

# Getting their Graves on

Wearing a device that calculated every calorie they burned during a six week-plus stretch, three Rochesterites tested the Gruve-y theory that diet and workouts aren't as important to weight control as taking the stairs, cleaning the house, and just plain standing up.

Obesity research doesn't usually make you want to stand up and cheer, but that's exactly the reaction that the exercise- and diet-averse among us (in other words, all of us normal people) should have to the renowned obesity research conducted by Mayo Clinic's Dr. James Levine and his team.

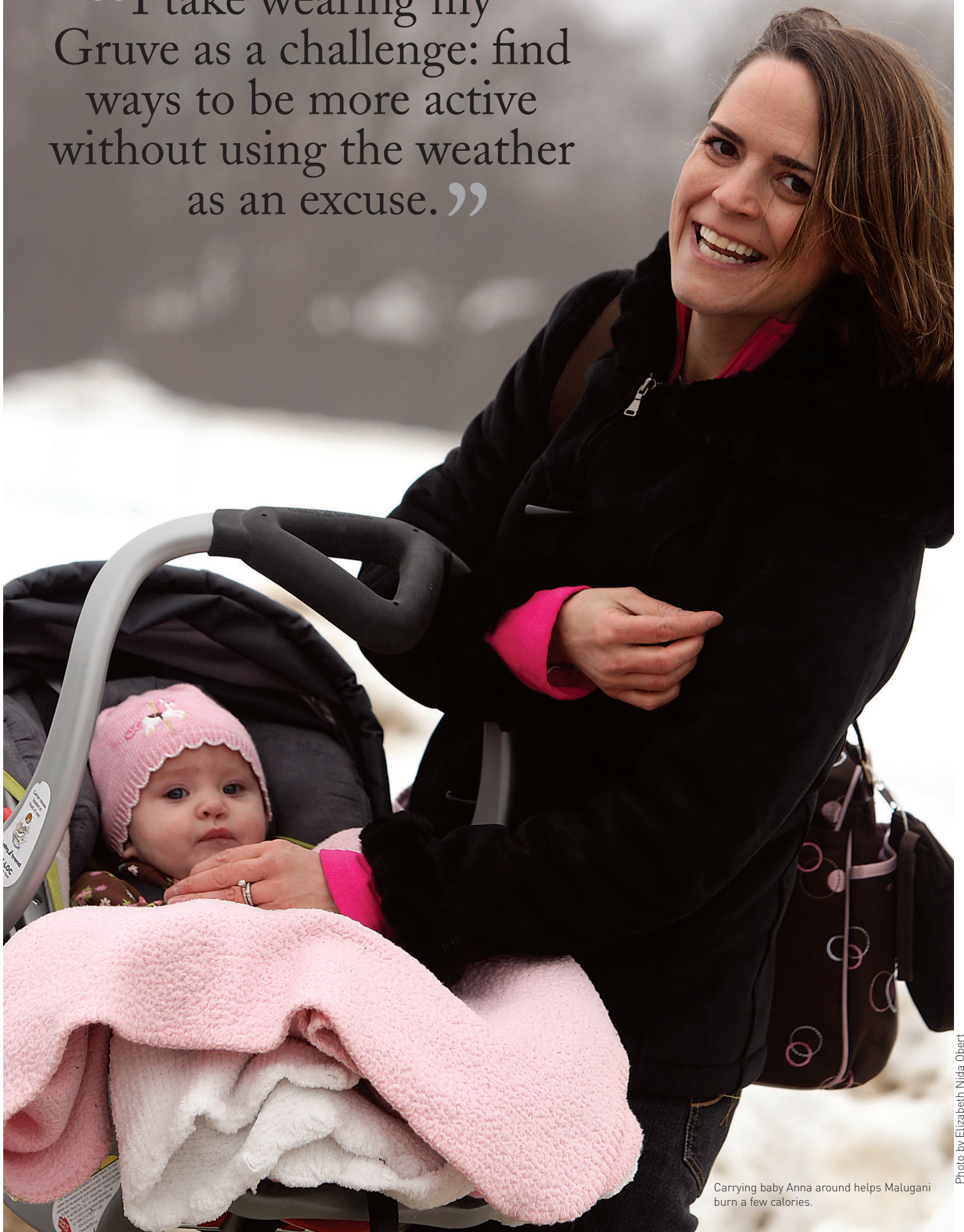
Levine's research—which has spawned anti-obesity tools like the walking workstation and the Gruve activity monitoring device—shows that maintaining a healthy body weight is more contingent on a person's overall activity level (or NEAT, which stands for non-exercise activity thermogenesis) throughout the day than on what they eat or if they exercise. (To heck with logging hours on the Stairmaster or depriving yourself of the occasional burrito!)

