



BEST FRIEND

Can Yoga Buff Courteney Cox Stay Balanced While She Walks The Highwire Of Hollywood Fame?

by Emily Nussbaum

With her shoe polish-black hair, milky skin, and police siren-bright blue eyes, Courteney Cox has always been a ringer for Snow White. The similarity goes beyond beauty: As mother hen of the hit show *Friends* — the linchpin of the NBC comedy lineup now that *Seinfeld* has jumped the schedule — Cox's ultra-competent Monica cooks, cleans, straightens, scours, and noodles for an urban cottage of friends who might be described as two Dopeys, one Funny, one Princess, and a Doe. And like Snow White, the actress herself is a domestic whiz, a sort of freelance Martha Stewart, regularly snapping up, redecorating, and reselling Hollywood homes — installing chandeliers by hand and re-grouting the kitchen tile.

In sum, Cox (who one friend admits "is Monica — just more complex") is a first-class role model for perfectionists everywhere. Neat, smart, funny, loyal, savvy, and successful, like a sexier boy scout, she's even managed to achieve that triple axel of the acting profession, segueing from large to small screen and back again without losing her audience. Indeed, between menschy Monica and Cox's snappy, hard-as-nails turn as a manipulative investigative journalist in the popular *Scream* films, the actress has demonstrated that she has both the you-

want-to-know-me charisma that makes for sitcom success and the you-want-to-be-me glamour of a top-line movie star. Doing it all isn't the challenge for Cox. Dealing with it may be. Like many get-it-right-the-first-time types, learning to relax and feel good doesn't always come naturally to her. So what's the toughest part of her day? Pushing her body to the limit with intensive Pilates and power yoga workouts? Learning lines? Dealing with the press? "No," admits Courteney. "The hardest thing I do is shut my mind off so I can go to sleep."

Cox wasn't raised to be such a tightly-wound urbanite. In fact, her upbringing took place in the languorous outskirts of Birmingham, Alabama, land of the drawl, the dawdle, and the "be sweet" ethic of Southern politeness. But some of her urgency may have sprung from those two classic family contingencies: divorced parents, plus a huge step-family. "My parents were complete opposites," she says. "Mom was a conventional Southern belle — conservative, reserved. She liked security. Dad liked adventure, excitement. 'Spend it now' was his philosophy." Her parents split up when she was 10, on the cusp of adolescence. After each parent remarried ("to their own types," she notes), she ended up with a sprawling brood: thirteen siblings and step-siblings, with Courteney the youngest. "Obviously, it's nice to be

right, but it's more important for me to be understood," says Cox. "And I think I got it from my big family. When you're a kid trying to speak at the dinner table, or trying to get your point across, you're not always heard."

High school was a shock to the system. "So we have this girl from Alabama who never really felt like she fit in," is the way Courteney tells her own story, fairy-tale fashion. "Everyone around her talks so slowly, and she wants them to catch up to her speed, so she talks faster. She hates high school — not the work so much; it's just the cliques... She even wants to move away, at one point, and live with her father, but then she realizes that there are cliques everywhere."

After high school, Courteney picked up and moved to New York, that outpost of high school oddballs looking to succeed. She posed for book covers, showed off her clean-scrubbed looks in skin-care ads, got her first real speaking line ("You look really... sizzling") on *As The World Turns*, and won the dubious honor of being the first person to say "period" on TV (in a Tampax commercial) and mean something other than punctuation. But her real breakthrough came when Brian DePalma picked her to be the charmingly gawky "Who me?" girl Bruce Springsteen pulled onstage for a quick boogie in the 1984 "Dancing

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In *The Dark* video. With that iconic moment — the thrilled girl-next-door yanked up out of the audience — Courteney also symbolically stepped up into the big leagues. And after a short apprenticeship as Michael J. Fox's girlfriend on *Family Ties*, the "girl" part in *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*, and a few years of career limbo (anyone up for renting *Mr. Destiny*?), she moved on into the warmest, most successful, most welcoming clique of all time, the gang at Central Perk.

How does she cope with the stress of being in the public eye? When she first went out to Hollywood, Cox had only a casual interest in physical fitness, claiming that she did no more than "walk the dogs and go up and down the stairs." "I've joined every gym in L.A.," she sighed at the time. "And I go for six weeks and forget about it. I don't like people to watch me." As her career has shifted into high gear, however, she's become a major fan of some more holistic body disciplines, craving them as much for the challenge and emotional peace they provide as for the sheer physical results. High on her list: power yoga — which she's raved about on TV — and Pilates, a 70-year-old fitness technique which features powerful but subtle movements done on spring-fueled machines.

