

Jon Garvey chews the cud



Running for fun

Now that the hysteria of the London Marathon has subsided, it may now be revealed that my wife, who decided to give the others a chance in the London effort, was the fourth woman across the line in the Chelmsford three-mile Fun-Run. A proud moment indeed for our family though, of course, as coach and chief ice-cream buyer for the children, I myself was unable to compete. This high point in the Essex social calendar did, however, give me the chance to see why jogging has become such a popular activity.

I took up jogging in the winter, when my wife brought me a tracksuit, presumably to still my complaints of angina while



walking to the garage to get the car out. A week or two of wading through the mud on the common, while the dog did his best to trip me over, hardly put me into that state of glowing well-being of which the athletes speak, but at least enabled me to run for a train without feeling sick. No amount of training, however, could alleviate the conviction that jogging is the most boring activity in the world.

The Chelmsford Fun Run soon explained why people are nevertheless hooked on it. They do not get pleasure from jogging but from being *seen* to be jogging. There is a kind of jogging *chic* which distinguishes true believers from the odd eccentric in an old vest and ex-army shorts.

Difficult to digest

The Butter Council, and its equivalent in the margarine manufacturing world, have been increasingly at each other's throats in the past few months, each accusing the other of false health claims for its product.

I confess to being slightly biased, as I find it hard to believe that churned cream is so much more harmful than the alternative conglomerate, whose most natural ingredient is ground-up whales. In any case, I prefer the taste, whatever Leslie Crowther and his team of hand-picked morons may say.

In the war of words, however, I am forced to conclude that each camp is guilty of misinformation.

There is on the one hand the television advertisement for a certain brand of poly-unsaturated axle-grease, which shows a housewife throwing a party for all the new, slimline, atheroma-free husbands in the neighbourhood, while in the background clouds of thick smoke arise from the sizzling, fatty steaks on the barbecue. Not quite the emphasis of the original dietary hypothesis, I think.

On the other, there is the offering of the Butter Council which dropped through my letter-box the other day. It

informed me that only one, poorly controlled study had ever shown decreased morbidity from a reduction in dietary intake of fat. I might have believed it, had I not at that moment been reading an article citing at least three such studies.

The whole argument is rather futile, really, when one considers how much more fat is ingested from milk, meat, biscuits and eggs than finds its way on to the morning slice of toast. But it's probably better to keep quiet about it, lest some entrepreneur starts persuading us to buy the polyunsaturated egg.

Talking of propaganda, isn't it strange how a stream of totally false allegations in the papers and law courts has forced the manufacturers of Debendox to discontinue its production, while our profession's attempts to point out the proven genocidal properties of the cigarette have served only to increase world tobacco sales? We seem to have a lot to learn in the art of communication.

And talking of drug companies, I haven't always been entirely complimentary about these institutions, on which our credibility as doctors largely rests. I make no apology for this, since much of what they do to sell their products is laughable. But I take my toupée off to the medical adviser of one company. After some inquiries about a quite specialised treatment, he not only gave us prompt and helpful information about his own product, but volunteered that a rival's offering had some advantages.

Perhaps such frankness loses the firm some revenue (assuming it doesn't lose the medical adviser his job!), but it will certainly lead me to prescribe their drugs more often than if they had blown their own trumpet in the usual fashion.

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