Leave the Cannoli Take the Weights

Practical Guidance on Eating, Exercise and Empowerment

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To Karin, my classy wife, for her love, inspiration and for putting up with me in general

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Introduction

LEAVE THE CANNOLI, TAKE THE WEIGHTS

This battle to get fit and maintain a healthy weight may get ugly. To be successful you need to prepare for a good old-fashioned street fight. Let me make you an offer you can't refuse. As your wartime consigliere, I'm here to help you get the attitude and resources you need to be successful. Only a dope would bring a knife to a gunfight.

Don't mope around or whine. The deck has always been stacked against you; you just didn't know it. We were designed to assure the propagation of our species at a time when a normal day at the office involved running from predators, hunting for prey, fighting other cavemen, and foraging for nuts and berries. Responding to these primordial stressors, our brains dispatch two competing messenger proteins called cytokines, with one

designed to stimulate cell production and one designed to tear down cells. When young, the default setting switches to build up muscles, lung cells, bones, and brain cells—all the tools we need to stay on top of the food chain. Then, when we become sedentary in middle age, the stressors diminish, and the default setting switches to "tear down is easier."

Now, with our sedentary lives devoid of ancient stressors, it is not surprising that sometime in our early forties or so, it becomes dusk in the switching yard of our brains. The default settings change from "building up is normal" to "tearing down is the *new* normal." Our twenty-first century bodies are still jonesing for the ancient elixir that facilitates the building up process. You can dress us up in Calvin Klein's, but we remain cavemen with competing cytokines on the inside.

Resetting our switches is harder than fixing a horse race. The aging process is like a stealthy tailwind that causes slow, gentle, and predictable changes: reducing maximum heart rate, wrinkling skin, graying hair, and decreasing muscle mass, among other unpleasant but non-lethal things. Disuse of our muscles causes normal aging to accelerate by slowing down the building-up process and thus increasing the velocity of this tailwind. Once our bodies are no longer challenged by the rigors of survival, our brains reset the switches to tip the balance in favor of hastening our demise so that we will not take scarce food, water, and desirable mating partners from the next generation.

Once you reintroduce the ancient stressors that cause the building-up to outpace the tearing-down process in your cells, you will literally have an entirely new body in a few years. You can effectively put some quality time back on the clock. Bucking a tailwind takes more energy than riding the currents, but it's worth it. That's why airplanes take off into the wind. The same forces that can hold you back can lift you up—if you know how to harness their power.

I'm born and bred in Jersey, so you know I'll go to the mattress for you. As a health and fitness columnist, Certified Personal Trainer, and Certified Lifestyle & Health Coach for more than seventeen years, I've got the juice to help you harness the power within and assemble a team to help you be successful. *Leave the Cannoli, Take the Weights* blends scientific research, practical insights from my experience training clients, and edgy humor into an easily digestible, secret recipe that will help you maintain a healthy weight and improve your overall fitness. The book is divided into seven parts:

I. How to Get Your Tuchus Into Gear

II. The Journey Begins

III. Leave the Cannoli: Nutritional Insights

IV. Take the Weights: Pump Iron or Sleep with the Fishes

Part I:
Getting Your Tuchus Into Gear

MAN UP (YOU, TOO, LADIES) AND BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

To paraphrase Henry Ford, "Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, either way, you're right." Self-efficacy is the key to success in living a longer and healthier life. The placebo effect and self-efficacy are part of the same continuum, whose power cannot be underestimated. This isn't New Age psychobabble I'm talking here. It's science. Don't believe me? Why is it then that the FDA usually requires all drug tests to be double-blinded so that both the subject as well as the dispenser of the medication being tested does not know what is being given? Why do experts use blindfolds for taste tests? Why does lighting and room color impact the taste of food? When people are looking for something, do you know what they find? They find what they are looking for! Look for good health and fitness, and you will have taken your first step toward finding it.

You may have some medical baggage, perhaps a bad back, trick knee, arthritis, fallen uterus, enlarged prostate (not both of course), tennis elbow, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis, or the heartbreak of psoriasis. So, you may have some attitude issues, perhaps low self-esteem, laziness, lack of smarts, lack of motivation, or daddy issues. I don't give a rat's behind! Maintaining

a healthy weight, having a stronger heart, and enjoying more physical strength and stamina will help attenuate or even reverse your condition.

Sure, genetics may have dealt you a few bad cards, but recent research indicates that 70 percent of all premature deaths and disabling illnesses are preventable because they are lifestyle related.

Every ailment and condition you may have has an intervention that will let you begin a program of exercise and nutrition that will help you improve now.