"The biggest struggle is to stay focused through the pain of the postures — it takes unbelievable concentration!" she notes. "Staying within yourself or maintaining 'quantumness' is the key." Yoga, for Courteney as for many other fans of the body-and-mind discipline, is more

than a simple exercise technique. It's a gateway to serenity in a crazy schedule. "Life's so hard anyway," she says. "Every minute is hard. But if you can do something really difficult in yoga, and learn to stay in it, as opposed to running from it, then the payoff comes. Hopefully, as things in life happen to you, you can say to yourself, 'Okay, I can handle that.' For me, it's just learning to cope."

Power yoga is especially challenging to her because of its intensity: "You're constantly moving, working up a great sweat." And of course, she also values the aesthetic payoff of these toning techniques. "There is something called a 'Pilates Butt,'" she laughs. "If you do it right, you get a great butt. Mine isn't a big butt, but for me it's gargantuan!"

In fact, Courteney's willowy but muscled body has been the subject of a whole lot of gossip as she's made her way into the public eye. In the current climate, a female celebrity's body is subject to a peculiar form of public analysis: "If you eat a lot they call you fat or bulimic. If you don't eat, you're anorexic. I guess there's always got to be some issue," she laughs. "But I do care about my weight and staying fit." Understandably, Cox is getting more than a little tired of handing out the constant denials. "I don't have any skeletons in my closet!" she says. "I'm five foot five and I weigh 110, and I do go up and down," she notes. "But I would never throw up my food — that I promise you — and I would never take a laxative."

Once famous for scarfing down junk food from an on-set cache called "Courteney's Candy Cabinet," Cox has actually started to cut down on the sugar consumption in the last year. ("I haven't had sugar now in almost three months," she noted back in May. "I got a little crazy with certain foods.") And other than the occasional Butterfinger snarf, Cox has always been a hyper-healthy eater. "Someone must have said that they see me eat candy all the time, but I'm thin. But that's only been in spurts," she says. "I know what to eat, and I know how to eat." Her eating style goes something like this: "I try to eat pasta for lunch, because it acts as fuel and I can burn it off better. For dinner I try to eat lighter, like a baked

potato with ranch dressing."

She's also learned to care for herself in other ways, taking, for example, "tons of vitamins to make my hair grow" after her black locks were chopped short for a *Friends* storyline.

Courteney's personal life has been as subject to rumor as her eating habits, especially the demise of her long relationship with Michael Keaton. "Anything is possible with Michael and me," says Courteney. "The thing is, if you talk to the press about your lover or your relationship, it's out there. It's way too much for both parties to live up to." Nonetheless, she says of Michael, "I think he's the most wonderful person I've ever met. We still love each other." Since the breakup, she's been linked with Counting Crows singer Adam Duritz, though they are no longer involved.

For Courteney, sex and love are strongly linked. "I think I'm a sexual person, especially when I'm in love," she says, "but I don't think of the opposite sex in purely sexual terms. There are things that are more important than sex, but I have to be physically attracted to stay in a relationship. There's something very chemical about being with somebody. I believe in fate. Otherwise, why am I attracted to only a certain number of people in my lifetime? There could be a hundred gorgeous men in a room, but I may be chemically attracted to one of them."

When Snow White looks in the mirror, what does she see? The fairest of them all? Hardly. "When the makeup artist and the hairstylist both work on me, I can look decent," she admits grudgingly. "But right now, if I walked by a mirror, I'd go, 'Oh my gosh — dog!'" She does, however, like her eyes — "if they have makeup on them." Is this just the envy-repelling modesty of a beauty who feels the need to put herself down? Or is Courteney really that hard on herself? Maybe a little of both. Ironically, though, as her career kicks into high gear, she may be learning to cut herself a little more slack. "I just took a vacation, and for the first time, didn't check my messages," she notes proudly. And after so much impressive renovation of other people's houses, the home-maker may finally be starting to feel at home. "I always have these goals, and I achieve them and get bored and move on. I used to think it was good to work, just for the sake of working," she says. "Now I'm choosier. Now I cherish resting." 🌿