

## Towards Physical Transformation: One Man's Story

There is a lot of interest these days in losing weight and becoming fit, and there should be, as we are becoming an ever more obese nation. Before anyone think I am a naturally lean or athletic person, so somehow a physical transformation is easy, I can tell you that eating in a disciplined manner has always been very hard for me. I could be called a chocoholic, as well as a butterholic. And the evidence is usually all to apparent in my waistline.

Even after I survived Stage IV cancer, I fell back into bad eating habits that were deeply discouraging. In particular, I found myself weighing 210 lbs with a 40" waist, and 24% body fat.

Something had to change. A couple of books gave me a great deal of knowledge about how to eat and how to exercise (they will be listed later), and when I was able to adapt those theories to my own particular situation and personality, results were dramatic. Over the next 16 months, and just before turning 60 years old, I was able to lose 50 pounds, get my waist to 30", and reduce bodyfat by three-quarters, from 24% to 6%, while not losing any muscle. I realize most people do not need to reach 6% body fat, but the process to lose weight and become fit is the same no matter where you desire to end up. I want to share with you the essentials of how I was able to get those results.

I will not lay out a detailed diet, explaining background information about nutrition and food composition, nor will I discuss particular gym routines or biomechanics. I skip all that partly because it would take too long, and partly because so many other people can do it so much better.

So what can I add to the discussion?

Our defects. Yours and mine.

Let me back up a bit to explain....

How often have you read an article on health and fitness, or heard a talk on the TV or radio or online, and felt that thrill within, that inspiration to begin again, to latch on to the latest new breakthrough that will finally make a difference in how you look and feel? The new Me is around the corner! Right?

I think we all know these thrills, these fantasies. The problem is they excite our imagination, they feed our ego, they show the vision at the end which seems so

wonderful, they all offer stunning results if we just follow the theory, but they do NOT help us confront our weaknesses and self deception, and they do not take us by the hand to show us how to navigate the mine field of our own defects. So this talk is different in that I want to start with the ugly reality of where we are and who we are, and try to pick up the pieces from there. In other words, to move forward we have to be clear on where we stand right now.

I can't predict what your particular constellation of defects might be - I can only share my own and consequent adaptations, and hope they are helpful to you. I do know we all share the same human nature, so it is likely that a good deal of my own challenges might be very familiar to you.

Suppose we could bottle a new fitness program, that new shiny ideal routine for diet and exercise that promises the skies. Before we get to the wonderful, transformative results at the other end, however, that bottle has to be poured through the contaminating soil of our fallen human nature. I will only address two such "toxic materials" in the soil here:

- 1) ***We are not objective about ourselves, either inside or out. We instinctively inflate the good and downplay or deny the bad.***
- 2) ***We cheat at the slightest opportunity, to avoid the truth, to sneak in a pleasure we desire, or to bend the truth so we do not need to face it.***

Maybe you think you don't share these defects. I can only confess I have them in spades. In general, it is only when you try to really improve at something that you realize how intractable your defects are. Generally we prefer mediocrity because it insulates us from facing ourselves.

And here is one more truth I think we need to confront, and in fact, embrace:

***We cannot eliminate our defects, we can only learn to manage them.***

I am convinced that a key to progress in fitness (and, by the way, in spiritual development also) is to confront and embrace this truth that our defects are with us to the end. This does not mean we give up and declare a truce. But it means we have to be humble enough and honest enough about who we really are.

I do offer fitness training, or mentoring, but there are much more experienced trainers out there. What I might offer that is not as common is to focus on your

personality and daily routine, and help you to navigate the mine field of your personal defects, so that over time you can develop a program that suits you and is sustainable. Your falls are actually the key to ultimate success, because they teach us how to adapt, so we don't want to brush them under the rug. Viewed properly, there is no such thing as failure, only feedback.

What does this mean in practical terms? To combat those two key flaws mentioned above, not being objective and the propensity to cheat at the first opportunity, our fitness program must be anchored in daily, objective, concrete benchmarks. Call it the D.O.C. or doc doctrine. That is Key #1 to physical transformation. If we are not willing to do that, we are not ready to change. Period. And you will see how that played out in my own journey.

I will cover the material in four parts:

First, I discuss 8 key steps you will have to take to achieve physical transformation (four related to diet, and four to exercise):

Second, I lay out the six different areas that need to be considered with any fitness program.

Third, I offer ideas on what I call "defect management" and Fourth, the Why of Mental Preparation.