Think of yourself sailing alone through the fog on a not-so-seaworthy ship heading toward dangerous rocks a hundred miles away. Your craft has no radar, no navigation, and the engine runs a bit rough. There is no immediate danger, but if you don't change course, the outcome will be disastrous. With you manning the helm and a small, competent team of shipmates making subtle course corrections, you can steer clear of the rocks and be sipping wine with some goodfellas long before the sun set over your yardarm.

"WHAT IS FITNESS ANYWAY?"

A gym buddy of mine, seated on the bench next to me, just completed his third set of biceps curls when he proudly declared, "I am fit!" Followed awkwardly by, "Aren't I?" This reminded me of a conversation I had with a good friend over a decade ago regarding the definition of fitness. As I said to my friend, being "fit" is not a single state of conditioning, but rather a complex and interrelated set of eight components of physical performance. How many components of being fit do *you* have?

1. **Strength:** This is defined as the ability to move a moderately heavy weight eight to twelve times. Bench pressing 150 pounds a dozen times would be an example of having good strength. So would a gymnast performing a routine by controlling her body weight throughout a series of complex movements, including pressing her body up to a handstand on the balance beam. But wouldn't this action require balance?

2. **Balance:** This is defined as the ability to know where your body is in relation to itself, and to perform tasks while in an unstable environment. The gymnast walking backward and then pressing up to a handstand fol-

lowed by an explosive dismount is a great example of balance. But wouldn't the explosive dismount involve power?

3. **Power:** This is defined as how much explosive force you can muster to move a very heavy weight just a few times. An Olympic powerlifter performing a clean and jerk, a defensive lineman blitzing a quarterback, and that guy who pulls a moving van on the *World's Strongest Man* competition are examples of power. But wouldn't generating tremendous force over a short time frame involve speed?

4. **Speed:** This is defined as the ability to have quick movements or sustained rapid movements over a predefined distance. Sprinting 100 yards in 9.1 seconds and bicycling 40 mph for 100 miles are examples speed. But doesn't riding a bike take balance? Getting the big picture now?

5. **Flexibility:** This is defined as the ability to have full range of motion about a joint. The gymnast doing a back walkover has good flexibility as does the sixty-five-year-old golfer with a drive off the tee as smooth as silk. The Olympic powerlifter also has great flexibility. But doesn't the powerlifter have power and balance, too? Do you see a pattern developing here?

6. **Endurance:** This is defined as the ability to repeatedly do the *same* activity before your muscles cannot go on.

A well-conditioned heart pumps the required blood to well conditioned muscles. Swimming a mile and finishing the NY Marathon are great examples of endurance. What about performing *different* activities like a triathlon, involving swimming, biking, and running. Don't the components of a triathlon need a lot of coordination?

7. **Motor Coordination:** This is defined as a planned pattern of harmonious movements in space by one or multiple body parts against a force to achieve a predetermined goal. Shooting a basketball involves gross and fine motor coordination. Playing basketball involves a lot more that just shooting the ball doesn't it?

8. **Stamina:** This is defined as the ability to repeat, over the course of an extended time, a series of *differing* movements, using a variety of muscle groups with power and strength. A college or NBA basketball game is a great example of stamina at work. Sprinting up and down the court, dribbling the ball, crashing the boards inside, driving to the hoop for seven to ten minutes without stopping involves a high level of stamina.

Most activities and sports involve more than one element of fitness. Some sports involve an abundance of one element and little of another. The key to fitness for most of you is to balance all the elements in such a way that your weaknesses are shored up and strengths enhanced. Doing so will help you to live the life you want right up to the end.

WHY TORTURE YOURSELF WITH EXERCISE?

Several years ago I demonstrated a wonderful exercise, a dumbbell bent over row, for a seventy-year-old client. It was a challenging exercise designed to improve his posture and functional ability to lift heavy objects, like grandchildren, off the floor. He called it a hateful exercise then asked me, "Where's it written this is a good exercise?" *Where's it written?* The next session I slammed down a half-dozen professional journals, exercise manuals for trainers, encyclopedias of exercises, and biographies of body builders. Each book flagged with Post-it Notes to cite the locations of *where it was written.*

In the old days, there were no old people—humans didn't live that long. In the old days, no one asked stupid questions about exercise. If you couldn't lift the rock to smash the skull of another caveman you were fighting, *your* skull got smashed. If you couldn't track down an ibex, your family didn't have dinner. If you couldn't chin yourself up to the next branch of a tree, a tiger had you for dinner. Evolution had a way of developing the physical skills we needed to survive as a species. Take off our Armani jackets, Prada shoes, khakis, and Fruit of the Looms, you will find we are all cavemen and women on the inside.

