

Dr Pamela Peeke

Redefining Fitness

By Judith A. Habert

She has two New York Times Bestsellers, "Fight Fat after Forty" and "Body for Life for Women," is the Chief Medical Correspondent for the Discovery Health Channel, the host of the reality TV show "Could you Survive?" Radio Show



many of us, author included, often forget and the message is that we need to stop and smell the roses and take care of ourselves. As women and caregivers we often neglect to take our needs and concerns into consideration, or at best, we take a backseat to all of those around us. Dr. Peeke is helping women across the country stand up and take notice of their own needs and realize that if they are not healthy they cannot provide the care to those around them.

Dr. Peeke was born and raised in San Francisco, California, and spent summers at her family home in Santa Cruz. She attended Lowell High School, a leading "geek" academy as proclaimed by Dr. Peeke. Lowell is similar to The Bronx School of Science in New York which is a well known breeding ground of the nations intellectually gifted. Although, obviously educationally elite, Dr. Peeke only decided to go into the medical field when she was approached by a member of the yearbook committee who needed to know what he should put under her picture. He told her she had to be "pre" something, so what would she like the caption to read? She had no idea. He looked at her and posed the question as to what it was she liked. She responded that she liked people, math, and science. He said "It sounds like a doctor to me." So she acquiesced and her yearbook picture was captioned Pre-med. After high school she attended Berkley and decided that since she had committed to pre-med in her yearbook she should follow through and find out if it was truly the career for which she was destined. "I play the authentic game." Dr. Peeke said, "I always have to be authentic in what I decide to do, so I figured what better way than to volunteer at local clinics and hospitals. Dr. Peeke volunteered at the Berkley Free clinic, the Haight-Ashbury Free clinic and Highland Hospital in Oakland where the Black Panthers hung out (while there she took care of Angela Davis). She realized that this was meant to be. "I said to myself, self, if you like this stuff and don't mind giving gonorrhea shots to wayward teenagers who didn't get the memo, I could do all aspects of medicine. I loved it." Dr. Peeke loved the research field but realized that she loved being around people even more, so she decided that she couldn't spend all of her time in the lab.

Dr. Peeke suggests the same process to all of her students: If you want to be a doctor the best way to see what it truly is all about is to hang out with doctors. If you want to be a lawyer go hang out with lawyers. You can't just sit at home on the couch and watch Grey's Anatomy and Law and Order. As Dr. Peeke laughingly notes, those shows are not true representations of the profession, "They have more sex on those shows than I have had in my lifetime. The reality is that when I was an intern I found little time to even change out of nasty dirty scrubs after having them on for 36 hours. I can't imagine saying let's have sex in the laundry closet. "

Host and National spokesperson for the American College of Sport's Medicine's new Exercise is Medicine™ campaign, but you will never meet anyone more down to earth and friendly. I was lucky enough to have the pleasure of hearing Dr. Pamela Peeke speak at Sharp's 'Speaking of Women's Health' event last year. I can honestly say she moved me. Not only with her upbeat personality, but with the message she was conveying to San Diego Women. A message that

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What is it that Dr. Peeke loves most about her field? “Teaching, I love to teach.” You can tell how much she loves it when she stands in front of a crowd and has them on their feet chanting her many mantras. Dr. Peeke has so much to teach. Her groundbreaking concepts fill the pages of her books the pages of her books and teach women across the country how to be fit. Her book “Fit to Live” is a redefinition of what it takes to be fit enough mentally, physically, and spiritually, to literally survive 21st century global living. In her book Dr. Peeke

has redefined fitness as integrative fitness. “It’s not about bulging biceps... but about bulging brains, biceps, and spirit.” Dr. Peeke not only wants women to put their bodies through physical workouts, she also wants women to put their spirit through some pushups too. “We can’t treat ourselves like science faire projects anymore. We can’t have scrambled minds with bulging biceps; it has to be a package deal.” One of Dr. Peeke’s latest endeavors is her reality show “Could You Survive?” The concept is an amazing one

and is a true reality show. It takes normal everyday people and puts them through real life threatening scenarios. One episode involved a group of people placed in a burning building. They were faced with all sorts of challenges. Dr. Peeke was waiting on the roof near the helipad. “The participants had to climb up 25 floors to find their way to freedom. In the midst of it they had additional challenges thrown in their path. Perhaps your mom was with you and suddenly succumbed to the smoke, so you had to drag her up the stairs along with you.” Many of those in the group appeared healthy and fit to the outside world, they are sometimes referred to as “skinny fat people;” they appear skinny, but have more fat and less muscle. The amazing result was that not one of them survived the challenge. “I waited at the top and not a single one of them survived and so I said ‘You’re Dead, how

does it feel?’ I looked at them and said I am going to give you the one thing that you never get in life, a second chance. Then for four weeks I have the trainers from hell show up and during this time we found all types of problems, many of which the contestants had no idea. We found one with diabetes and another with extremely high cholesterol. After four weeks they came back and were put back in the same burning building scenario and this time they survived.” This truly shows that even a small change over a short period of



time can make the difference between life and death. “Our show is a true reality series using real live people and putting them in extreme situations. It is a combination of survivor and extreme makeover. What we are doing is redefining fitness and showing what is truly necessary is mental, physical and spiritual fitness. Are you fit enough to run to the airport gate and make the plane, because the ramifications of not doing so mean you just missed the opportunity of an interview for your ideal job? It is a call to arms and legs. It’s all about adapting and adjusting to life’s ever changing environment I am teaching people mental, spiritual, and physical flexibility.”

Dr. Peeke admits that teaching women to change how they think is often the hardest job that she must tackle.

