

NI MAGAZINE

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Spring/Summer 2005

A close-up portrait of Kathy Smith, a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair and bangs, wearing a red sleeveless top. She is smiling slightly and looking directly at the camera against a dark blue background.

Kathy Smith
America's Leading Fitness Expert

Physician Profiles

The Making of
ABC's Extreme Makeover

The Faces of Interface
Mission of Service to Humanity

Recognizing
Anxiety & Depression

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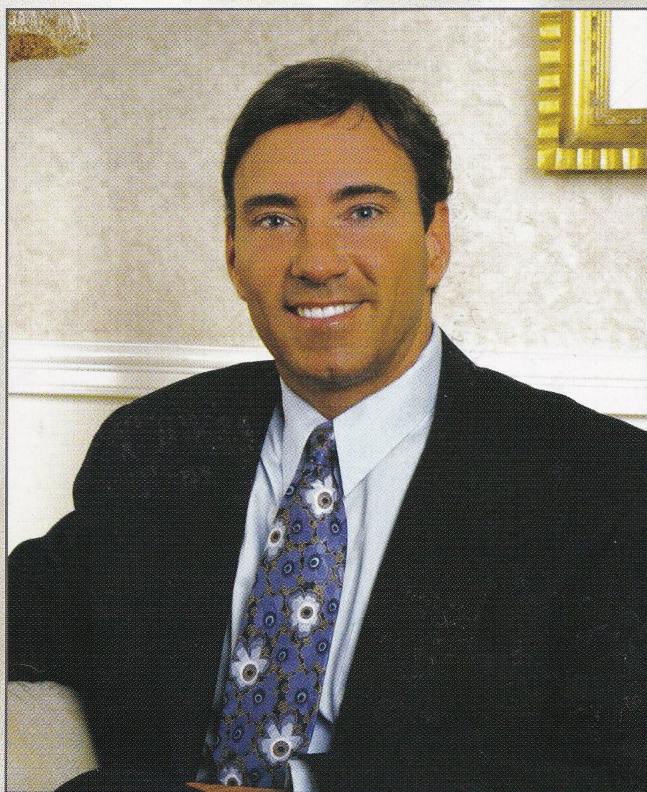
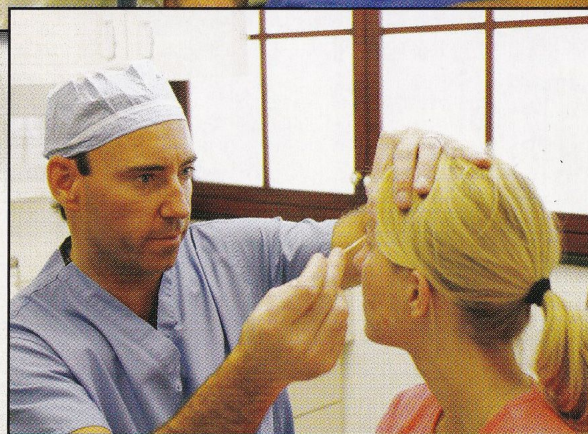


and pulling with the butt muscles. "Now hold that position and squeeze." Holding it, is the trick for that difficult muscle group, Michael says. Just fifteen reps and the next day, I felt it. Either I am out of shape (though I still box and bike a bit) or he really is a guru of specific muscle knowledge. Vanity makes me suspect the latter. After all, ABC can afford to hire the best.

Another point Michael repeats over and over again is that we need to eat, rather than starve, in order to reshape the body. "The only way to speed up the metabolism is eat specific foods at specific times of the day in order to build muscle and burn fat. Since no two people are alike, finding the right balance of specific foods and specific times of day is the challenge." That's where his diagnostic tools of health evaluation and trained sculptor's eye take over. Viewers have watched Extreme Makeover patients drop six sizes in as little as four weeks through Michael's approach. Patients have their meals catered during their transformations, so producers can maximize success on the show. Michael oversees the catering too, just as he does for clients of 'Michael Thurmond's Spa Body Makeover' at the Luxe Hotel in Santa Monica.

For the rest of us who don't have a catering service, Michael recommends eating six to eight times a day. Mini meals including all those foods we know we should be eating like fresh veggies, protein and high fiber carbs. He believes in bio identical hormone replacement for baby boomers and older clients. "Hormones are the microchips for weight gain and loss, and muscle tissue replacement during the aging process. Even though it's a controversial area of medical science, I see results day after day that could never happen without hormone replacement therapy."

Another piece of advice he offers, "I see a lot of hypoglycemic people cutting carbs willy nilly and that's just plain dangerous. Find out if you are hypoglycemic and respect that reality."