Today, two-thirds of Americans are obese and have atrophied into mush because we have not regularly placed sufficient challenges on our bodies. Gardening, vacuuming, washing the car, and playing with your cat are not intense enough to provide the needed stimulus. We don't need to do moderately strenuous exercise all the time. We need to do just enough to trick our bodies into believing that we are still effective hunters, gatherers, and makers of babies. Don't worry about the science behind the messenger chemicals released by your brain in response to physical challenges. Just hit the weights two or three times a week to dupe your brain into believing you are Conan the Barbarian. Walk fast or ride your bike five or six times a week and you become Jesse Owens. When you lift weights and do cardio in the right measure, your body rewards your efforts with what it took to survive: strong and flexible muscles, a powerful and efficient heart, weight in a healthy range, and a sharp mind.

Mark this part of the book with a Post-it Note. If people ask for proof of where it is written that we need to do strength and cardio exercise, show them this page, shut the book, and smack them with it.

BUT I'M ALREADY EXERCISING, AREN'T I?

Over the years, a lot people have told me they've been exercising a lot: planting shrubs, cleaning out the garage, vacuuming, carrying grocery bags, and shopping in the mall, etc. Folks, I hate to break it to you, but the activities cited above are not examples of exercise. They are voluntary activities. Unlike involuntary activities associated with your basic metabolic rate, such as breathing, digestion, and perspiring, you make a conscious choice to expend the energy to walk, shop, and clean. And yes, these activities do burn calories, but no, they do not qualify as exercise. To consider an activity exercise, it must possess the following characteristics:

Progression
After a while walking the same distance at the same speed and lifting the same weight again and again will stop providing fitness benefits. Over time the resistance (weight) must gradually increase to provide a benefit.

Regularity
You must exercise regularly. Perform strength training at least twice a week for it to be effective. Do cardio most days of the week to provide training benefits.

Overload

Muscular strength and cardiovascular fitness result when the load the body must bear increases, such as in weight training and engaging in cardio exercise. Our bodies possess the wonderful ability to constantly adapt to new and increased demands placed upon them.

Variety

The body's ability to adapt is a double-edged sword. Adaptability helps us get stronger, but if the stimulus remains the same, muscle growth and strength gains will slow and eventually cease. An effective program of exercise shocks your body to constantly challenge it.

Recovery

When muscles work hard enough to handle the overload placed upon them to increase strength and size, micro-tears appear in the fibers. This is good, completely normal, and a part of the strength building and muscle growing process. During periods of rest, the fibers repair and become stronger.

Balance

One goal of exercise is the symmetrical, balanced, and proportional development of all major muscle groups. When you vacuum you usually use one arm. You usually walk up a staircase one step at a time. Mowing the lawn involves many muscles that push in a forward movement with little or no pulling backward or side-to-side actions.

Specificity

Having specific, measurable goals is important to any fitness program. Lifting heavier weights, walking at a faster pace, or achieving greater flexibility are examples of goals that you can quantify.

The most important thing to know about exercise is that it can work for you. A professionally designed program will embody all the characteristics detailed above. You can still mow the lawn, rake leaves, and clean your carpets. But with an exercise program under your belt, you'll look buff doing the chores.

THE LESSON OF WALLY PIPP

Several years ago, a long-time client told me she felt tired from sleeping poorly two nights in a row. In addition, a cold was coming on. Uncertain about her ability to train, she asked if I could modify her exercise program for the day to accommodate her being under the weather. I explained that it is better to exercise at a lower level of intensity than not to train at all. "How differently things could have turned out if Wally Pipp had made the same decision," I said. It was the start of baseball season, so I thought this a good analogy, as baseball lore is replete with life lessons. Her uncertain look inspired me to retell the tale of Wally Pipp, the most important baseball player you never heard of.

Born Walter Clement Pipp in 1893, Wally became the New York Yankees everyday first baseman in 1915. Pipp was a wonderful fielder, a career leader for fielding percentages (.992) and putouts at first base. In addition, he was a great slugger, having twice led the American League in home runs. More important than hitting homers was his ability to drive in runs—for six years he had ninety or more RBIs. In 1923 he had 108, and in 1924 he had 114—all before the days of steroids, designated hitters, domed stadiums, and $20 million salaries.

