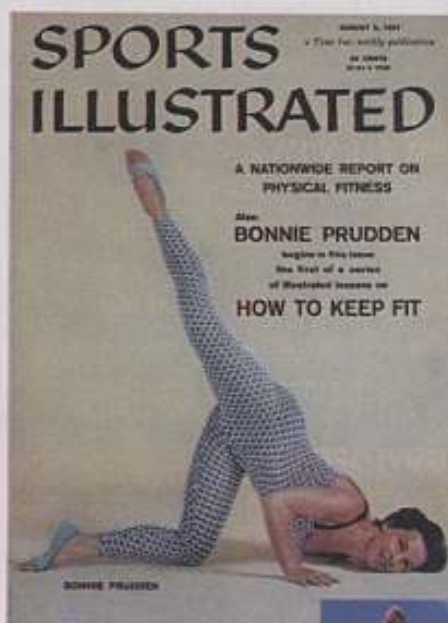


Bonnie Prudden, Fitness Pioneer

August 5, 1957



Prudden's exercise routines have been embraced by every level of society.



NICHOLAS MEIX (COVER); PAUL F. GROSS/ASA

UNLESS YOU are an incorrigible couch potato, Bonnie Prudden has improved the state of your body. The spunky 5' 2" great-grandmother was a fitness guru long before getting fit became fashionable, and her work has shaped the way Americans think about exercise. She taught her first conditioning class more than 50 years ago and at age 85 is still keeping up a breakneck schedule of lectures, interviews and fitness demonstrations.

In 1946 Prudden was living in Harrison, N.Y., and was appalled at the lax physical education in the elementary school of one of her two daughters. Bonnie, an accomplished dancer, rock climber and skier, started after-school exercise classes for Joan and Suzy and

their friends. Over the years Prudden's fitness routines have been embraced by every level of society—swimming lessons for babies, a dry-land ski school, and programs for women in prison—and practiced in nearly every conceivable place. She devised a workout regimen for the shower, “under cover” exercises for the bedroom and even “toilet training” for those who spend a lot of time on the throne.

The first lady of fitness gained national fame in 1955 when she wrote, with Dr. Hans Kraus, a study stating that American children were the least fit in the world. “The reasons were simple: school buses, cars and television,” says Prudden. “Physical education had committed suicide.” Her so-called shape of the union address, as the study came to be called, prompted Dwight Eisenhower to form what is known today as the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. A series of articles she wrote for *SI* in '57, aimed at teaching readers how to get fit, led to regular appearances on *The Home Show* and *Today*.

Prudden also made an important contribution to alternative medicine. In the mid-1970s she found that muscle pain can be relieved if pressure is applied—using fingers, knuckles or an elbow—to the proper trigger point in a muscle, and then remedial exercises are performed. This technique, known as myotherapy (*myo* means muscle in Greek), has helped people from Leonard Bernstein to Mark McGwire.

Prudden moved to Tucson in 1992 and is working on three books to add to her list of 13 published titles. She offers this advice for the motivationally challenged: “Get into some kind of exercise that you like and stay with it the rest of your life. You can't afford ever to quit.” Does Prudden practice what she preaches? Absolutely. “I put on *Hooked on Classics* or ABBA. Loud. Then I do polkas, ballet movements and all kinds of exercises for an hour in my pool. It works very well.”

—Trisha Lucey