



A hike by any other name would be as sweet

Picture it, Ravello, Italy. The small hilltop town is known for its exceptional gardens and stunning views of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Perched 1,100 feet above the coastal towns of the Amalfi Coast, Ravello is reachable by tour bus for the masses and via thousands of steps for the brave (or just crazy). I must emphasize "step" after step...after step (see picture). Recently my husband and I decided to be crazy and hike to the top of this beautiful town along steep pathways dotted with olive groves and laced with grapevines.

Our hike, however, did not reflect the traditional definition of "hiking". There were no backpacks or maps, not even a compass or a first aid kit (there was barely a pathway). I was always under the impression that in order to hike correctly, such items were needed and that you would likely spend most of your day trying to get to wherever it is you were supposed to be going. Hiking seemed as endless and pointless as many of my clients tell

me they feel about running on a treadmill while looking at themselves in a mirror.

Interesting...

Reflection. Now there's a tricky word.

Maybe all those years of feeling like hiking was a slow-paced, boring, almost burdensome activity had to do with me not being able to open my mind and see beyond what I thought I knew. Running on a treadmill in front of mirrors never bothered me because it was an opportunity to let go of distractions and focus on my body. To get this feeling from a treadmill is rare. So while hiking up to Ravello I reflected upon this difference between most others and me and gave myself the chance to redefine what exercise, health and fitness means to me.

The almost two hours of uphill reflection led me to conclude that using a gym, with all those machines I cherish, is not the only way to get as fit as I strive to be. When utilized correctly, the gym provides the best starting point and an integral home base for overall fitness. You use it so that when you want to perform a different activity, play a sport or simply go for a hike with your husband you can do so with relative ease.

Hiking or any form of exercise doesn't have to be boring or painful no matter where you are. On our hike I was able to (for the first time) open my mind enough to see that I could turn hiking into what I wanted it to be... vigorous exercise. That's its benefits are immeasurable. Hiking is a weight bearing activity that helps prevent osteoporosis by increasing bone density and decreasing calcium loss. When hiking, a change in elevation and varying terrain helps to build balance and coordination. I can easily make my hike harder by adding a 10 or 15 lb. backpack to increase calorie burn.

Plus, the mental health benefits of hiking are just as plentiful as the physical. Exposure to natural bright light increases levels of serotonin in the brain, which helps to elevate your mood. And because exercise also boosts serotonin production, the benefit is twofold! And as for most, when I am happier I am able to relax and enjoy what is around me...the sun, the mountains, the ocean, etc.

So grab a pair of supportive shoes, some sunblock and a bottle of water and stop making excuses as to why you don't do the things you want to do for fitness. Add a hike, whatever your definition of it is, to shake up your workout routine. Hopefully when you finish, your reflection in the mirror will bring a smile to your flushed face.