Then on June 2, 1925, the wheels of his career went off the tracks. Pipp asked Yankee's manager Miller Huggins if he could sit out the game because he had a headache. By the way, in his day, Huggins was a fine player who later became the manager that turned the Yankees into the dynasty they are to this day. In his wisdom as the Yankees skipper, he told rookie Lou Gehrig to fill in for Pipp. Pipp never played for the Yankees again. He was traded to the Reds and retired two years later. Gehrig's record 2130 consecutive games played over fourteen years stood until Cal Ripken, Jr. broke it in 1995. Both Gehrig and Huggins are in the Baseball Hall of Fame, while Pipp is relegated to a Trivial Pursuit answer.

What would have happened if Pipp had swallowed an aspirin, run fewer laps, taken fewer pitches in batting practice, and decided to gut it out on that fateful summer day? Would things have turned out differently? Would Yankee Stadium be the House That Pipp Built? We will never know.

Would *you* get more out of life if you had more energy? Would you be better prepared for life's curveballs if you had more stamina and strength? Unfortunately, most of us do not have the option of taking ourselves out of the game and asking the manager to have a pinch hitter, take the kids to the dentist, or have someone come off the bench to go to work for us.

Team, tomorrow we begin a tough series on the road. Our opponents are cagey. Lethargy is on first, Complacency is on second, and Lack of Confidence is pitching. These guys are tough but

predictable. We can beat them with our team—nobody can turn a double play like Self Efficacy and Experience. Confidence will be hitting leadoff and Commitment will be our starting pitcher. If things get tough, we can always bring in Resiliency from the bullpen to close the game. Get a good night's sleep, and be ready to play. This is one game you can't afford to miss.

SO YOU GOT SOME MEDICAL BAGGAGE—DO IT ANYWAY OSTEOPOROSIS: BARE-BONE FACTS

Osteoporosis is a sneak thief that robs mainly women of their bones' mineral content. Last year the number of osteoporosis-related fractures in women exceeded the number of heart attacks, breast cancer cases, and strokes—combined. According to the National Osteoporosis Foundation, over eight million women aged fifty and older have osteoporosis, while another twenty-two million are at risk for developing the disease. Nearly 40 percent of women over fifty will suffer a fracture due to osteoporosis sometime in their lives. By 2020, it is projected the number of women with osteoporosis will exceed ten million.

Are You at Risk?

Estimates indicate that 72 percent of all women sixty-five and older who have osteoporosis are unaware of their condition and have not been treated for it. You are at increased risk to suffer from osteoporosis if you:

- Lead a sedentary lifestyle
- Have a family member with osteoporosis

- Have previously suffered an osteoporosis-related fracture
- Have low body weight or are thin boned
- Are a post-menopausal woman
- Have been taking certain prescription drugs for a prolonged period
- Are Asian, Caucasian, or Hispanic
- Have had a hysterectomy
- Have an eating disorder
- Are a heavy drinker and/or smoker

If you have two or more of these risk factors, please contact your doctor for a referral to evaluate your bone density through a simple, painless, definitive test.

Next Steps

If you *are* diagnosed with osteoporosis or its precursor, osteopenia, there are immediate actions you can take in order to attenuate or even reverse this disease. First, your doctor may recommend prescription medicine designed to strengthen your bones. If you drink heavily or smoke, stop. Next, think about your eating habits. Do you have an eating disorder? Are you getting enough calcium? Are you eating a balanced diet? Be honest with yourself. An appointment with a registered dietitian could provide great benefit.

Exercise

Nineteenth-century German anatomist Julius Wolff developed principles that still hold true today. Wolff found placing

increased stress on a bone causes that bone to get stronger to bear up under the new load. Weight-bearing exercises increase bone density. The level of exercise needed to stimulate bone growth involves lifting moderately heavy weights, not the rubber-coated pink one- and two-pound weights many women prefer. If you are under thirty-five years old, start pumping iron now. The stronger your bones are when young, the stronger they are likely to be when you get older. Although strength training may not increase bone density once you reach your 80s, lifting moderately heavy weights may stop the mineral loss dead in its tracks, according to a study done by Sato and colleagues in 1999. So, if your doctor diagnoses you with osteoporosis, and he or she prescribes a program of exercise, do what you are told under the guidance of a Certified Personal Trainer. More on this later.

Don't Break a Leg

"With a disease like postmenopausal osteoporosis that you often cannot see or feel, it is important to capture women's attention, show the importance of early intervention, and provide simple ways to help protect against fractures," said Dr. Stuart Silverman, M.D., Clinical Professor of Medicine and Rheumatology at the University of California Los Angeles School of Medicine.

I hope this information has caught *your* attention. If not, perhaps I should come over and give you a smack.