Here, three Rochesterites on a quest for better health tested the Gruve device—which measured the number of calories they burned through everyday living—for six weeks or more in the dead of winter, with inspiring results that encouraged more movement and less sloth. (The little buzz the device emitted when we sat still for too long certainly helped!)

Stories by: **MEGAN MALUGANI, GREG SELLNOW, AND BETH NERVIG**

Photos by: **ELIZABETH NIDA OBERT, KEN KLOTZBACH, SCOTT JACOBSON, AND GARY CLARKE**

“I take wearing my Gruve as a challenge: find ways to be more active without using the weather as an excuse.”



Carrying baby Anna around helps Malugani burn a few calories.

I'll try anything, ANYTHING, to avoid another sedentary winter spent in hibernation mode, where the longest walk I typically take is from the refrigerator to the couch. So the idea of wearing the **Gruve device**—which records every calorie I burn—appeals to me. I have high hopes that just clipping the device to the waist of my pants every morning will serve as a guilt-inducer. The Gruve will keep me off the couch! The Gruve will get me on the treadmill! The Gruve will prevent me from packing on an extra layer of wintertime fat!

**Name:** Megan Malugani

**Age:** 38

**Target calorie burn:** Increased from an average of 361 calories/day to 424 calories/day during my two months spent Gruve-ing.

**Percent of days I reached green:** 76.

**Gruve goal:** To increase my activity level and avoid weight gain during the sluggish winter months.

**Gruve lessons:** I shouldn't be so hard on myself about my lack of "real" exercise. Being the mom of three young kids, I rarely sit down, and the constant standing and moving is what helps me maintain a healthy weight.

**Bonus:** I avoided my usual winter weight gain and may have even lost a pound.

## Week One: How active am I?

In early December, my Gruve adventure begins when I clip the device on my waistband for the first time. The device is supposed to record all of my horizontal, vertical, and diagonal movement. When I'm standing, it'll even pick up swaying and fidgeting. Too cool!

The first week is my Assessment Week used to calculate my Green Goal (target



Malugani plays hockey with her son Joey.

Photos by Elizabeth Nida Obert

daily caloric burn). I am supposed to go about my regular routine, and I do. Besides an indoor roller-skating outing to a nearby town with my 5- and 7-year-olds, the week (pathetically) involves no intentional exercise.

At the end of the week, I sync my device and see that my baseline Green Goal (calculated based on my resting metabolic rate and my current activity level) is set at a measly 361 calories per day. (It would be higher if my intention were to lose weight rather than just try to maintain my current weight.) I immediately begin rationalizing: my Green Goal would be much higher in any other season, when I could go outside with the kids or take my nightly stroll through the neighborhood. But then I view it as a challenge: find ways to be more active without using the weather as an excuse, you lazy schmuck!

## Week Two: Getting buzzed and losing my Gruve

I get buzzed by the Gruve for the first time while I'm taking a nap with my baby. The vibration is supposed to notify me that I have been seated or sedentary for too long and that I should get up and take a five-minute walk. I brazenly ignore the buzzing, not even tempted to change positions and even slightly annoyed that the buzz could wake the baby. So much for motivation!

A few days later, I lose my Gruve completely. It's a \$200 device, loaned to me by Muve, Inc., and it's lost somewhere in the clutter of our home. I lament the fact that I must be expending literally thousands (thousands!) of unrecorded calories looking for my Gruve. I offer a reward to the kids for finding it, but end up locating it myself, under a pile of clothes in the closet where I'd changed from work clothes to sweats one day. It's a good thing it was buzzing from inactivity or it would have been lost forever!



The "slow burn": Everyday activities with Bella, Anna, and Joey keep Malugani busy.

### Week Three: Momentum gains

After getting my Grube back, I re-commit to upping my activity level. I don't want to waste my time with this awesome device. Upping my activity isn't hard during a week when I'm cleaning the house like a madwoman in preparation for holiday guests and out Christmas shopping several times. In fact, my biggest calorie burning day so far—509.9 calories—occurs when I hit five stores around town in three hours and then go to the mall. I'm not even jockeying for the parking spots closest to the stores, like I usually do, because parking further away will help me reach my Green Goal quicker. Talk about Power Shopping!

