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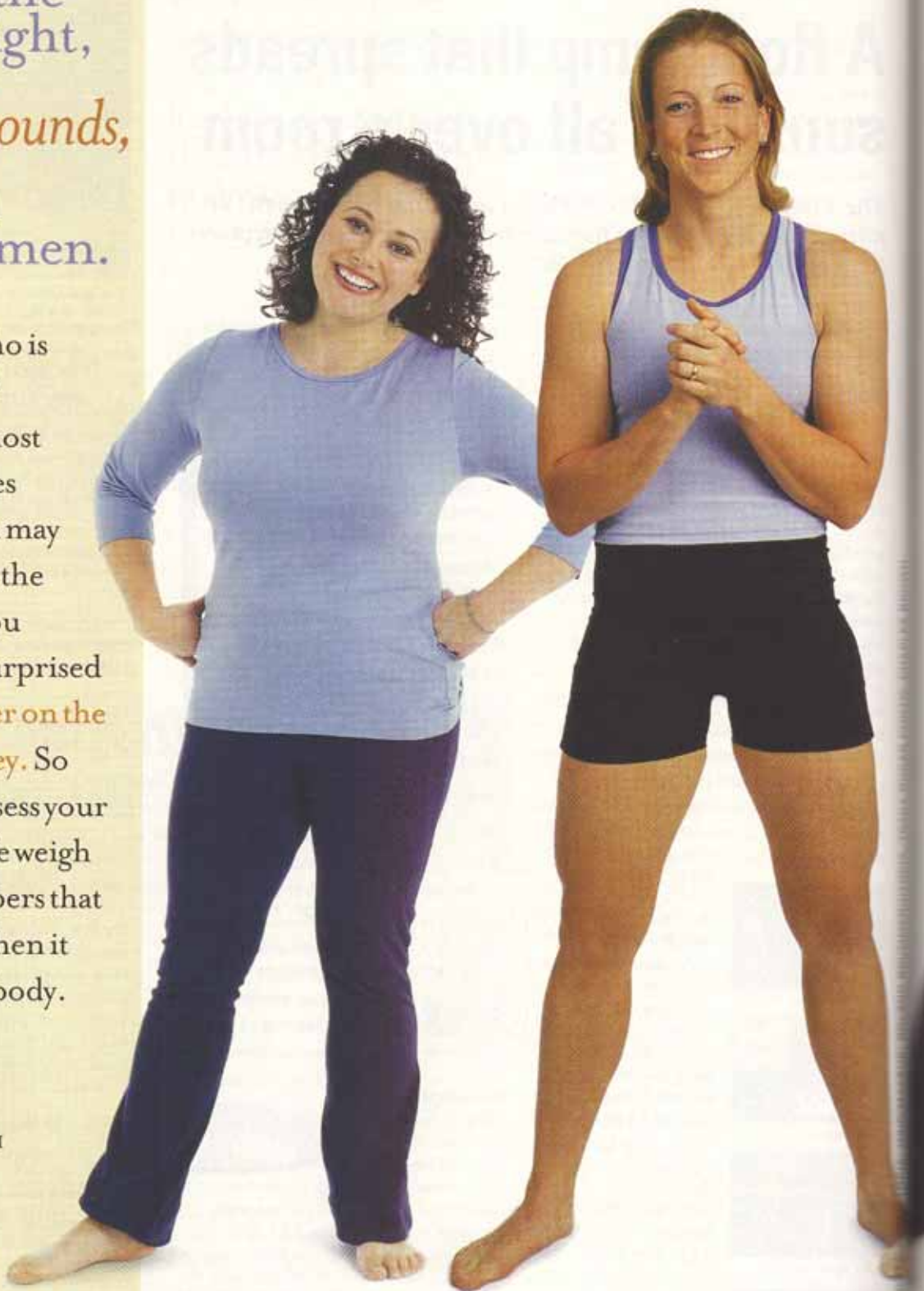


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See how the
same weight,
140 pounds,
looks on
these women.

Can you tell who is
the healthiest?
Who eats the most
or who exercises
regularly? You may
be surprised at the
answers, but you
shouldn't be surprised
that **the number on the
scale isn't the key.** So
how can you assess your
own health? We weigh
in on the numbers that
really matter when it
comes to your body.

by MELISSA SPERL
photography by
MARILI FORASTIERI



five women,



one weight

JUST ABOUT EVERY WOMAN has her “dream weight”: what the scale read in high school or pre-baby; what her sister weighs; what Catherine Zeta-Jones weighs. She fixates on this number, devising intricate exercise regimens and diets in order to reach it. What, though, does this number really mean? That when she gets there she’ll be healthy and fit—or simply that she’ll look good in a pair of pleather pants?

