

Julie's treadmill is a metaphor for what her life has become: a fast paced race against herself that doesn't allow her to move forward.



When you meet "Julie" at freshmen orientation you are drawn to her immediately. Her warm smile, ebullient personality and contagious laugh are infectious. You're certain you'll remain close friends. Over slices at Pizza Palace afterwards, you learn that Julie is as smart as she is outgoing. She's attending USC on full scholarship with aspirations of becoming a dietitian. "I love food, so why not become a professional?" she teases. "And maybe I'll learn how to lose a few pounds," she says as she glances down at her body. It hadn't even occurred to you that

Julie is slightly overweight.

During the course of your friendship as the two of you attend events, you discover that food is a central part of every collegiate function. The book club you join sponsors a monthly ice cream social that puts Ben, Jerry and Willy Wonka to shame. Your study group meets in a lounge that houses more snacks and soft drinks than textbooks. The all-you-can-eat pasta bar is a smash hit amongst students, providing the most fuel and fodder for the student buck. And alcohol? Who knew cheap beer could taste so good.

After a series of such food filled experiences you now understand where the proverbial "freshman fifteen" comes from. As a runner with track season upcoming, you don't stress over your few added pounds. Julie, however, decides to hit the gym.

Following a sweat-filled month of cardio, Pilates and eating more like a rabbit than a college freshman, Julie seems happier and looks healthier, too.

As the year carries on, though, she begins to cancel plans you've made together and rarely returns your calls. You catch up sessions at the pizza parlor have grown obsolete and on the rare occasion you reach her she claims she's busy, tired or both. Your budding friendship didn't blossom after all.

Months later at the campus gym you spot Julie on a treadmill, sprinting at top speed. You can see that she's lost her

added pounds and a few more. Entranced in her cardio/! pod oblivion she doesn't notice your approach.

When her treadmill timer hits its maximum allowance of 60 minute she pauses, hits 'RESTART' and returns to full speed. Julie's treadmill is a metaphor for what her life has become: a fast paced race against herself that doesn't allow her to move forward.

What Julie is experiencing is common amongst college students. With heightened academic and social pressures, hectic schedules and financial strain the desire to manage or control one's weight can reach unhealthy levels.

Physical fitness is a positive goal. Taken to unhealthy extremes it can lead to compulsive exercise, a disorder noted by exhaustion, moodiness or depression, insomnia, loss of the

menstrual cycle (in women), physical injuries, fatigue and eating disorders.

Building your schedule around your workout sessions, skipping classes and/or social activities in order to hit the gym and beating yourself up over a missed workout are all signs that your exercise habits have gone too far.

Healthy lifestyle guidelines suggest 20 - 60 minutes of cardiovascular exercise three to six times per week for optimal health. This may include running, walking, jogging, hiking, dancing or any variety of physical activities (i.e. you do not need to watch a calorie ticker in order to consider it a workout).

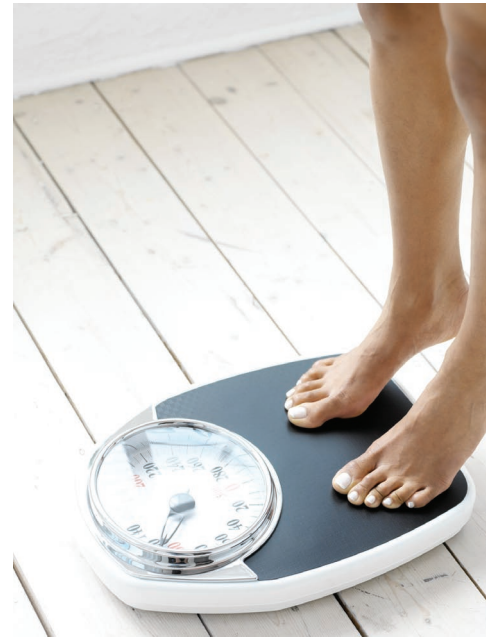
Enjoyment is a key differentiating factor between healthy and compulsive exercise, so seek activities you find pleasure in. You should look forward to how your workout makes you feel rather than feeling obligated and motivated purely by stringent results.

If you're unsure where your fitness enthusiasm lies, experiment. Take a kickboxing, spinning or yoga class. Go hiking, biking or rollerblading with friends. Try a dance or aerobics DVD. You may be surprised by your skills and passions you've yet to discover. Rest is as important as activity, so make time to relax. A day or two off of exercise weekly and adequate sleep promotes physical and emotional results

Healthy exercise promotes positive body image. As a fit person you'll experience greater levels of serotonin and other feel good hormones, sleep better at night and have better ability to cope with stress.

When the little voice inside your head speaks negatively of your body, weight or appearance, tell it to shut its mouth. Remind yourself that you're valuable regardless of your shape or size. You can't change what you can't accept, so efforts to appreciate and accept your body, as it is, are crucial.

If you relate to Julie's struggles, seek help. Compulsive exercise is treatable. Learning ways to stay fit healthfully will allow you to maintain the physical fitness you seek while enhancing your life, rather than inhibiting it.



For more information on positive body image and the dangers of compulsive exercise, visit www.somethingfishy.org