I already notice one major pattern to my caloric burning. The days I am working at my part-time job are far more sedentary than my days at home. I get buzzed several times a day at work, and hardly ever at home. I incorporate an extra walk through the skyways into my workday routine, but it's still a challenge meeting my Green Goal on workdays.

### Week Four: A break for the holidays

I'm quite active in the days leading up to Christmas—shoveling, building snowmen, and entertaining. Five days in a row I burn more than 400 calories, but then on Christmas Eve I drop back down to the 200s. From Christmas Day to New Year's Day, I go on vacation without my computer and leave my Grube at home

with no way to charge or synch it.

Besides a day spent playing boot hockey, I doubt I reached my Green Goal many of the days between Christmas and New Year's, although I do wonder how many more calories I burn by carrying a 15-pound baby around with me the majority of most days than if I were empty handed. I also wonder, after five too many Christmas cookies, how long it will be before the Grube incorporates technology that zaps you not only for inactivity, but when you've pigged out and exceeded your recommended caloric intake for the day.

### Week Five: New year, new me (I hope)

My New Year's resolution is small and attainable—wear my Grube every day in January and be more active (how's that for vague?). I'm homebound the first few days of the month with sick kids, however, and get off to an uninspired start. The subzero temperatures seem to have chilled not only my body, but my ambition to move.

By January 3, however, I'm sick of sitting around (and I realize that Wii wakeboarding does not, in fact, burn many calories). I refine my New Year's resolution: I want to reach my Green Goal the rest of the days in January. That very day, I walk on the treadmill in my basement while watching the kids play video games. It takes two stints of walking on the treadmill—for about 15 minutes and then 10 minutes later—to reach my Green Goal, but I feel great.

### Week Six : Treadmill time

I finally get back into the office, and every day I go to work I have to hit the treadmill (at just a medium-paced walk) for a few minutes in the evening to reach green. Luckily, my kids get in on the action. My daughter puts on exercise clothes—she looks like Olivia Newton John—and does jumping jacks alongside me. Both my older kids are constantly checking my Grube device to see if I've hit green yet, and I am getting a little obsessed myself, pressing the button on the device at least a dozen times a day to track my progress. I realize a secondary benefit of this experiment is getting my kids more interested in fitness.

### Week Seven: Stair stepping the old-fashioned way

"Mom, can you get me something to eat?" "Mom, can you come watch me build a Lego ship?" "Mom, can you come up/down/in/out here?" Believe it or not, these words—spoken literally dozens of times a week (or even a day)—are likely what keep me from turning into a blob of Jell-O in the winter. Most of the moms of young kids I know are pretty slim, and this constant motion must be the reason why. I record the number of trips I make upstairs and to the basement of our two-story house one typical day: it's 22, and that must be worth something exercise-wise, right?

### Week Eight: A real workout

I have my best day yet—I reach my Green Goal by 2 p.m. and burn 630 calories. This takes a little extra effort—an actual workout on the treadmill at the Rochester Athletic Club. I know this sounds pathetic to the gung-ho exercisers of the world, but I am proud. I am finding the Grube to be a great motivator and I actually miss it when I am not wearing it!

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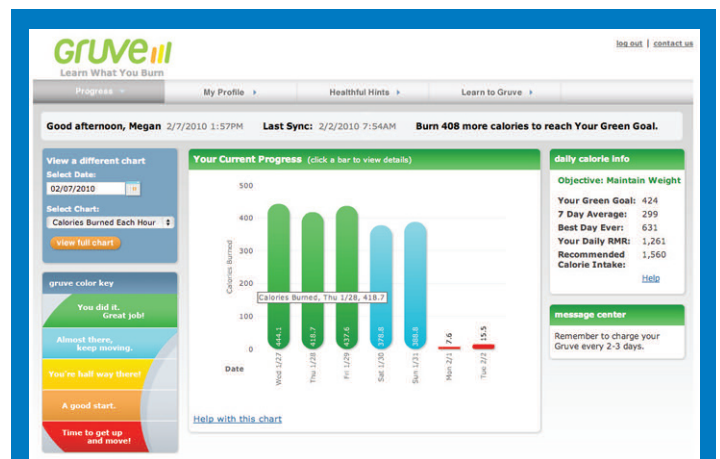


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## Week Nine: It actually worked!

