

A CHAT WITH FAIGY FINK OF FIT WITH FAY



BY SIMMY HORWITZ

Ten women - respectable *n'shei Yisroel*, responsible mothers, hard workers - stand doubled over in laughter, mid-lunge, at the side of a pool during an ostensible water aerobics class.

Welcome to working out with Faigy Fink. Hilariously funny and unpredictable, Faigy is not your typical exercise taskmaster. In fact, it's hard to imagine Faigy instructing her "trainees" to perform the same exercise move for more than 30 seconds straight, because she herself would get bored. Yet, as exciting as Faigy's fitness classes are, it's in the area of nutrition where this health expert shines even more.

This week, we pinned down the busy fitness guru for a talk on how she got her start in health, how we can keep healthy amidst countless obstacles, and the wackiest exercise move she's ever directed (answer: it just may be jumping off of a mini trampoline into the deep end of a pool).

Yated: How did you get into nutrition and exercise?

Faigy Fink: It's something that I've been into my whole life. A childhood friend once heard someone mention that I've been doing this for 15 years - which is how long I've been seeing clients - and she answered, "Actually, she's been doing this since she was born."

In the same way that some kids go to piano lessons to develop their talent for music, I would go to nutritionists simply because I loved learning about health. I loved reading up about every diet on the market, and figuring out how to calculate calories and read labels. I vividly remember sitting in one nutritionist's office, taking in her big desk and the scale on which she would weigh her clients. I thought at the time, "One day, I am *so* going to be behind that desk."

Y: It's in your blood! Has anything changed in the industry over the years?

FF: Back in the day, if you wanted to eat healthy, you would look at the calories and the fat; it was all about adding up to a low number. Nowadays, we have much more of a focus on the ingredients. Are the ingredients wholesome and healthy? When a client sends over a picture of a food and wants to know if she can eat it, I'll ask her to read me the ingredients. If we get three ingredients in and I don't recognize what it is, or if the first ingredient is sugar, it's a red flag. We also now realize that fat is actually *good* for you - it's essential to give your body energy.

Y: Where did you get all of your nutrition knowledge from (aside from having a lifelong passion for the topic)?

FF: I went to school to receive my formal training, but for the most part, I had already seen it all. I had been studying it for years. A lot of what I know is also a result of my experience, having worked with so many different types of people over the years. I've learned that no two people are exactly the same.

You can't have a one-size-fits-all diet plan because different things work for different people. You can't say, "Everybody should be gluten free," or, "You can only eat 'this' amount of 'this,'" because every single body is different. There's no such thing as, "Here are the rules and good luck."

People have always been my strength. I work using the individual's unique makeup, along with the knowledge of human characteristics. It's going to be the Nine Days and someone has a dairy sensitivity? You can't just say, "No cheese for nine days." You have to figure out how to work with them, so it fits their needs, but is doable and possible.

Y: You have a clear passion for nutrition. How did this transition into exercise, as well?

FF: To me, you've got to do whatever it takes to help a client. I had clients who said, "Show me what to eat, but I'm not going to a gym," or "I hate exercising," and I thought, "This is a necessary part of healthy living." If she's not going to do it on her own, we've got to make it work.

Exercising does not have to be boring. I've learned how to make it

so much fun! It's not about taking 30 minutes on the treadmill, then crossing it off your list for the day. It's about having a blast so that you don't even look at the clock while you're doing it. The best thing my clients can say to me at the end of a class is, "What, it's over already?"

It's the same thing with a diet. You don't have to eat the same thing every day in order to be healthy. I teach my clients how to get creative with their food, and I'm always developing new recipes that keep it exciting. Ask my clients about my healthy "Milk Munch" dessert. It's not normal.

Y: Even with the most delicious healthy foods, our favorite "cheat" foods can still beckon. What's the answer to that?

FF: We're aiming for progress, not perfection. It's always about the progress. A client will complain to me that she didn't lose weight over *Yom Tov* and I'll ask, "But did you gain?" In the past, she would have walked away from *Yom Tov* five pounds heavier, so now she's the same weight? That's amazing! Who cares that she didn't lose?

The only way to get through life is to focus on the positive, and that goes for anything in life. We always try to switch the negative to a positive: "You had a piece of cake? Okay, but did you stop yourself from having *three* pieces of cake? So that's fantastic!"

It's the same approach that carries over to the menu plans and exercise classes: let's focus on the positive, let's make it exciting and fun. I'll always bring in new equipment and try to be creative and vary things. The more enjoyable it is, the longer it will last.

Y: Are there any easy "tricks" to keep healthy as much as possible?

FF: Think ADD. When you "add" in the good stuff, it keeps away the bad stuff. You have a sweet tooth? Satisfy it with yummy, nutritious, sweet vegetables, such as sweet potatoes and carrots, or a fruit, such as an orange. Get in those nutrients and get your sweet fix, and the craving for something unhealthy will go away.

Another piece of advice I would give everyone is to stop looking at your next door neighbor. We would be healthier if everyone just focused on themselves instead of everyone else. Hashem created everyone with different brains, different money and different metabolisms. Just like you can't say to everyone, "Just work harder and you'll make more money," you also can't judge another person's metabolism. Some people are hungrier by nature. Some people digest their food better and can afford more.

Personally, I'm affected by gluten intolerance. I also have sensitivities to a lot of other foods, so I really understand the struggles that people have.

Y: Is there any one area in which people struggle the most when it comes to weight loss?

FF: People don't have patience. In our stressed-out lives, our car-pool society, we're all rushing-rushing-rushing, and we want results, *now*. It doesn't always work that way, though.

As a Jew, we don't give up. We're used to hard work and persistence. Sometimes, you'll see results right away, and sometimes, you have to wait it out. The goal is

to have a healthy relationship with food and that will pay itself back over time. Trust me, when you've reached your goal weight at the end, you don't think, "Oh, but it took me an extra three months."

Y: What's more important, diet or exercise?

FF: Abs are made in the kitchen. Seventy to eighty percent of what's affecting the bottom line of a person's weight comes from the food. When I take on a client who hasn't been eating right or exercising, I'll always start with the meal plan, and I won't bring in exercise for the first two weeks. Once they have the hang of the food, I'll incorporate exercise.

Y: Can a healthy lifestyle be for everybody?

FF: I'll often get a client who is incapable of eating healthy and exercising because there are heavy emotional issues blocking the way. A nutritionist can't just say: "Cut carbs, add vegetables and you'll be good to go." Cutting carbs is not going to help when the person needs emotional guidance.

When a client comes in in that situation, I see it as my job to get her help in whatever form she needs; it's all part of my price as her nutritionist. My main thing is helping people. Once you help people with what they need, everything else falls into place.

People are amazing. Everyone has something incredible to offer. When you believe that a person can achieve their goals, then they can do it.

Faigy can be reached at fitwith-faynj.com.

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