The fact is that the same number can look very different on different women—and can mean a variety of things. Take the five women in this story. Each weighs 140 pounds, a full 12 notches below the weight of the average American woman. But would you know by looking at her that Ellen Wilson sweats it out on a bike five days a week, and has done so for 20 years? The numbers on the scale don’t say that Kim Clark gets her five servings of vegetables per day, or that Tracy Ducar can bench-press 150 pounds. Even the charts that consider both weight and height aren’t very helpful. If you’re 5 feet 5 inches tall, for instance, these charts say you should weigh in somewhere between 111 and 150 pounds. That’s a huge range, the difference between a size 2 and a size 12.

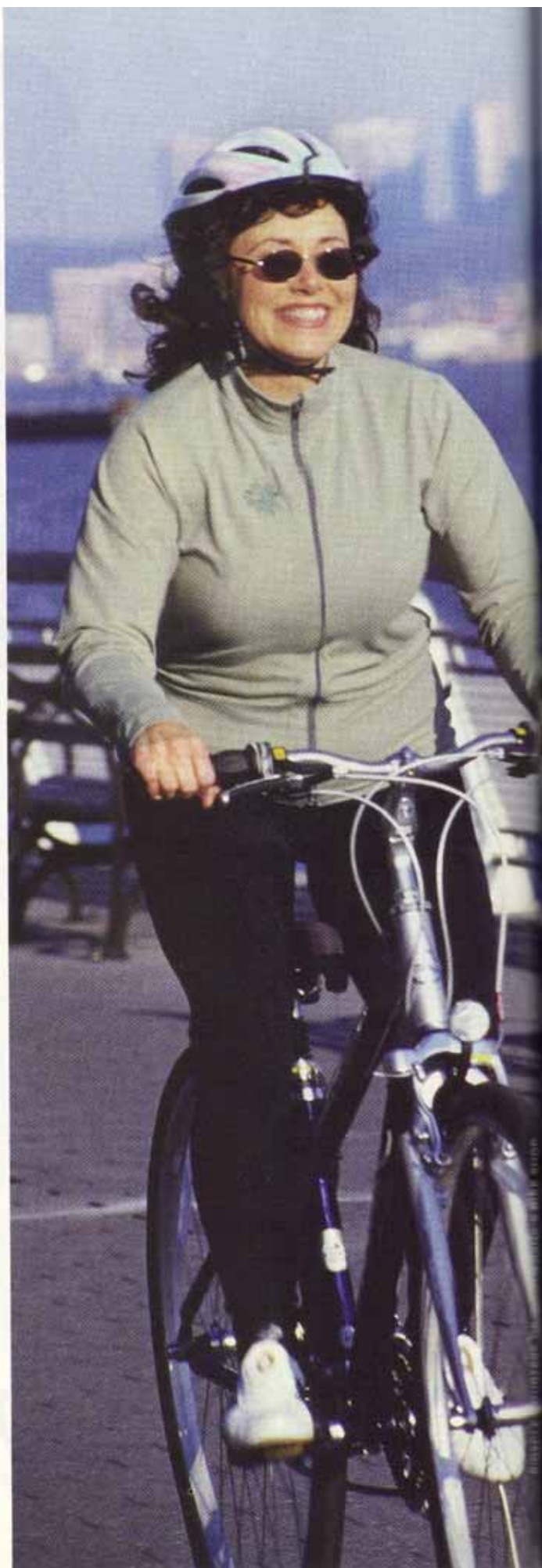
Body mass index, or BMI, is better than the weight charts because it correlates closely to body-fat percentage—often mentioned as the “gold standard” of determining physical health and fitness (see “Crunching the Numbers” at right). Still, though, you can have low body fat and not be in good shape. So what if a skin-fold test says you have 18 percent body fat (a number most women dream of) if you can’t go for a bike ride with your kids without feeling winded?

“Fitness is a combination of cardiovascular health, muscle health, strength, endurance, and a mental or spiritual state of being,” emphasizes Carol L. Otis, M.D., the head of the Women’s Sports Medicine Clinic at the Kerlan-Jobe Orthopaedic Clinic in Los Angeles and co-author of *The Athletic Woman’s Survival Guide*.

Throw away your scale, the experts advise, because weight doesn’t really matter. But we say, get real: We love knowing what we weigh. Because even if the scale doesn’t tell you everything, it’s an easy way of keeping check on where you are now relative to where you were last month. You know if the needle is swinging to the right because you’ve added muscle (which does weigh more than fat) or you’ve just been eating junk.

