

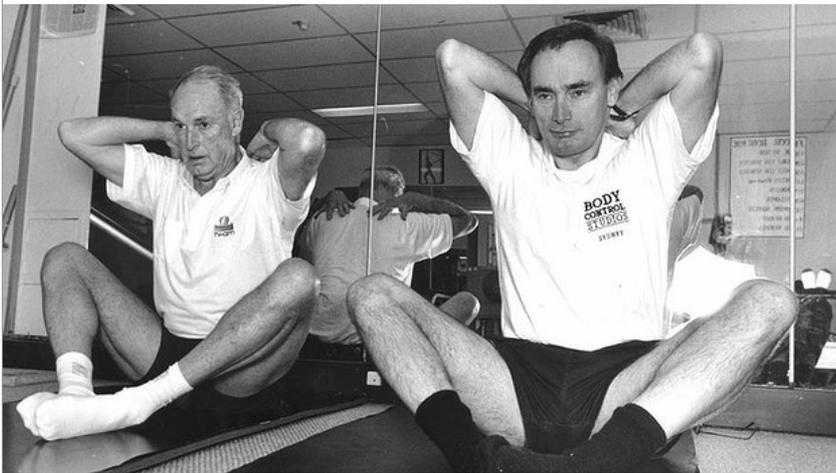
Want to join the 'flat-stomached elite'?

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Nigel Bowen

Your looks have a direct influence on your success. So here are some tips to amp up your hotness.

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Bob Carr: working on his flat stomach.

Bob Carr's revelations about his strict regimen of steel-cut oats and one-legged Romanian deadlifts and determination to fit in with the "flat-stomached elite" prompted much amusement among average citizens of this nation who are, on average, overweight and not much given to physical exertion. Among the political and business elite there was probably rather less merriment. Those who make it to the top tend to be under few illusions about the reality of "lookism" and frequently go to Carr-like lengths to present well.

Anna Hodges, owner of Purple Squirrel Recruitment says, "There's nothing particularly unusual about Carr's behaviour in the circles he moves in. You can see that represented in TV shows such as *House of Cards*, where Frank and Claire Underwood are always going jogging. Executives use their workouts as stress relief but they also do them to look good because they realise that is important. It's not often verbalised but it's understood that in many industries attractive individuals have an advantage."

Arna Jade, an entrepreneur and executive, has experienced the "hotness dividend" firsthand. "I used to own a fashion accessories label and definitely felt pressure to look good, which ultimately led to me dropping 30 kilos," she says. "My products, which I modelled, then sold a lot faster and designers were more willing to lend me gowns and get involved in cross-promotional arrangements."

"The same process played out when I was a finance manager working in the resources industry. When I lost weight I was given more client-facing tasks and invited to more corporate events. I don't imagine anyone made a conscious decision to hide me away when I weighed more but the better I looked the happier senior executives were to have me represent the company in public."

Jade's experience would seem prove what controversy-magnet British sociologist Dr Catherine Hakim argued in her 2011 book *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital*. Hakim asserted that people focus on human capital (what people know) or social capital (who they know) while ignoring erotic capital (how much the people you know want to have sex with you).

Like Hakim, personal branding expert Ben Angel believes those wanting others to give them their business, a job or a promotion should accept they are operating in a "lookist" environment.

"There's massive denial around lookism," he says. "We'd all like to believe we were judged on the merit of our work but people can't help but automatically scan the features and body shapes of others and make instinctual friend or foe, fight or flight decisions."

"Would TV producers be so keen to book me on their shows if I stacked on a lot of weight? The honest answer is no, being overweight would detract from the message I was trying to share. And that's precisely the issue - if your physical appearance is preventing you from sharing your authentic self with the world, you should address that."

At this point, it would be standard to launch into a bromide about the importance of being well-groomed. Yet while they may be important, shiny shoes and an expensive outfit aren't going to turn someone from a six to a nine in the desirability department.

Joe Hockey, no doubt conscious of the fate of Kim Beazley, who never quite managed to shake off his undisciplined fat-man image, has recently opted for weight-loss surgery.

James Packer is widely presumed to have done likewise. Cosmetic surgeons report less of their business is coming from ladies who lunch and more from career women and, increasingly, men who are very aware they need to look the part if they aspire to be the public face of their organisation.

Tellingly, many in the upper echelons of the business world have swapped long lunches and leisurely rounds of golf for pre-dawn bike rides and low-carb diets.

Hakim, speaking to this writer shortly after her book's release, noted that while being judged on your looks strikes most of us as unjust, erotic capital is more democratic than the social and intellectual varieties, in the sense that while you can't change the social class you were born into or the IQ you have, it is feasible to boost your stocks of erotic capital and enjoy the benefits the flow to the beautiful people.

Hakim's tips? "The most important factors are staying slim and a good haircut that suits your face. And don't overlook the value of smiles – almost everyone looks more attractive when they smile."

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