By the end of the Great Gruve Experiment, I'm such a Gruve slave that I jog around the conference table at work when I get buzzed (I'm sure my boss thinks I have to go to the bathroom), I volunteer to be the gopher who picks up lunch for my colleagues on a busy day, and I see the positives when I have to park three blocks from my son's school on an icy day. I also resent that the Gruve isn't waterproof when I spend an hour in the pool with my kids because the calorie burn is unrecordable, and I walk on the treadmill during a Vikings game (the pre-Gruve me would be glued to the couch).

I regularly hit the treadmill for periods of 10 to 15 minutes during the day, without beating myself up for being too wimpy. When taking the kids swimming or ice skating, I'm more likely to join in than watch from the sidelines. Good health can be fun, I discover, and I deem myself a Gruve success story at the beginning of February. Rather than starting (and probably failing) with a grand new exercise plan for 2010, I realized that just being more active in my daily routine has great benefits. And who knows? "Real" exercise may be next.



## SETTING UP YOUR GRUVE

When initially setting up my Gruve, I hooked it up to my computer and plugged in my age, height, weight, and gender. I didn't know my blood pressure, body fat, and other health stats that could have more accurately established my resting metabolic rate (RMR—the baseline level of energy I would burn even if I were to stay in bed all day). Every few days thereafter, I downloaded the data on my Gruve device by plugging it into my computer. On my Gruve "dashboard" online (pictured above), all the data was charted and color coded (showing how I moved through five levels of activity—red/ orange/ yellow/blue/green—on my way to reaching my activity goal for the day). My dashboard charted out how many calories I used by the day, hour, and even minute.



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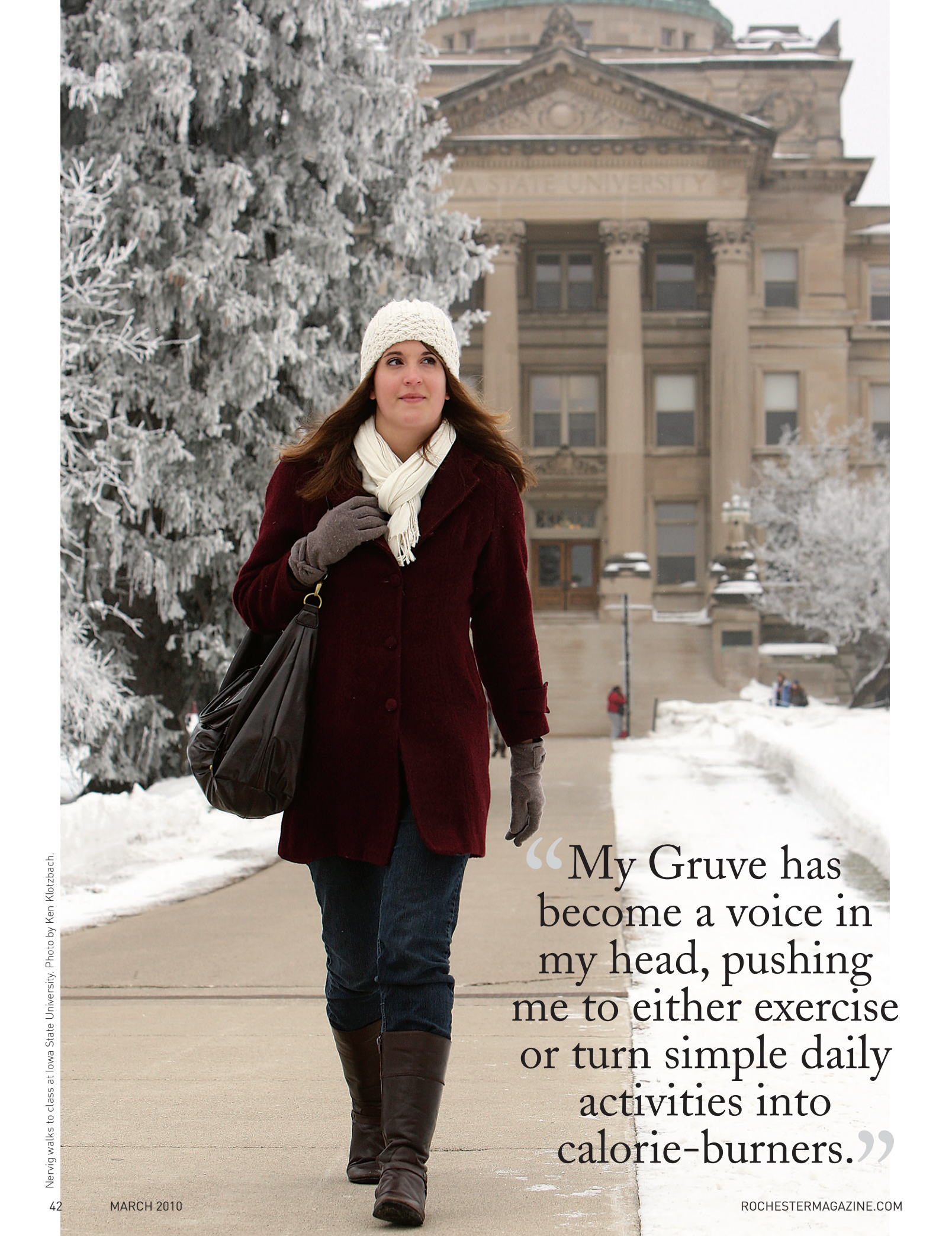
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Nervig walks to class at Iowa State University. Photo by Ken Klotzbach.

