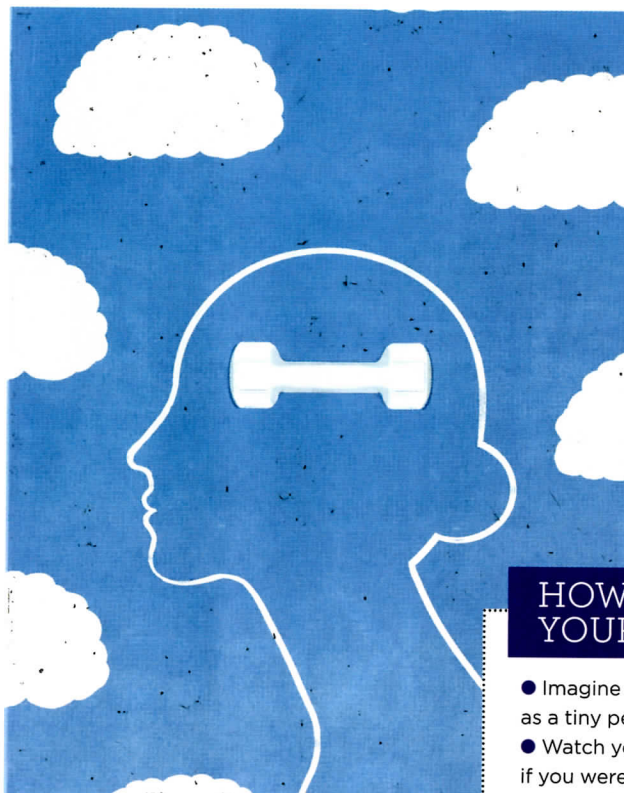


# Can you think yourself fitter?

YOU MAY NOT BELIEVE IT, BUT NEW RESEARCH HAS SHOWN YOU CAN GET FITTER AND SLIMMER JUST BY THINKING ABOUT IT. SUZY GREAVES DISCOVERS THE NEW BODY-MIND CONNECTION

ILLUSTRATION SHOUT



It's a dream come true for those of us reclining on sunloungers. Breakthrough research has revealed you can get slimmer and fitter, just by thinking about it. In the future, using your brain could become the most important part of a diet or fitness regime.

For years, the general consensus among exercise scientists has been that exercise and diet are what counts. But a recent Canadian study seemed to show that you can get fit simply by imagining yourself that way.

The study compared two groups, one who exercised and one who didn't, but who did *think* about exercising. Results showed the non-exercisers experienced nearly the same gains in strength as the exercise group, by visualising three times a week. (The real exercisers improved muscle strength by 28 per cent, the visualisers improved by 24 per cent.) And that's not the only study in this revolutionary new field. Scientists in Cleveland measured a substantial increase (35 per cent) in muscle strength in 30 volunteers who imagined exercising for 15 minutes a day, five days a week over 12 weeks.

It gets better. In a 2008 Harvard study, a hotel's housekeeping staff were told that what they did on a daily basis qualified as the amount of exercise needed to be healthy. They made no changes in their behaviour, just kept on doing their job. Four weeks on, they had lost weight, as well as lowered their

blood pressure and body-fat percentage. A similar group of housekeepers, who had not been told their job qualified as exercise, saw none of these changes.

So how on earth can this work? 'Our thoughts can have an astonishing effect on our bodies, because the mind can't always tell the difference between real and imagined,' says Dr David R Hamilton, author of *How Your Mind Can Heal Your Body* (Hay House, £9.99). When, during research for drug companies, Hamilton realised that placebo drugs produced comparable results to the actual drug, he set about understanding why. 'I found irrefutable evidence that the thoughts we think have a massive impact on our healing capacity,' Hamilton says. The theory is, different mental states release hormones that can accelerate or stop muscle growth, fire up or slow down your metabolism, even switch genes on and off.

So, is visualisation really going to give you results? Cat Dugdale, who runs Superchick personal training company, says your mental state definitely can make a difference to what you achieve when you

## HOW TO THINK YOURSELF FITTER

- Imagine a mini-you – yourself as a tiny person inside your body.
- Watch yourself on a screen as if you were at the cinema and you are the main character.
- Decide what you want, for example, to feel fitter, healthier and/or to lose weight.
- Create a scene or a story with the mini-you in your head, which tells the story of how you get from fat to thin, from flabby to firm. You could imagine the mini-you stoking the furnace of your metabolism and watch it burn off the calories, or the mini-you pumping up your muscles, like you would an airbed.
- Do this visualisation for 10 minutes, three times a day.

exercise. 'That's been proven in studies on athletes,' she says. But, she adds, 'focusing on being healthier will simply encourage you to make small but healthy choices in food and exercise – and they all add up.'

So, whether or not you're convinced that there's some unexplained mind-body connection, it does stand to reason that, if you've spent half an hour visualising a healthier you, it will make that Magnum seem a little less appealing and going for a walk a little more sensible. And that can't be a waste of time, can it? ■