill. I was ready! I walked into the doctor’s office, a tower of confidence. I loudly announced my name, took my seat (as opposed to seats), and smoothly swiped up the magazine of my choice. It was my lucky day; I got Sports Illustrated, an issue only three years old. I was half way through my seventh magazine, which was predicting that Pete Rose would be rookie of the year, when the doctor called me into an examining room. There I waited for what seemed like four hours but in reality was only two and a half.

The doctor remarked on how much weight I’d lost and was pleasantly surprised when he easily found a vein for my blood test and didn’t have to use an extra long needle to get through the fat. Now it was time to take my blood pressure. He wrapped the band around my arm, this time there was no stretching sounds, pumped the tester up to 185.

Soon the gauge began to fall 175, 165, 160, 155, 150, 145, 140 then time stopped, the needle hesitated but suddenly fell 135, 130, 125, 120, and finally 118. But what was the other number? I didn't see it. The doctor looked at me, his blue eyes, hard and steady, his mouth began to open, and I thought I was going to have a heart attack waiting to find out if I was at risk for a heart attack, and then he said it. "You're blood pressure is 118 over 75. It's perfect." I'd done it. I'd done it. Determination, sacrifice and well desperation - the mother of eliminating hypertension. But I still wasn't entirely out of the woods. He'd call me the next day with the results of my blood test.

The next 24 hours went by painfully slow like a sumo wrestler squeezing through a clogged artery. Finally, I exercised again, ate even slower, actually chewing the food, and allowing it to touch my tongue before swallowing. During the last several weeks I'd perfected the technique of swallowing while holding my tongue to one side of my mouth. At first I tried using a prophylactic (without spermicide) on my tongue, but found it too much of distraction because it was better tasting than the food. Till almost dawn my anxiety caused me to chatter away at myself like a schizophrenic in solitary confinement. The next day I woke up late, did another round of exercising, and just as I climbed off the bike, the phone rang. And kept ringing as I frantically searched for the receiver. By the time I saw it in my other hand there was a new message on my machine. I hit the message button it was good omen, it was not a salesman, not a fax, not a bill collector, it was the voice of an old girl friend telling me that she found several guys better than me the day we broke up in fact she slept with six of them and two of her girlfriend's that night, but that was an old message. The next message was the new one.

It was the doctor and he said, “Hi, John, this is Doctor Davis. I got the results of your blood test. Your total cholesterol is-“ And then silence.

Later that night, after thirty phone calls and a dozen faxes to his office, I found out that my doctor had died of a heart attack. It would have ruined my dinner but I also found out that my total cholesterol was 190. The HDL at 70. I was no longer a high risk for heart attacks. Unfortunately my doctor was, although his cholesterol and blood pressure were normal, he had other heart attack risk factors, he smoked three packs of cigarettes a day, ate mostly fast foods, and worst of all had to deal with HMO's.

A year later, I'd lost 47 more pounds, my blood pressure and cholesterol were perfect and I joined a gym. Yes, you heard me a gym. A gym filled with great exercising machines, pretty ladies, and a lot less of me. In fact I've been dating a woman I met there. She asked me to hold her legs while she did sit ups, which I did. And for some reason she thought it was cute when I didn't let go of her on the treadmill, the ski walker, and while she stepped on the gas peddle on the way home, that is until she swerved, opened the door and I flew out and landed in a nearby pond, where I nearly drowned. She saved me by giving me mouth to mouth and when I spit up the water, and gurgled, she thought I asked her out and said yes (I think she was afraid I wouldn't let go of her tongue). That's the good news. The bad news is she's an amazing cook, I've put on 28 pounds, my cholesterol and blood pressure are on the rise, we don't go to the gym or exercise much any more. We take turns not using the bike and the treadmill. But we're going to start soon; she wants to look thin for the wedding. Me, I just can't wait to eat a piece of that

cake, maybe I'll eat the whole Goddamn thing. What the hell, if my blood pressure and cholesterol spike and I cash in my chips right there, I'm already dressed for the funeral (and hopefully the tux will still fit).