“My Gruve has become a voice in my head, pushing me to either exercise or turn simple daily activities into calorie-burners.”

**Name:** Beth Nervig

**Age:** 22

**Target calorie burn:** 322-457 (it went up!)

**Percent of days I reached green:** 55.

**Gruve goal:** From the start, I was simply hoping that my Gruve would get me off the couch during the winter months, when it's fairly easy to be a lazy college student.

**Gruve lessons:** Gruve helped me realize that physical activity could be anything from running errands to roller skating. Even sweating at the gym was worth it just to see my little Gruve bar graph shine green.

## Days One through Six:

### Vegas, baby

I am in day six of my Gruve test week, and I am currently mid-flight on my way to Las Vegas for a family vacation. Las Vegas probably isn't the ideal place to start a health-conscious endeavor. Mainly, people just sit at casino tables and drink. This should be interesting. Starting my Gruve program the day before Christmas Eve may not have been the smartest move either. I have spent the last five days eating gingerbread men and watching re-runs of "A Christmas Story." My Gruve has been buzzing on my hip all week. As I understand it, this is its only way of telling me I am lazy and should get up off my butt. I have recently begun the habit of shaking my hip in retaliation whenever my Gruve buzzes, which I think is the reason why the lady next to me on our flight keeps asking me if I need to use the restroom.

### Day 12: Phoenix, babies

I left Las Vegas the other day, and I'm now at my sister's house in Phoenix. Life is chaotic at best. There are two babies, my niece Olivia (7 months) and my nephew Charlie (1 month), two boxer dogs, two cats and seven adults. I've only been here one day and I already feel like I'm constantly bending over to pick up some roving child or animal. On our extra-long family walk outside, I held Charlie in the Baby Bjorn, and I'm hoping his wriggling helped me to meet today's green goal. Is it selfish to use a baby to meet exercise requirements? Nah.

### Day 15: Guilty conscience

I've recently noticed that my Gruve



Running at ISU's Rec Center helps Nervig reach her calorie-burning goal.

has become my athletic conscience. Whenever it buzzes, I feel chastised and internally embarrassed, thankful that the world can't see my calorie-burning failure. My secret fear is that I have the same Gruve calorie goal as a bedridden 80-year-old. When my Gruve steadily vibrated the whole plane ride back to the frozen tundra of Minnesota, I couldn't help but picture myself spending the next several months curled up on my couch, safe from the blizzarding winds, void of all athletic movement.

### Day 19: Taking Ames

I headed back to school in Ames today, and made the mandatory Target and Hy-Vee stops before driving three hours and unloading my car. I am a little surprised that I hit my Gruve goal today, but I think it means that my Gruve future is bright. If all it takes is running a couple of errands to hit my daily goal, then reaching my Gruve goal back at school should be a cinch.

### Day 21: Orange crush

In a strange twist of events, I worked out! Seriously. This never happens. I decided it's about time I actually put my Gruve to work. I ran one mile and expected my Gruve to be shining bright green as I left the Rec Center. I'm crushed it only glowed a feeble orange.