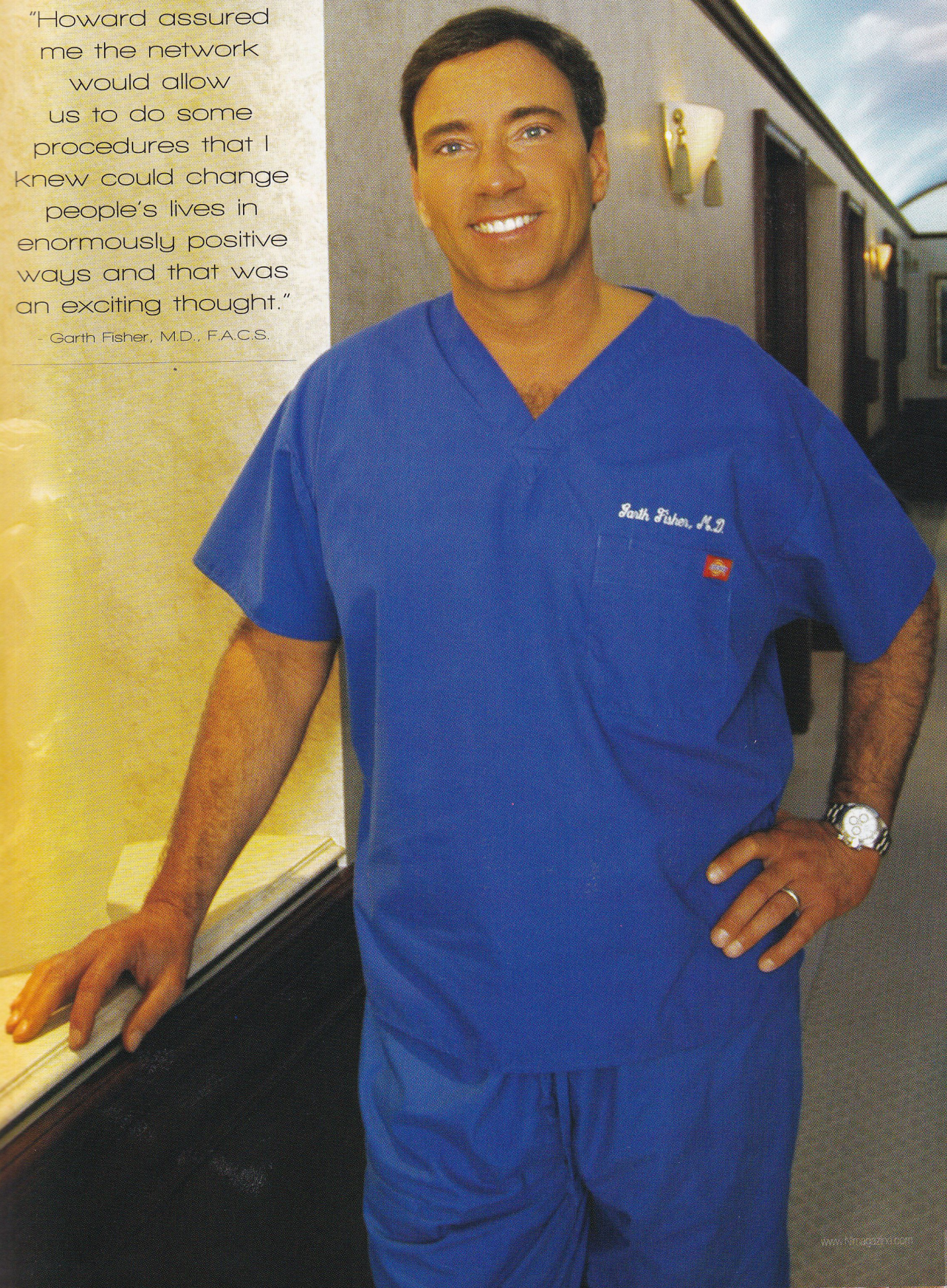
Look for more wise advice about health and body building Michael Thurmond style in his Six Day Body Makeover book coming out this month. His empire grows.

When Dr. Garth Fisher was first approached by producer Howard Schultz to lead the Extreme Dream Team, he was a bit apprehensive. "The idea of building an entire TV show around one of the fastest growing and most controversial aspects of our culture was an obvious two-edged sword," he says, casually draping his athletic frame into the big easy chair opposite mine. "I never dreamed it would really fly, because, as you know only too well Bree, the odds of selling a TV network a new show idea, much less having it hit a home run, are astronomical. But then I thought, as long as we can focus as much on making people grow more confident and happy with themselves as we do on simply making them more attractive, we'd have something special."