Of course, if each added pound drives you to a drastic diet, you probably should wean yourself from the scale. But if you can maintain perspective about the numbers or just judge by how you feel (or the fit of those pleather pants), that’s great. A healthy weight is about both body and mind. And your fitness is about determining your target weight and how to get there. These five women know when they are on track, and they treat their bodies right. What could be more beautiful than that?

**You can have
low body fat
and not be in
good shape.
So what if you’re
slim if you can’t
ride a bike without
getting winded?**





Ellen Wilson

Overcoming Illness

HEIGHT: 5'1"

AGE: 40

OCCUPATION:
stay-at-home
mom

HOME: Sears-
port, Maine

For exercise, you have to do what you love. Ellen Wilson's husband swears that running works. For her, it's cycling.

■ **WHAT SHE EATS:** Wilson revamped her diet after the birth of her daughter five years ago. She was diagnosed with a thyroid condition, which made it tough for her to return to her pre-baby weight. She still struggles with the disease, but the new eating habits are part of what keeps her feeling healthy. Her main diet focus is

getting at least four cups of veggies per day.

■ **HOW SHE WORKS OUT:** Wilson has a self-made program she calls "Tour de Pants." She does four to five indoor and outdoor cycling sessions per week, working toward a new pair of pants she picked out in a catalog.

■ **HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT 140:** "When I look in the mirror, I see a normal American woman. Sure, I wish I were thinner—I would like to be between 120 and 125—but I'm thankful, since I have this problem with my thyroid, that my weight has been pretty stable."

■ **PHILOSOPHY:** "Before the baby, I weighed 117 pounds; I know that's not realistic now. You really can't go by weight. And, for exercise, you have to do what you love. My husband swears that running works. For me, cycling works."

crunching the numbers

Although most methods of judging your weight are just estimates, sometimes that's all you need for a quick health assessment. According to the American Dietetic Association, one of the best ways to find your target weight is to calculate your body mass index (BMI).

Your BMI is your weight in kilograms divided by your height in meters squared. But you can avoid the metric system by using this shortcut:

- Multiply weight in pounds by 704.5.
- Divide that by height in inches squared.

So if you are 5 feet 4 inches tall (64 inches) and weigh 140 pounds, the numbers look like this:

$$140 \text{ pounds} \times 704.5 = 98,630$$

$$64 \times 64 = 4,096 \text{ (height in inches squared)}$$

$$98,630 \div 4,096 = 24.08$$

To skirt the math, use an online calculator, such as the one from the National Institutes of Health (www.niddk.nih.gov/health/nutrit/pubs/unders.htm). Or go to Health.com and get your number off our easy table, "Are You Overweight?," in the Weight section of the site.

According to the NIH, you are considered overweight if you have a BMI between 25 and 29.9. A BMI of 30 or higher is in the obese range. If your result is above the limit, take your ideal BMI and run the numbers in reverse to find your target weight. (One caveat: Very muscular people may have higher BMIs because muscle is so heavy, not because their weight is unhealthy.)

For a fast way to determine if your body-fat percentage is healthy, pinch the skin on the back of your upper arm. (Tense the muscle so you're just grabbing fat.) If you can pinch more than an inch, you're carrying around too much fat.

Where you carry fat is also important. Fat stored around your waist indicates a higher risk for heart disease and other conditions than that on your hips. The test: Measure your waist at its smallest point; then measure your hips at their largest point. Divide the waist number by the hip number. Women should have a waist-to-hip ratio below 0.8. Men should be below 1.0. —MOIRA WEINER

Pauline Millard

Maintaining a Healthy Approach

HEIGHT: 5'7"

AGE: 24

OCCUPATION:
writer, grad
student

HOME:
New York City

■ **WHAT SHE EATS:** Lots of fruit: "It gives me energy," says Millard (at right). At lunch, she heads for sushi ("I'm totally addicted"), and for dinner, just about anything goes. Her hectic schedule means a lot of dinners out, which is easy and generally quick in New York City.

■ **HOW SHE WORKS OUT:** Millard exercises four or five times a week because it relieves stress and lifts her mood. She runs outdoors in the summer, and in winter, she spends some time on the treadmill and some in a hip-hop funk dance class.

■ **HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT 140:** "It's the weight I feel best at. One summer I ran a lot and got down to 130, but it made me so thin that people asked if there was something wrong with me. That wasn't a good feeling. Anything more than 140 makes me feel sloppy, and anything less makes me feel undernourished. Clearly, this is the right weight for me."

