

RESEARCH UPDATE

the Science of Success

CURVES' 10TH ANNIVERSARY IS A TIME FOR REFLECTION
AND LOOKING AHEAD TO MORE BREAKTHROUGHS

BY PORTER SHIMER



With 10 fantastic years to celebrate, what better way than to take a quick look back at the science that has made the amazing success of the Curves program possible. “There’s been no smoke-and-mirrors trickery behind the results we’ve seen with this program,” says Richard B. Kreider, PhD, FACSM (Fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine), who is professor and chair of the Exercise and Sport Nutrition Lab in the Department of Health, Human Performance, and Recreation at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Kreider and his team of researchers have had the Curves program under close scientific scrutiny since the fall of 2002.

“That’s when Gary Heavin came to me and said that he wanted his program tested as comprehensively and accurately as possible,” says Kreider. “I can remember his words to this day. ‘Find what you find,’ he told me. And when I asked him what he’d do if we found that some of his theories weren’t holding up, he said, ‘I’ll just have to rewrite my book.’”

And, in fact, certain tweaks to the dietary aspects of the Curves program have been made, thanks to Kreider’s research. “We found, for example, that the original concept of following the Phase I diet [1,200 calories per day] for two weeks lowered metabolism too much so we shortened the Phase I period to one week and found that the overall program was about as effective while being easier to maintain compliance.”

Surpassing the Test of Time

The theories and claims behind the program have held up amazingly well, says Kreider, even those that were at first considered a bit controversial by some of the more conservative among the scientific community.

“Consider, as an example, the ability of the program to increase a woman’s metabolism even as she’s losing weight,” Kreider says. “Formerly, this was thought to be impossible, that weight loss by its very nature slows the body’s metabolism as part of the body’s famine response to the reduced caloric intake that weight loss was thought to depend on. Not so with the Curves approach, which we found gets around this response by increasing energy expenditure through exercise, more frequent

ingestion of meals and snacks throughout the day, and intermittent periods of caloric increase to keep the metabolism active. This allows a woman to lose weight while maintaining or increasing metabolic rate, which studies show is an important factor in helping people maintain their weight loss.

“What’s surprised me the most,” adds Kreider, “has been the quality of life factor, how this program—regardless of how much weight a woman loses—can have such a positive effect on so many other aspects of her life. We’ve had women say it’s helped them turn over a whole new leaf even when their weight loss has not really been all that dramatic. Between the support provided by the program’s communal nature and its physiological benefits, it’s evidently a real boost for self-esteem, which certainly helps women stick with the program as well. We don’t really have a way to measure it, but I’ve been quite impressed by the amount of camaraderie and cohesiveness the program seems to inspire.”

Helping even more in this regard is the new Curves area on the Baylor Web site [www3.baylor.edu/HHPR/Curves/], Kreider says, with a nod toward celebrating that, too. “The site will serve as a kind of personal trainer to keep women motivated by helping them chart their progress while also answering any questions they might have about the dietary or exercise aspects of the program.”

And what do Kreider and his research team have planned for the months ahead? Either in progress or in the planning stages are the following:

- Studying the effects of different types of calcium supplements on exercise and weight loss in postmenopausal women
- Fine-tuning the amount of calories that should intermittently be increased to boost metabolism
- Determining the optimal intensity and form to be used when exercising on the Curves equipment
- Evaluating the effects of the Curves program on women with diabetes and hypertension, and in older women

“It’s a pretty full plate,” says Kreider. A veritable feast, indeed. 🍴

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Curves goes to school

Richard B. Kreider, PhD, is in the process of preparing a Curves pilot program for implementation in three middle schools in the Waco, Texas area. “It will include exercise sessions similar to those of the current Curves program in addition to instruction on the importance of exercise, healthful eating, and weight control,” he explains. “We’re hoping to eventually introduce the program on a national level. With the increase in obesity and obesity-related diabetes among young people, it’s a program we’re working very hard to make succeed.”