



Wendy Harnwell, 46, started practicing aikido, a form of martial arts, a few years ago. It has been a great addition to her life – both physically and mentally – but it didn't quite start out that way. Harnwell, who lives in Swarthmore, Pa., was raised as a Quaker, and nonviolence is a tenet of the faith. So it was a challenge for her to learn critical aspects of aikido training such as delivering and defending against meaningful attacks. But Harnwell kept up her training, and today she remains an active aikido student, practicing five to six times a week for one to three hours at a time. She also sticks to a healthy diet, following basic Weight Watchers guidelines, focusing on portion control and keeping her alcohol intake to a minimum.

GET FIT

LAUREN A. GOLT

What prompted you to start exercising?

My youth was spent as a quiet, plump bookworm. I avoided exercise. When I was a junior in high school, however, I began running cross-country with my dad. I also tried aerobics, yoga and weight training before encountering aikido. In 2001, my husband, daughter and I moved to the area and found a place to train in aikido.

What are you hoping to achieve?

Exercise has helped me achieve all of the following: relaxation, a clear and focused mind, weight loss, improved balance and muscle tone, endorphin high, fun, relief from daily worries, camaraderie, flexibility, insight and ideas for work and personal situations, meditative

state of mind, sense of personal accomplishment, self-confidence, improved posture, coordination and body awareness, improved physical and emotional strength, fresh air, new perspectives and improved memory.

What has been the best part?

The time I spend training in aikido pays dividends in all the other aspects and activities of my life: professional, family, social and spiritual. Simple yet profound concepts are easier to integrate into my daily life when I've learned them through aikido. The main things I have learned from aikido are patience, the ability to stay centered and grounded, and to have a positive mind.

What has been the toughest part?

The toughest part of aikido for me has had nothing to do with the physicality of the training. The toughest part has been rewiring

my head. Aikido combines the rhythmic, graceful elements of partnered dancing with the timing and fighting qualities of boxing, and induces a calm state of self-awareness found in meditation. I had none of these in my background.

What keeps you motivated?

Excellent teachers and other members, my family, vanity and pride, habit, positive past experiences and self-respect. My rule is that if I'm in town and healthy I go to class.

How do you find time?

I don't find the time; I carve out and guard the time. I think this is an important shift in one's thinking about exercise. For instance, I haven't watched TV for almost 15 years. It sounds like an enormous sacrifice, but I don't miss it. Also, over the past 30 years I've tailored my workouts to accommodate my age and stage in life.

What advice do you have for people considering a fitness program?

Understand that there is a fitness program for every personality, age, body type, budget, time constraints and life circumstances. Persist until you find one that works for you. Don't settle for a program that hurts physically or makes you feel bad about yourself.

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Wendy Harnwell takes instruction from Rick Berry.

Set things up for yourself so that you succeed. Find great teachers and classmates. Team up with a buddy, family member or friend for accountability and camaraderie.

Do you have an exercise story you'd like to share or know someone who does? Contact Suzanne Loudermilk at 324-2258 or sloudermilk@delawareonline.com.