

THE TWISTER

What the hell was it? A disc with wheels designed to capitalize on "The Twist" dance craze.

Debut: 1960s

The promise: Twisting like Chubby Checker while on this particleboard disc (sold by Jack LaLanne in his catalog) will burn more calories than sitting down to watch the Chubster do it on *Ed Sullivan*.

Our verdict: We're stunned that a man named Chubby could even have inadvertently spawned an exercise craze. The Twister was "basically a bathroom scale on ball bearings," confides good sport Dan LaLanne, ol' Jack's son.



ACU-DOTS

What the hell was it?

Magnets stuck on thick gauze that would be wrapped around limbs.

Debut: 1979

The promise: Pain relief and increased blood circulation will occur as the magnets "attract" the iron in your blood.

Our verdict: Even the most iron-rich blood doesn't budge—all that these magnets would have attracted was laughter. Amazingly, "These suckers made a comeback in 2001 to 'cure' joint and muscular ailments," says Seabourne. "But most proved to have little benefit beyond the placebo effect."

THE RELAXACIZOR

What the hell was it? A gizmo that, via its "contact pads," electrically shocked the body.

Debut: 1949

The promise: Sore muscles will be soothed by surges of electricity. Because, you know, nothing says "relaxation" like high voltage.

Our verdict: Shockingly, more than 400,000 Relaxacizors were sold before they were banned for aggravating such preexisting medical conditions as hernias, ulcers, and epilepsy. "Legitimate electronic muscle stimulators are great for rehabbing injured muscles," says Seabourne, "but only a trained physical therapist should administer them." As for relaxation, geez, just jump into a hot tub. (Without any electric appliances, mind you.)

THE AUTOMATIC EXERCISER

What the hell was it? A collection of pulleys, ropes, and chains attached by handles and straps to a bowling-ball-size weight—the WWI-era predecessor to Bowflex. The weight lifted the user while he sat there, relaxed (probably because he was finally separated from his dumbbell cane).

Debut: Late 1910s

The promise: "Double your strength, improve your health, and lengthen your life."

Our verdict: Production ended in the '20s, probably because no one bought any, and the few that were sold didn't work. "Any device that can be used to provide resistance to muscles at different angles without injuring the participant has merit," says

Seabourne. "But if the muscles themselves aren't doing the work, it doesn't belong in the same class as the Bowflex."

THE BATTLE CREEK VIBRATORY CHAIR

What the hell was it?

A spasmodic seat that shook the sitter violently—until he relented and stood up. Conceived by Corn Flakes creator and bowel redeemer John Harvey Kellogg, this one was featured at his Michigan sanitarium.

Debut: Circa 1900

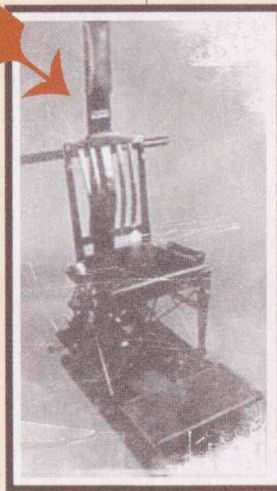
The promise: Being shaken, not stirred, will stimulate intestinal contractions and, therefore, leave you with a cleaner colon.

Our verdict: Sitters surely felt like Wile E. Coyote on "ACME Earthquake Pills." Reminds us of English nannies and baby-shaking scandals. "You might as well have sat on a hansom cab over a back-country road," says Seabourne.

THE SLIM SLIDE FITNESS QUEST

What the hell was it? This "quest" involved, essentially, wearing booties and sliding back and forth on a piece of plastic.

Debut: Totally '80s



The promise: Lunging and slipping like a drunken sorority girl on a freshly waxed floor will build a heroic body.

Our verdict: You would have looked hopelessly foolish, and had the instructional video to prove it. "It trained a bunch of lower-body muscles," says Seabourne, "but it was so boring, it just never caught on." Seabourne does note, however, that this device actually had merit—if you wanted to be a sprint skater: "Used in a cross-training format, it's awesome."

THE IMPERIAL BELT MASSAGER EXERCISE MACHINE

What the hell was it? A motorized belt that fit around the waist, vibrating the midsection.

Debut: 1950s

The promise: Having your booty shaken for you at G-force speeds will literally flap the fat away.

Our verdict: Seems like many a comic device on *I Love Lucy*. "Any machine that does the work for you won't work," says Seabourne. "It's like people who let motorized exercise bikes pedal them."

THE MOLBY REVOLVING HAMMOCK

What the hell was it?

A hammock that bore no small resemblance to the rack, complete with chin strap and leg shackles. (Think *Pulp Fiction*'s The Gimp getting medieval on your ass.)

Debut: 1920s

The promise: "Make your spine young!" ads exclaimed. Yes, you too can have "all the keen relish of a healthful existence" when you tangle yourself in a net like a mackerel. The apparatus rolls you from side to side, supposedly straightening your back and improving circulation.

Our verdict: If that is the case, Seabourne wonders, "Why don't the people who ride those 'spinning teacups' at Disney World look like Arnold?"

Assistant editor Sean Hyson never tried any of these inventions, including the Prostate-Gland Warmer. (Or so he claims.)