### Day 25: Smooth skating

By now, I have explained to all of my friends about my Gruve experiment. Instead of asking me "What's up?" they now ask, "What color are you at?" They have become obsessed with my Gruve and mock me according to how far I am from each day's goal. In the Gruve spirit, we decided to try some old-fashioned fun tonight—a roller rink. When we arrived, we were the only people over the age of 10, besides moms. The kids looked at us as if we had just ignored the 4-foot height limit at the McDonald's Play Zone. But who knew roller skating could be so fun? We chicken-danced. Played dodge ball on skates. There was even a "couples skate" under the disco ball.

### Day 26: 722!

I had my best day yesterday. 722 calories burned. Apparently, roller skating has been the key to calorie-burning all along. Somehow, I think people might be creeped out if I became the only roller-rink regular who wasn't in middle school. Instead, I went and played

basketball at the gym today. I realized that my Gruve has become a literal voice in my head, pushing me to either physically exercise or turn simple daily activities into calorie-burners. For example, I danced while making supper tonight. Talk about multi-tasking.

### Day 28: Goal's growing

So I'm not totally reformed because I counted two laps and five reps on a machine as my workout during my Gruve photo shoot. Worse yet, I noticed that my green goal has increased. It's practically unattainable. It's like when my dad taught me how to crawl by placing the remote control further and further from my reach.

### Day 30: Grooving

I am a leader for an Iowa State University charity event called Dance Marathon, which means that it has been my job for the past year to recruit a team and help them raise \$200 to dance for 15 hours on January 23, with all proceeds going to a local Iowa children's hospital. As a leader, I wear a different costume for each of the 15 hours and bounce around like a crazy person to help keep my team motivated. Did I mention that sitting is illegal at this event? Thus, I've been running around all week trying to make 15 costumes. Now, not only do my roommates think I'm crazy for talking to my Gruve, but I've been working on various costumes all week including: a giant person-sized moon, a giant ear of corn, a giraffe, and Peter Pan. On the upside, my Gruve goals are sky-rocketing since I simply haven't stopped moving in days. I've even been running to the bathroom just to save time.

### Day 31: Marathon moment

Dance Marathon is one day away. I have to be there by 6 a.m. and I won't be going home until around 2 a.m. I fully expect my Gruve to explode from overuse. I'm hoping to break some sort of Gruve goal world record. Part of me feels like Dance Marathon will be my ultimate vindication, payback after weeks and weeks of being a Gruve-buzz-inducing couch potato.

### Day 32: Aftermath

Dance Marathon is over. I am too exhausted to write. I think I am only alive thanks to Red Bull, pure adrenaline, and the smiles of all the sick kids that were dancing with us all day. My body feels like someone has pummeled it repeatedly with baseball



Photo by Greg Clarke

A 20-hour dance marathon helps Nervig (center) shatter her Gruve goal for the day.

bats. My Gruve hit green around 11 a.m. and I kept jumping and dancing for about 13 more hours.

### Day 33: Counting calories, and counting to 1,500

I burned more than 1,500 calories yesterday! I feel like that number should be higher. My body no longer feels like it was pummeled by baseball bats. It now feels like I was run over multiple times by a semi-truck. My Gruve keeps buzzing when I try to nap. Doesn't it know that I practically set the Iowa Gruve calorie record yesterday? Someone needs to alert my Gruve that it should take a couple of days off. My exercise conscience needs a break.

### Day 35: Buzz kill

Another great Iowa storm means I have

done nothing all day. Surprisingly, my Gruve hasn't been buzzing as frequently. This either means that it got the memo that I need a break or it has actually helped train me to move around more. Even when I'm at work or sitting at home, I now move around enough to evade the shameful buzz.

### Day 40: 40 days and nights, one valuable lesson

It is my last officially counted Gruve day. I have to admit I'll miss the little guy. I have become calorie-burning obsessed. I forgot to wear my Gruve yesterday, but I went to kickboxing class anyway. This action would have been unheard of for me pre-Gruve. In the doldrums of the winter months this tiny device has become an angel on my shoulder making sure that I don't become a cabin-fevered lump of laziness.

## GET YOUR GRUVE ON

Although the Gruve device was developed based on Mayo Clinic research, the product is now primarily owned and marketed by a company called Muve, Inc. To order your Gruve device (for around \$200) or to learn more, go to [www.muve.me](http://www.muve.me).



