

Triathlete should race away from her patronizing doctor

DEARABBY: I am a 55-year-old female who competes in triathlons for fun, fitness and health. I consulted my doctor because I was having foot pain. When I told him I was a runner and was preparing for a marathon race, his response was, "At your age, you could hardly call it a race."

I was shocked. I repeated the insulting comment to my husband, who has never supported me in this nor attended my races. He replied, "Well, you don't actually consider yourself an athlete, do you?"

I am so offended that I want to dismiss both my doctor and my husband. I just finished a race with 5,000 women. Every one of them was fabulous and serious, no matter how old or what they looked like. It was the spirit of the sport that mattered. At what age does one stop being an athlete?

— OLDER ATHLETE
DEAR OLDER ATHLETE:
When one becomes a couch potato — perhaps like your husband. According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary



Abigail Van Buren

Dear Abby

(11th Edition), an athlete is "a person who is trained or skilled in exercise, sports, or games requiring physical strength, agility or stamina." And whether your husband chooses to acknowledge it or not is beside the point.

As for your doctor, I'd say his attempt at humor was demeaning, and he should practice his profession only if he's wearing a muzzle. I wouldn't blame you if you "laugh" your way to another doctor who practices preventive medicine by encouraging, and supporting, his patients' fitness regimens.

DEAR ABBY: I have been married for 18 years — 13 of them unhappily. We have three teenage children. I have filed for divorce twice,

but allowed my husband to talk me out of it both times — "for the sake of the kids" and his own emotional health. He has panic attacks and is verbally and emotionally abusive. I want this divorce more than I want to breathe. I feel I deserve some happiness, too.

— MISERABLE
DEAR MISERABLE: You have paid good money to a licensed professional counselor, and have been told that for the sake of your own emotional well-being you need to move on. Don't you think it's time to follow through on the advice you paid for? If you decide to move forward, I urge you to continue with counseling during the divorce process. It will help to guilt-proof you and your children from what you know will follow. A divorce may be best for everyone concerned.

DEAR ABBY: My son, a rodeo cowboy, wants to know the proper etiquette for a groom wearing a cowboy hat during the wedding ceremony.

The ceremony will take place next July in a small Methodist church in Kansas. He really wants to wear his cowboy hat. Can he?

— SUZIE IN SMACKOVER, ARK.

DEAR SUZIE: Hats have become a standard part of many men's wardrobes in recent years, and the rules for wearing them have become less rigid. According to "Emily Post's Etiquette" (17th Edition), "hats can be left on ... at religious services, as required." However, your son should check with the clergy-person who will be officiating at the ceremony, just to be sure it's acceptable in his or her church.

DEAR ABBY: Over the last 25 years, Americans have done a great deal to prevent fires in their homes. Home fire fatalities in the United States have dropped 50 percent since the 1970s, thanks in part to public awareness and education. Technology such as smoke alarms has helped, too — by alerting home

occupants when fires start and giving them time to escape.

However, while most categories of fire continue to decline, one category is on the upswing: candle fires. That is why this year, during Fire Prevention Week, the National Fire Protection Association is focusing its efforts on offering important candle safety information to Dear Abby readers. Some facts to consider about candle fires: More candles are now being sold, and the result has been more fires. Candles have become such popular decorative accessories that during the last decade in the U.S., fires caused by candles have tripled in number to 18,000 per year. Forty percent of these fires begin in the bedroom, causing one-quarter of the deaths associated with candles! (December has almost twice the number of home candle fires as any other month.) How can you safely enjoy candles at home? Extinguish them when leaving the room or before going to sleep. Make sure all candles are placed in sturdy holders, large enough to collect dripping

wax. Keep them out of reach of children or pets. And use a flashlight — not a candle — for emergency lighting. — JAMES M. SHANNON, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL FIRE PROTECTION ASSOCIATION
DEAR JAMES: Thank you for wanting to protect my readers. Candles have, indeed, become popular home accessories — just open the cover of any home decorating magazine and see the many ways they are displayed in the decor of patios, living rooms, dining rooms, bathrooms and "romantic" bedrooms.

(Two fatalities occurred in Chicago when a woman lighted a candle in her bedroom and then left the room. Her bed caught fire, and the smoke spread to her neighbors' apartments. She escaped, but tragically two of her neighbors died of smoke inhalation.)

Editor's note: Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren. Write Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.



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