■ **PHILOSOPHY:** "I've been a size 8 or 10 my entire life. I'll never be a 4; I'll never be a 6. It's just not going to happen. I'm lucky that the weight I feel good at looks pretty good on me. I'll continue to watch what I eat and exercise, but I know my limits. I've never had the hang-ups with food that I think a lot of other women have."

Tracy Ducar

Staying Strong to Perform

HEIGHT: 5'7"

AGE: 28

OCCUPATION:
professional
soccer player
for the Boston
Breakers

HOME:
Wellesley,
Massachusetts

■ **WHAT SHE EATS:** Ducar (at right) tries to get protein at every meal—that's the key to her strength: It helps her develop more muscle and stay lean. Other than that, she just tries to eat healthfully, without obsessing about fat or calories.

■ **HOW SHE WORKS OUT:** During the soccer season, she trains on the field two hours a day and lifts weights two or three times a week. Ducar also likes to run two or three times a week, because as a goal-

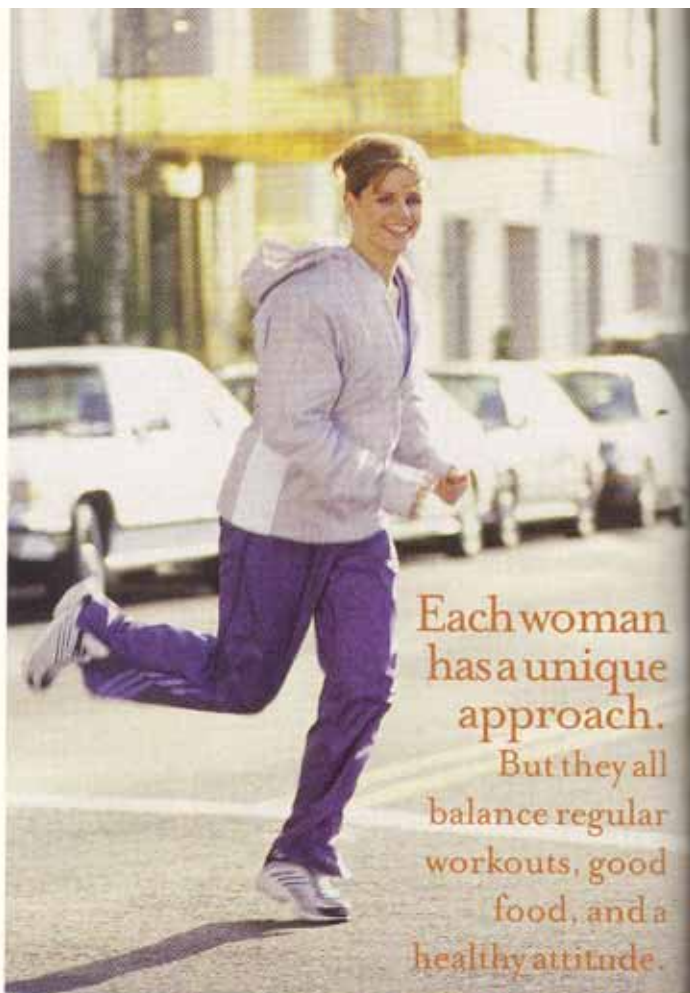
keeper she doesn't get as much cardiovascular exercise from field training as she thinks she needs.

■ **HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT 140:** "I feel fit, lean, and strong at 140. If I drop far below that weight, I know I have lost critical muscle mass. As a professional athlete, having a good muscle base is paramount. When I am at 140, I feel confident and play better."