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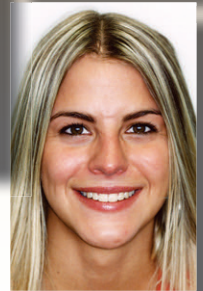
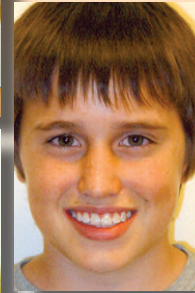
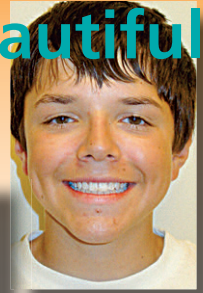
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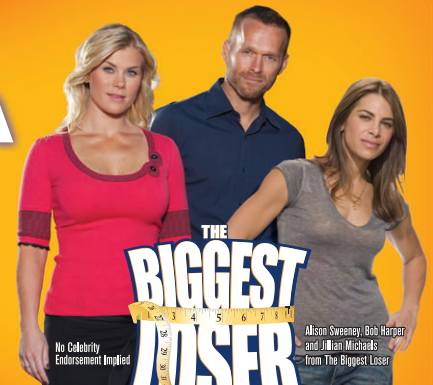
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A man with a grey beard, wearing a dark green Columbia jacket, tan pants, and a dark beanie with a colorful pattern, is walking a black dog on a leash. They are on a snow-covered path in a residential neighborhood. In the background, there are houses with snow on their roofs and a white picket fence. The man is looking down at the dog.

“There’s no telling what I might be able to accomplish with a few more months of Gruve-ing and maybe a little less bacon...”

Sellnow goes home at noon nearly everyday to walk his dog, Sidney. Photo by Scott Jacobson

Here's one of Gruve collaborator Andy Wood's standard opening lines: "What's the worst thing you can say to someone when they walk into your office?" Before I can think of something inane like, "You've got food in your teeth?" he answers for me. "Have a seat," he says. He tells me this about 16 seconds after I have directed him to a conference room and asked him to—you guessed it—have a seat.

The whole point of the Gruve device, Wood says, is to remind its users to get up and move around, and at the end of the day offer them feedback on how they've done. So, I've failed my initial Gruve test question, but I am bound and determined to pass the life experience part of the exam.

**Name:** Greg Sellnow  
**Age:** 52  
**Target calorie burn:** Increased from an average of 520 to 670.  
**Number of days I reached my green goal:** 45 of 49 days.  
**Gruve goal:** To increase overall fitness and maybe lose a little weight during the dog days of winter.  
**Gruve lessons:** I am a sloth at work. I burn almost as many calories during a 20-minute walk to work as I do during a 40-hour work week. I think I need one of those "walking" desks like Dr. Levine has.  
**Total weight loss:** Four pounds.

### Week One: Easing into it

This is my assessment week, when Wood has warned me not to get carried away with exercising. "Because if you do, that becomes your base activity level and you'll



Sellnow walks to and from work, a total of two miles, almost everyday. Photo by Scott Jacobson.

have to work that much harder to meet your goals." So, I use this as an excuse to hitch rides to work in the morning and watch Wild games while prone on the couch in the evening. When my mostly sedentary body cries out for some minimal exercise, I tell it to relax and have a Caribou mocha latte. "It's your assessment week," I say. "Life is good."

### Week Two: Shopping isn't all bad

Show time. The work week begins on Monday, Dec. 18. It's important to note the date because Christmas is less than a week away and, as usual, I've done no shopping whatsoever. It turns out that shopping, which I rank right down there with chipping ice off the driveway and burying dead cats on the Fun-O-meter, is actually good for something. I easily hit the target "green" zone for calories burned on my first two post-assessment week days, Friday and Saturday, by binge shopping with my three children. In fact, I nail my goals pretty much by shopping and doing little else in the way of physical activity. But the crash comes on Sunday, when I only make it to the "blue" (you almost made it) zone. Pride takes over on the holiday weekend and I hit my green zone every day through the end of the week, which includes Christmas. My top calories-burning day is 775.

