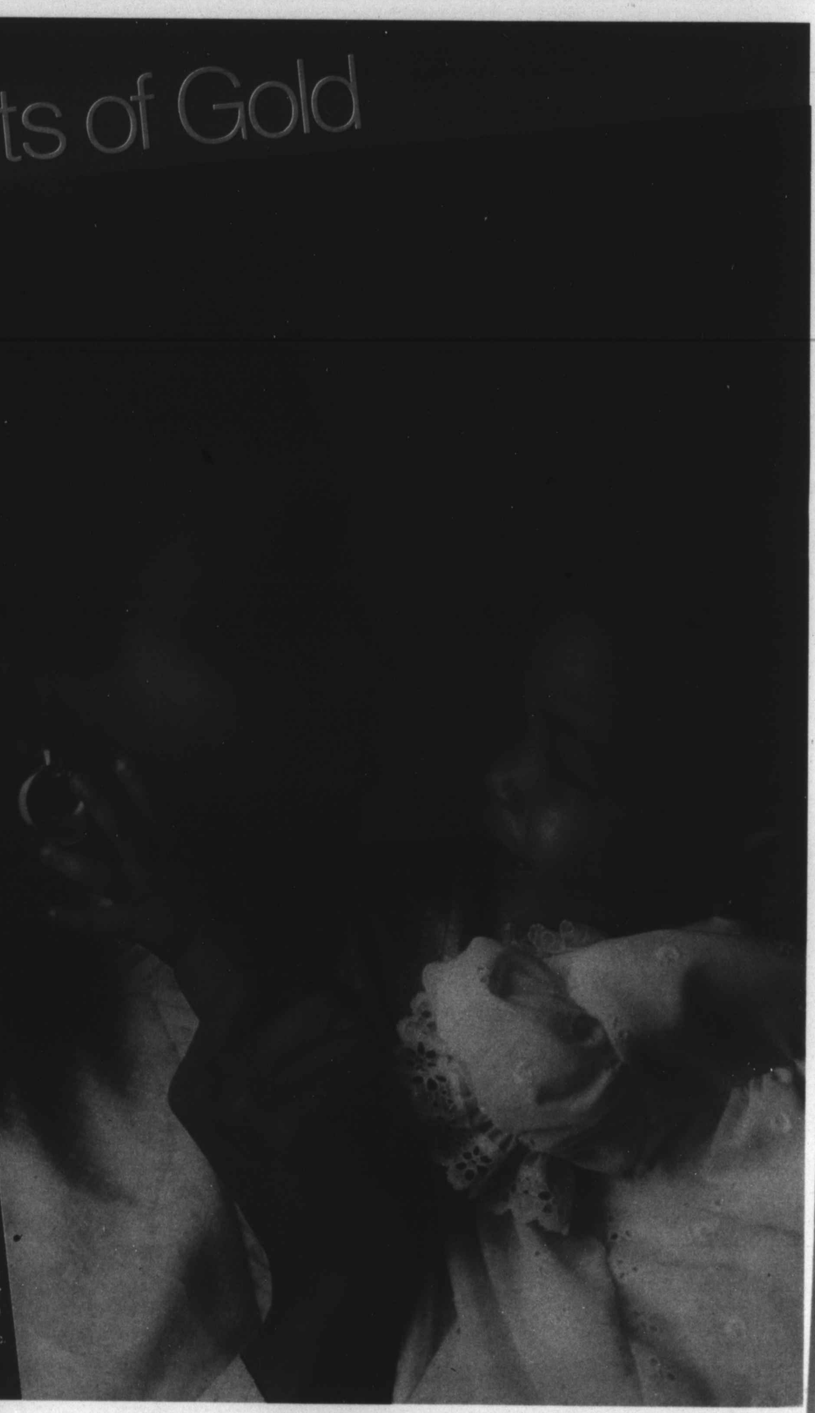
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COVER STORY

Getting Fit:

