

## ON A MISSION

Passions keep 59-year-old triathlete on track

**Triathlete Sally Edwards approaches 60 with a competitive fire that she wants others to find within themselves.**

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PHOTOS



[Sally Edwards](#)

(DANSKIN)

Fitness pioneer Sally Edwards -- for 30 years one of the best endurance athletes in the world -- has a message for unfit America.

Stop dieting. Start moving.

"Losing weight is very, very hard and takes a very long time," she says. "And dieting alone, the research shows, is typically not sustainable. But an active, healthy lifestyle is sustainable. And once you start exercising, the eating -- and often the smoking and the drinking and the watching too much TV -- will take care of themselves."

In fact, just last month researchers at UCLA reached much the same conclusion after culling through 31 long-term weight-loss studies. But 59-year-old Edwards, who has a master's degree in exercise physiology, arguably has more street credibility.

She has been a triathlete since the sport first appeared in the United States in the 1970s. She has finished the Ironman -- a nonstop 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and 26.2-mile run -- 16 times and held the world record for her age group. She has won the Western States 100-mile footrace in the mountains of California and the Iditashoe 100-mile snowshoe race in Alaska. She competed in the 1984 Olympic marathon trials and the 1995 Eco-Challenge, a grueling 300-mile adventure race.

If that weren't enough, she also has written 21 books on sports, fitness and health, including some of the first books on triathlons and training with a heart-rate monitor.

But what really gives Edwards' message merit is not so much her impressive resume as her dedication to fitness despite very mortal struggles with a bad back and a crowded travel schedule.

As the national spokeswoman for the Danskin Women's Triathlon Series -- which makes its annual stop in Orlando for a race Sunday -- Edwards is often on the road, giving seminars on training and doing motivational speaking. Since 1990, she has done each of the series' sprint races herself, always finishing last to ensure that no other woman has to do so. It's in her contract.

And as too many business travelers know, it's tough to squeeze in some exercise when you're living out



[August race](#) (DANSKIN)

May 1, 2007



[Horseback-riding/running event](#)

(COURTESY OF SALLY EDWARDS)

May 4, 2007



[Active lifestyle](#)

(DANSKIN)

May 3, 2007

of a suitcase, staying in unfamiliar cities and standing in airport security lines.

"So I really prioritize working out," says Edwards via cell phone while awaiting a flight in Chicago. "I've already made an appointment with myself to go inline-skating tonight when I get home to Sacramento. I've already checked to make sure it isn't supposed to be raining, but if that hadn't worked, I would have planned to go to the gym [to lift weights] and then go swimming."

Variety is an ally. If Edwards grows bored with swimming or weights, she might run, ride a bike, take a Spinning class or, in winter, go cross-country skiing or snowshoeing. To celebrate her 60th birthday, she is planning a 185-mile, two-week hike from Lake Tahoe, Calif., to Yosemite.

And she does all this despite degenerative-disc disease, which causes constant and considerable pain in her back.

"Any kind of chronic pain wears on you," she admits. "But I'm off pain medication now, and it has started to fuse naturally, which is what [the doctors] want. I don't have to take steroids [for inflammation] anymore, and I can run two or three times a week for up to an hour. . . . I'm still waiting for them to perfect the artificial discs."

One of her more creative workout options is a neighborhood collaborative she calls the "garage gym." Eight years ago, when good friend and training partner Paul Camerer started having trouble cycling because of failing eyesight, Edwards offered to put her bike on a stationary wind-trainer in his garage and pedal alongside him for company and inspiration. They started training together twice a week.

One week, when Edwards was scheduled to be out of town during their "ride," she recruited a friend to take her place. Soon the friend invited another friend, who invited another friend -- until now there are two dozen of them, lining up in Camerer's garage and down his driveway two mornings a week at 5:30 a.m.

"We try to be quiet because the neighbors have mentioned that 5:30 is a little early for loud music," Edwards says. "So a lot of times we don't turn on music at all. We just focus. It's a great workout."

Camerer, by the way, is now 88 and still going strong.

And Edwards figures that if he can work out, so can virtually everyone else. It doesn't have to be triathlons or running or cycling or snowshoeing. It just has to be something.

"Get started by remembering back to a time when you were active, even if it means going back to your childhood," she tells people. "What was it you liked to do the most? Because if you don't find a workout activity that you can fall in love with, you won't stay with it. It needs to come from the heart and not from your mind. . . . If you find fun, you find fitness."

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