As one of Hollywood's 'golden' surgeons, Garth certainly didn't need the celebrity. "I really enjoy being home with my kids while they're still young and the complication of TV celebrity was not something I wanted or needed. Howard assured me the network would allow us to do some procedures that I knew could change people's lives in enormously positive ways and that was an exciting thought."

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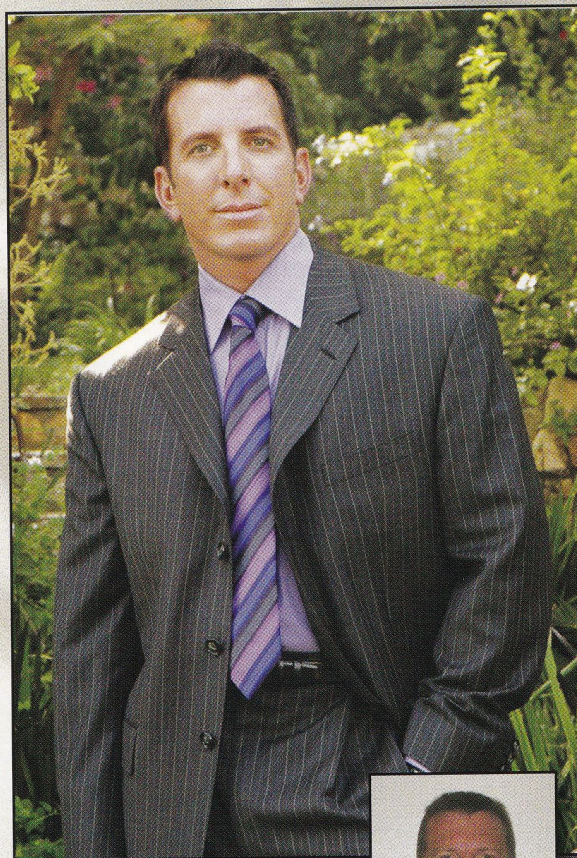
Garth Fisher, M.D., F.A.C.S.



His reconstructive work sets the tone for the entire show when a big makeover is at stake. To that end, his easy going nature is a huge plus. "It's essential there be a loving, embracing environment when a patient has to expose their emotional vulnerabilities when we 'assess' what is to be done, and have to do it in such a public arena." I laughed out loud in agreement, recalling how many times I felt so 'naked' while anchoring the news for twenty years, simply because I was having a bad hair day. "These brave souls open up their lives, hearts and their very flesh to a cynical and sophisticated viewing public, which often assumes someone chooses plastic surgery out of sheer vanity," he says.

Dr. Fisher specializes in breast and face reconstruction – and his waiting list is more than two years long. Sound like a lot of pressure? Garth is circumspect about that. "By the time a patient's surgery date finally arrives they've had ample time to do the research that makes the best possible patient for me. Others will find another surgeon to perform the procedure. There are lots of great surgeons out there in every part of the country, every part of the world."

He has several overriding philosophies which guide his choices about who the best candidates are for the show. "They're the same people who make the best candidates in real life. They have to be making the choice to do this for the right reasons at the right time and with the right doctor." I asked him to give me an extreme case of the opposite. "You'll find this hard to believe but it's true. I had a twenty-something Saudi princess fly to California for a consultation. As she pulled at her cheeks, insisting she needed her first facelift immediately, I told her to go home and come back in twenty years. I thought I'd never see her again. Less than three years later, she's back in my office, yanking at the face lift someone else had done for her. I sent her home again, but I bet she found someone to do it anyway."



Photos courtesy ABC photo department



Extreme cases like that can easily be dismissed as the worst example of choosing to go under the knife. So how does Dr. Fisher decide to turn down a patient with more realistic expectations than the Saudi princess was seeking? "I ask myself several questions. Is there another physician better qualified for this specific surgical procedure? Is the patient seeking 'perfection' which is subjective? And finally, do I want my name on this? I appreciate there are doctors out there who are making much more important decisions than whether to change someone's looks. I have enormous respect for doctors who are treating serious diseases, like cancer, so I try to keep what I do in perspective. I have the luxury of making sure I am exactly the right match for a patient."

This humble attitude is one major reason the show is a huge success. Just watch Garth's bedside manner on *Extreme Makeover* and you'll see a guy who's comfortable in his own skin (no pun intended). A reluctant TV star is always more fun to watch than one with a big ego, particularly when the patient is supposed to be the star.

Finally, my behind-the-camera experience begged me to ask Dr. Garth a final question. What really makes this show a true reality television production, especially now that it has a big budget? "There are no second takes in the operating room. I don't get to see the patient's results until minutes before the audience does on live TV."