Or Leaving Your Favorite Chair in Search of a Better Body

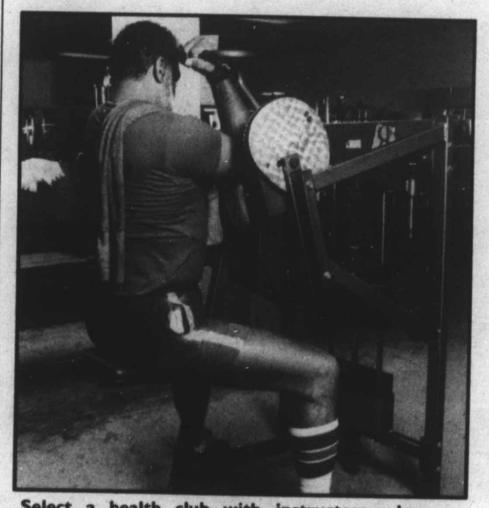
By Elin Jones

Winter really can be wonderful, even if you hate cold weather. You get to wear all those big sweaters and layers of clothing and you can eat all those wonderful "stick-to-the-ribs" foods we tell ourselves will help fight off colds.

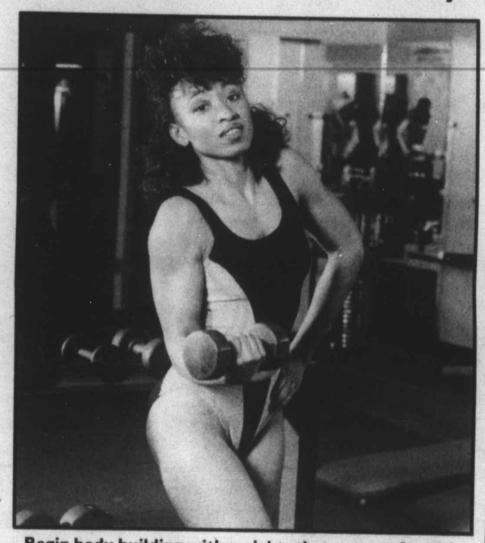
Ah! but then comes spring and the annual sweater shedding and under all those comfy clothes are extra mounds and pounds.

And here we are, our engines straining against the load, bogged down by our own winter excesses, chugging sluggishly toward bathing suit season.

Summer is just around the corner. Now is the time to get your motor running at top performance levels so you can enjoy the warm weather at the beach, the park or your backyard. Like any other sophisticated system, your body needs special maintenance. With the proper tool, you can fine-tune your physique and make yourself feel healthier, look better and sleep more soundly. You can also increase your flexibility and your sexual drive, lower your blood pressure, relieve stress, and prevent muscular atrophy and osteoporosis (loss of bone mineral). The best tool for such work is exercise. Remember, you are never too old (or too young) for bodywork.



Select a health club with instructors who are knowledgeable about proper exercise techniques, physiology and injuries.



Begin body building with weights that are comfortable for you. Most beginners prefer 5 to 20 pound dumbbells.

Working out is for men and women who want control over their physical appearance. Bodybuilder Carla Dunlap notes that athletics offer options and goals to females who do not fit the idolized "Playboy image." The soft, full woman has been idolized in black American culture for many years, says Deloris Aldridge, founder of Power Feminique, a membership organization concerned with fitness for black women. Aldridge, a medical care specialist, warns, "Health comes before men. The men may go, but you want your health to stay." She adds that round figures are frequently accompanied by fatty deposits that make the natural body unappealing even to the men who want you to remain voluptuous.

The myth that exercise leads to massive muscles discourages many women from working out. The reality is: Women have low levels of the male hormone testosterone and their muscles naturally tone up, strengthen and lean out. A combination of steroids, protein supplements and high calorie dieting is the only way to alter Mother Nature.

Your first step toward total fitness is a thorough physical exam, which should include EKG and spirometer tests (to measure

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