Summer *fitness*

Okay, so summer is a time to get out and get fit, but how much does it rankle when someone comes into the surgery with a sports bag?

Stephen Hancocks reaches for a weight.

It isn't just the action of entering the surgery with the bag that causes the irritation, it is what happens next. The patient lightly drops the sports bag onto the floor and the carefully numbered, polished metal studs on the bottom of the bag make merely the most delicate imitation of a noise. It is a sound like a perfectly poised tap dancer teasing you with the lightest clip, cllop of a toe to heel routine. 'Easy,' it says, pronounced with a lyricism that is absolutely maddening.

Just that little sound but it echoes through your aching frame as if someone has struck a peel of bells in your skull. 'Why aren't you fit?' screams a voice. 'Why, you don't even have a designer sports bag for goodness sake.' Of course you know you should do some exercise because all the books and magazines say so. And you will need to look great on the beach in, ooh, a few weeks time. Regular exercise, good diet, early to bed early to rise and all that stuff, but it isn't that easy in a busy working life is it? Besides there is good evidence that too much exercise is a bad thing and, given the way people claim that it is addictive perhaps it is better not to start. You're still not completely convinced though.

The problem stems from the fact that fitness is in another league nowadays. Once upon a time it was possible to amble down to the church hall once a fortnight, pull on a pair of battered plimsolls made off-white by decades of scuffing about on dusty floors, and bash a shuttlecock around for an hour or so. Not now. Now it is all hi-tech gyms where acres of heaving, straining and pumping flesh grunts its way from American-named training shoes to Italian-named hair conditioner in the showers. At times it seems as if even the tell tale sweat stains are applied aesthetically in gently sweeping underarm curves.

And then again everyone is hell bent on the detail of it all. It is no longer enough to get fit, or even feel fit, but that you have to know the minutiae of your fittest parts. For example it is necessary to know how to develop the different muscle groups. It is as much as you can do to develop the masseter, temporalis and digastrics as you munch on some delicious pie and chips but these people are talking 'definition' and we're not in the realm of dictionaries here.

Where do they find the time? That is the

*'You just know that
under that Ralph
Lauren shirt there
ripples a plank
of stomach...'*

other mystery. Housewives who manage to squeeze in rock-jazz dance class in between dropping the children off at school, seeing you for a check-up, working three hours as a PA to a local solicitor, picking the children up again and still not having to change out of their trackies. It leaves you quite breathless just thinking about it. Then again there are the astounding middle-aged fatties who wobble off round the park in training for their tenth half-marathon next Sunday week in Preston.

Don't they have televisions to sit in front of?

It may not seem so bad if it were only the

patients who ditched their sports bags by the spittoon, casually mentioned their prowess and beamed in knowing superiority. However, all the staff in the practice are at it too. The receptionist does step classes, the dental nurses are into aerobics and the DF is a competition swimmer who does a bit of water polo at the weekends.

The final aggravation is the patient who manages to sit up perfectly straight in the chair, from a supine position, rinse and spit out and lay back down again with perfect control and, what is even more exasperating, without a single grunt or expression of multi-strained escaping air. You just know that under that Ralph Lauren shirt there ripples a plank of a stomach. It is also at this point that you notice the wistful look that fleetingly crosses the dentist's face and suspect that she also has washboards on her mind, and not of the laundry kind. Then the penny drops. This isn't about exercise at all it is about, well, pairing, attraction: mating to put it at its most

basic. Your worries are over, if you don't need

attraction you don't need the exercise; and if you do - get a sports bag!