"I often ask women what gives them joy. Ironically, they can answer the questions for their kids, their husbands and even their dog, but most women don't even think about their own joy. I get a blank stare sometimes when I ask that question. That is the first thing that scares me. The second thing that scares me is when I ask about the joy issue and it involves pulling away or making some substantial difference in their lives. Many women are too afraid; they are just filled with fear. Sometimes it involves a divorce or a job change, often concepts which terrify them. It requires they do something which I call 'taking yourself on'." Dr. Peeke finds it necessary to ask that one central question: "What is the worst thing that can happen? There is a one liner that I use all the time. I ask women to consider one thing; before you do whatever you are going to do consider if what you are choosing to do is going to help you achieve your dream? If the answer is yes, do it appropriately. So for instance if it is taking a walk, then do it appropriately, don't walk 28 miles. If the answer is no and it doesn't contribute to that dream, then you have two choices. You either run like hell or you do it, but you own it. For instance, having half of a Crème Brûlée may not help you achieve your goal of getting into those jeans, however, you worked out like hell that day and you will work out hard tomorrow, so nobody died and you most likely didn't lose or gain weight. There is nothing horrible about being temporarily self destructive... but own it, crawl under the covers and eat the Ben and Jerry's, the key is not to continue doing it day in and day out."

Dr. Peeke admits, "The Biggest challenge with teaching women about health and fitness is to keep it simple. Women are overloaded. Don't approach the change in a big way. If you have to drop 30 pounds, don't think of it like that. Start your journey by getting up and taking a walk. Go into your kitchen and clean out the cabinets. Get rid of clutter. If you can't find your sneakers, you know you are not going to take a walk. Keep it simple, doable, credible, and break it up into small little bites and be patient with each of those."

One of the first steps that Dr. Peeke suggests is to write down your strategy. "Write down what you want to do. Look at your calendar and schedule time for what you want and need to do. Put a physical activity appointment into your calendar, as well as an appointment to chill. By doing this you can honestly say sorry, I have a previous engagement when someone tries to sabotage your good intentions. They don't have to know that the engagement is to chill."

Dr. Peeke also suggests that you don't have to write down every calorie you eat. "Let's face it; most of us know the high calorie or high ticket items. It is similar to what happens when you go to Saks, Neimans, or Nordstroms: You know what the high ticket items are. You don't have to know that the sweater you like is exactly \$340 dollars but you know it is pricey. It is the same when it comes to calories...you know what the high calorie items are. Go to that awareness place and stop counting every single calorie."

Of course one of the key questions I had to ask Dr. Peeke was about exercise. How much exercise should women over forty be getting on a weekly basis? In her book "Body for Life for Women" she wrote about Vitamin "I" which is intensity. Not enough women have vitamin I. "What that means is you shouldn't look like night of the living dead when you are on the treadmill. If you don't have disabilities and are capable of exercise but you're only going 2.3 miles an hour, why bother? Come on, a corpse moves faster than that! You might as well be sitting on the couch for the amount of workout you are getting. The key is to add intensity in intervals."

If you do intense interval training for 30 minutes, it's much better than if you did steady slow paced exercise for the same time period." As for frequency, Dr. Peek suggests that the best of all worlds is to stay active every day of the week. "Your activities of daily living should be amped up. If you are in a sedentary job use that five minute per hour rule: Which means I don't care what you do, but for five minutes get up and move...take a walk, go to bathroom, see a friend, or just walk around the building. Do the math, if you did that for 5 minutes during an 8 hour workday you now did 40 minutes of physical activity."

One of the biggest health concerns for all women is handling stress. As Dr. Peeke states, "Women have an undercurrent of stress almost all the time. You need to do whatever works to bring you comfort." In her book "Fight Fat after Forty", she helps women understand why women overeat under stress, coining the phrase "stressed spelled backwards is desserts". I couldn't help but ask how we can de-stress our lives? "You are not distressing your life, you are managing stress. There is a big difference. That goes back to those two wonderful "A" words; adapt and adjust. What I love for women to learn to do is become masters at adapting and adjusting to life's ever changing environment." What Dr. Peeke reminds us is that there is no way to live a totally stress free day. Stress, as it were, is an integral and essential part of life. It keeps us on our toes, it allows us to hone and refine our skills of living. Without some level of stress we do not know how to maintain mental flexibility. Like a great athlete playing tennis...back and forth back and forth, because you never know where that ball will be hit. When you do that you actually lower the levels of stress because your comfort comes in knowing you can handle stress if it comes your way."

But what happens when the stress takes over? There are some obvious warning signs that there is too much stress in your life, "Sleep disappears or it becomes grossly abnormal, either too short or too long, which is often a sign of depression. Another sign is an apparent change in appetite with gains or losses of weight, changes in attitude including increased irritability, or emotional levels so tenuous that you break out in tears in a heartbeat. Then of course there are the physical signs of stress such as high blood pressure and rapid pulse rate and the appearance of the "itis" diseases, arthritis, colitis, dermatitis. Chronic elevation of stress hormones is a pro-inflammatory state, so you end up exacerbating things that were just percolating along. Often these are genetic tendencies; headaches, diarrhea. symptoms will often show up in whatever part of your body that normally takes the stress. In the long term stress even suppresses immune function so more infections can occur."

What women have to keep in mind is that "The best caregiver is a healthy caregiver." They don't have to be number one. But there has to be a balance. The balance doesn't have to be 50/50, sometimes 70/30 will work out just fine.

With all that Dr. Peeke has going on I wonder how she manages it all. She does so by taking her own advice. "I am really good at multitasking," she laughs, "And I have learned to take some time to chill"

Well, hopefully our readers will do the same. I know as soon as this issue goes to press I plan to practice my "chilling" skills thanks to those wise words from Dr. Peeke.