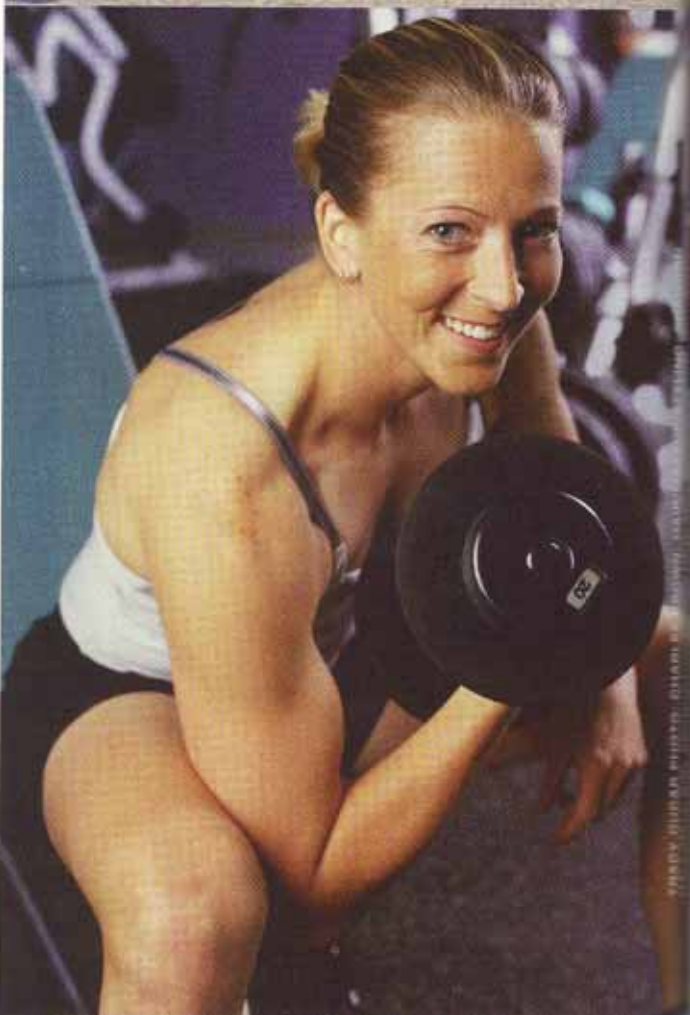
■ **PHILOSOPHY:** "I don't feel like a fanatic when it comes to food and nutrition. I'm definitely conscious, but I'm not counting every calorie. I think what I'm doing is easy for me. And when I take care of my training on and off the field, I feel like I do better on the field. The two go hand in hand."

online

How do you determine your ideal weight? Visit HEALTH.COM to take our poll; then share your thoughts on our discussion boards.



Each woman has a unique approach. But they all balance regular workouts, good food, and a healthy attitude.





Joyce Hundley

Focusing on the Right Goals

HEIGHT: 5'7"

AGE: 53

OCCUPATION:
antitrust
attorney for
the U.S.
Department
of Justice

HOME:
Washington,
D.C.

■ **WHAT SHE EATS:** Hundley (at left) thinks her diet has always been reasonably nutritious, but she recently decided that it was time to become a little more knowledgeable about how to eat healthfully. So now she chooses skim milk and whole grains, cuts out red meats, and fills up her plate with more fresh vegetables.

■ **HOW SHE WORKS OUT:** Hundley fits exercise into her busy schedule less than she'd like—but still manages to work out three times a week most of the time.

Walking or jogging along the trails of a nearby city park is one of her favorite pastimes.

■ **HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT 140:** "I believe that as long as I'm exercising, eating healthfully, and feeling good, 140 is fine. At one time I thought I'd like to get down to 135, but that's just not realistic for me. Now I know it's more important that I feel like I'm living a full life."

■ **PHILOSOPHY:** "I've come to realize that my goal isn't to lose 10 pounds, although that would be OK. I want to be able to be active with my son and daughter. My main goal is to focus on nutrition and exercise so I can participate in the activities that I enjoy with my friends and family."

Kim Clark

Being Her Best From the Inside Out

HEIGHT: 6'0"

AGE: 32

OCCUPATION:
fitness model

HOME:
Coatesville,
Pennsylvania

■ **WHAT SHE EATS:** Her regimen is low-fat (less than 18 grams a day) and low-carb. On the days that she works out, though, Clark (at left) allows herself to go a little heavier on her self-proclaimed weaknesses: breads and pastas.

■ **HOW SHE WORKS OUT:** A second-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do, Clark

is working toward master status (fifth-degree black belt). She trains in Tae Kwon Do three to four times a week for two hours a session. She also plays a weekly game of pick-up basketball.

■ **HOW SHE FEELS ABOUT 140:** "In my industry, 140 sounds like a lot, but for me it's an ideal weight. I'm in the best shape of my life: I feel healthy; my clothes fit well. I used to set my target at 135, but when I try to get down to that weight, I just don't feel as good."

■ **PHILOSOPHY:** "My main motivation for working out is to look good and feel good. My grand master, Chae T. Goh, has instilled in us a motto: 'When your body is fatigued, your mind takes over, and when you're mentally fatigued, your spirit takes over.' I carry this into my everyday life, and it helps me on auditions. I know I'm going to give the best of my ability, no matter whether I get the job or not." ❊

Freelance writer Melissa Sperl lives in Boston and also contributes to Women's Day, Travel Holiday, and WeightWatchers.com.

