



Timely Information for Personal Success

What's Your Morph?

By Aaron J. Allie

Throughout man's quest to classify everything into categories, one of the more interesting health and fitness examples remains almost forgotten in the annals of history – the principles and vocabulary developed by psychologist William H. Sheldon.

This article will introduce most readers to the terms coined by Sheldon: “ectomorph”, “endomorph”, and “mesomorph”. Today's technology eclipses Sheldon's work, however it does show up occasionally in physical therapy and personal training textbooks as an early fundamental theory of anatomy.

Starting in the 1940s, Sheldon determined that humans embodied any combination of three major physical somatypes. The dominant somatype had a direct relationship with structural characteristics like appearance, build, posture, shape and strength. He formed this conclusion by examining more than 4,000 pictures of college-aged freshman at nine Ivy League universities, which was initially taken to follow the growth of conditions like rickets and scoliosis that was prevalent at the time.

Categories of Physique

The new categories of human physique were labeled ectomorph, endomorph and mesomorph:

❖ **Ectomorphs** defined thin, lanky individuals who had long muscles and thin bones often noticeable at

the ankle and wrists. High metabolic rates benefited ectomorphy, and they excelled in activities requiring muscular endurance.

❖ **Endomorphs** fulfilled the round or pear shaped individual. Although not athletic in appearance and inhibited by slow metabolic rates, Sherman's textbook endomorphs, aided by layers of large muscles in the hips and legs, were associated with strength.

❖ **Mesomorphs** were the natural athletes or Olympians. They were an aesthetic mix of lean tissue and strong bone structure aided by a healthy metabolism.

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Keep Biking this Winter

For Northerners, the first snowfall means putting away your bicycle for the winter months. But it doesn't have to be that way. Fat biking is OPEN this winter. These bikes resemble their warm weather cousins, but with huge tires at extremely low psi's that create a nice, through-snow calorie burn.

Early fat bikes were built by welding two rims together, creating more ground-to-tire contact in snow or sand. The first notable fat bike trekked through the Sahara on a set of Michelins, while later prototypes surfaced in Alaska and were capable of handling arctic conditions.

In 2005 Surly introduced the first mass-produced bike for winter use, the *Pugsley*. In fat bikes, the shock is absorbed by the tires, set anywhere from 4-10 psi. Today's models are equipped for all seasons and trails.

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Questions and Answers

Approach the Holidays Carefully

Q: *How can I keep from overeating this holiday season?*

A: It's important to avoid the all-or-none principle. This means not caring and embracing holiday excess – or going to the other extreme, following a strict program of “don'ts”. It's best to let things play out and make adjustments as needed.

This time of year many of us have more time off than any part of the year. If the work party gets a little out of hand, you could have more free time to incorporate some calorie burning.

Have a family member who needs some uplifting exercise? Try taking a relative to an exercise class, health club or crisp winter walk.

Finally, eat a high fiber snack before any celebration to deflect the chance of splurging. Mingle far from the food table as the sense of smell is a killer.

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Rankings and Temperaments

Sheldon's investigation took into account less-alterable components of the human body like hip and shoulder width, posture, muscle distribution and other structural ratios. He created a 1 – 7 ranking system for each somatype with either endomorph, mesomorph or ectomorph being dominant. For example 7-1-1 was extreme endomorph or 1-7-1 was extreme mesomorph. In nature there were few extreme examples of any one somatype; rather, milder combinations like 5-2-3 were common.

Furthermore, Sheldon tried to predict behavioral patterns and temperaments for each somatype, which is possibly the reason his work is disregarded by many experts today. Muscles, digestive systems and nervous systems were part of every being, however an individual's inherent focus towards those organs and systems differed per individual. He felt ectomorphs were driven by the nervous system and brain, which created a desire for reflection and privacy.

Endomorphs had a longer digestive tract and found their satisfaction from food and relaxation. Mesomorph's lean physique and strong circulatory system rendered their happiness towards physical activity and competition.

Summary

Compare these findings to yourself, friends or co-workers before you make your final judgment on Sheldon. But you should also know that some health providers employ different strategies when working individually with endos, ectos and mesos. ■

Aaron J. Allie, BS, CPT, MES, PES, is a personal trainer and writer in Waupaca, Wis. Learn more on this subject by reading Sheldon's books, such as "Atlas of Men", "The Varieties of Human Physique" or "The Varieties of Temperament."