### Week Three: Walk, walk, and walk some more

I begin a pretty steady exercise regimen. I walk to work every day (a distance of about a mile) and walk home most evenings. I use the bathroom on the other end of the building at work. I get up frequently to look out the only public window in the newsroom. (To be fair I've always done this, especially when I'm trying to put off writing my column.) And, like a new convert to Stephenie Meyer novels, I tell everyone I come in contact with about my Gruve. I meet my green goal every single day, including New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

### Week Four: Cooking is Gruve-y

This might seem counter-intuitive, but it turns out that cooking is good for Gruve-ing. The import thing is not how fast you move or how vigorously you move, just that you move—period. I enjoy cooking, especially for special occasions such as New Year's Eve, and the more time I spend in the kitchen, I find, the easier it is for me to meet my green goal. Which is more difficult now because the Gruve, apparently not a dumb piece of plastic after all, has increased my green goal by about 100 calories after realizing I sandbagged the assessment week. Still, I hit my goal every day, except Sunday, when I couch potato it watching the Vikings game and working on newspaper stuff from home on my laptop.

### Week Five: Getting attached to "G"

I've come to realize that you have to actually wear the Gruve to understand it. I try to tell



people how it works and why it makes so much sense, and they just nod politely like I'm an Amway salesman or something and change the subject. But the Gruve and I—we're tight. OK, I know this is going to sound creepy to non-Gruvers, but when I get up in the morning the first thing I do is clip G to the waistband in my underwear because I don't want those calories I burn running up and down the stairs while I'm getting ready for work (don't worry, there's no one else in the house by now) and letting the dog out and ironing my shirt and heating water for my morning tea and making my instant oatmeal, all in my underwear, go to waste. G is the only thing that is with me all day long. It frowns red or yellow when I'm just not trying hard enough to get off my butt and move. It cheers me on when I hit blue, and congratulates me when I achieve my daily green diploma. Despite my enthusiasm, though, I miss my green goal twice, on Thursday and Saturday, when I only make it to blue.

### Week Six: Nervous energy = Calories burned

My son is a high school hockey player. Worse, he's a goalie. So, when he's between the pipes I pace. Or sway. Or, when things are going badly, I leave the arena between periods and take long long walks. It turns out that this sort of activity, like cooking, is good for Gruve-ing. Now, when I go to hockey games I know I'll have no trouble achieving green for the day. I hit my calorie burning peak on a game day in Albert Lea (913) and achieve my green goal every day this week.

### Week Seven: The unthinkable occurs

Tragedy. I return home from a hockey game, take off my sweater and G tumbles to the

floor like he's been shot. I pick him up and he's glowing green, which is good; it means there's no brain damage. But something is wrong. G's belt clip is broken. I check the Gruve Web site and discover that this is not an uncommon problem and that belt clip breaks are covered by G's warranty. I send an e-mail to the people who make the Gruve and they respond quickly with detailed instructions on how to print out a FedEx pre-paid label and return G for repair. I'm without my Gruve for a week. Still, I maintain pretty much the same routine as before. So, I like to think I'm still achieving my goal. But I feel so naked without my Gruve.

### Week Eight: Getting my Gruve back

Here's something weird. When my Gruve was en route to the shop in Minnetonka, it managed to burn more than 600 calories and achieve green goal status. Congratulations, G. Well done. My Gruve arrives back home safe and sound on Friday, but I decide to start fresh on Monday with a new Gruve-y week.

### Week Nine: Proud to be Green

I am faithfully wearing my Gruve as I write this. But my picky, overly demanding editor is bugging me to complete my journal and turn it in, so I'll have to cut this off. In the seven full weeks I have worn the Gruve I've achieved green status all but four of the 49 days and I feel pretty good about myself. I've also lost four pounds, without restricting my food intake. So, there's no telling what I might be able to accomplish with a few more months of Gruve-ing and maybe a little less bacon and a lot more leafy green vegetables. I Gruve on.



## The Idea Behind the Gruve

Understanding the causes of obesity is important to the people who want to crush it. And for Rochester physical therapist Andrew Wood, director of ergonomics and corporate services for Minnetonka-based Muve, Inc., the company behind the Gruve, obesity goes hand-in-hand with a sedentary lifestyle.

It doesn't take an exercise physiologist to understand and buy into what Wood says: that the advent of computers, TV, and transportation methods which require sitting "have engineered out day-to-day activity" and that "the difference between lean people of normal weights and those who are 'horizontally challenged' is not in what they eat, and it doesn't matter if they exercise or not. It's the day-to-day, mundane activity level that matters the most."

Therefore, for most Gruve wearers, the goal is not to train for a marathon (whew!) but to increase their everyday activity. A "slow burn in a consistent manner" is just as effective, or even more effective, according to Wood, as bursts of exercise.