Part One: the 8 Important Steps to transformation:

- 1) You will not lose weight if you mostly eat things like donuts, twinkies, and oreos.
- 2) You will need to break up your meals into 5 - 6 smaller meals, eaten about 3-4 hours apart. Breakfast is the most important meal; avoid eating in the evening.
- 3) Unless you plan on losing only very modest amount of weight (under 1- pounds) you will have to get used to occasional bouts of intense hunger.
- 4) If you want to keep weight off after you lose it, you will have to give up certain "dangerous" or high calorie foods. Put another way, to stay fit longterm, you will need the discipline to stick to a rigid and healthy meal plan, 7 days a week.
- 5) Your muscles will only grow only if they are surprised, so changing your routine often is essential.
- 6) Lifting weights will make your muscles bigger, but cardio training is the most important for losing fat.
- 7)If you want to lose weight in a particular area, you will eventually need to target those areas (usually hips and thighs for women, stomach for men).
- 8)Fat will be converted into muscle when your weight training reaches a certain intensity.

There. With those basics we can get started....

Or not.

Because, every one of these ideas is either completely wrong, or totally un-necessary.

Unless you are pretty knowledgeable about fitness, many of these 8 steps may have **seemed** absolutely common sense, but I thought we should start this way to get your attention and underscore a very important point: what you may have heard or assumed about fitness is probably much more complicated and difficult than it needs to be. The fundamentals are actually incredibly simple.

As mentioned previously, every single day there are articles published in magazines and newspapers, or talked about on TV, that announce some new breakthrough in fitness, or dieting, - a new formula, a new supplement, a special food, a new exercise machine - something that can really make a difference.

Most of it is just slick marketing - capitalism at its finest - the packaging of any idea or product that might make a buck, usually by offering some new hope for the change we all crave, the quick transformation we all wish was there.

Sorry, there are no quick fixes, but there are simple things that do work and complicated things that don't. So I will proceed by going over those 8 statements I just read that seemed so reasonable but are actually wrong, and use that as the springboard to uncover some of the **real** basics of fitness.

**Misconception #1** - I am sure this seemed like a no-brainer - of course you can't lose weight if you just eat junk food most of the day. Actually you can. Dr. Mark Haub, Professor of Nutrition at Kansas State University did just that. Every day he ate mostly twinkies, donuts, doritos, oreos, and soda. In two months he lost 27 pds. At the same time he lowered his bad cholesterol and raised his good cholesterol levels. He was trying to make a point that is really important: You lose weight **whenever** you eat fewer calories than you burn, in other words, when you run at a "caloric deficit". Period.

Now of course you should not live on twinkies and soda, and trying to lose weight on such a diet would be really difficult and you would feel terrible. But it conveys a crucial point: **if** losing weight is your **only** goal, **how many calories you consume** is much more important than what you eat.

So, how many calories you should consume is the real starting point of any weight loss or muscle gain program.

First you need to know what you should consume to maintain your current weight. In other words, know the reality of where you are today. The technical term is knowing your TDEE (total daily energy expenditure). This formula takes into account your gender, age, weight, height, and estimated daily activity level, to determine the number of calories you need to maintain your current weight.

This is one of the essential, objective benchmarks that should be the pivot of your entire fitness program. If you don't know where you start, you can't know how you are progressing, or regressing. Just google the letters TDEE and you can get this number in seconds.

Once you have that all-important number, you decide what you want to do. If you want to lose weight, like most people, you just reduce your maintenance calories by, say 20%. You can certainly do less than 20% but results will be slow, or you could cut by up to 25% but any more than that will invite a host of very negative starvation responses, discussed later, so I strongly discourage it.

We are almost off to the races. The only other essential formula is what is called your "macronutrient ratio," - in other words, the percentage of those calories that are protein, carbohydrates, and fat. While I would recommend a different ratio for someone who is very overweight, or very lean, I can say with some confidence that an excellent ratio for most people is 30/45/25 or 30%Protein/45% Carbohydrate/and 25% fat. If you are a male and want to build a muscular body, 40/40/20 is even better.

This does mean adding something to every meal, namely, a scale and a couple of measuring cups. Yes, tracking your calories. And for a while you have to read the labels on everything you eat to see the macronutrients it contains. But before you despair, I assure you that the modern age has made this incredibly easy. Before the internet, one would have to look up each food item in a thick and sometimes inscrutable book, add up the calories and nutrient ratio, and then add up the days totals. That is all a thing of the past. You can eat anything and just ask Google what you just did! It knows everything from a serving at a particular restaurant to the calories in one peanut to the calories in home-made foods, and provides the macronutrients as well.

I set up a single spreadsheet on my computer that automatically tallies the protein, carbohydrates, and fat for every food, and totals them as I go. My spreadsheet includes all the foods I regularly eat, with space at the bottom to add anything new or unexpected. Building such a spreadsheet does take a fair amount of time, and it is what I offer all my clients, adapted for their own preferred foods. All you need to enter is one number, say the grams of a banana, and the computer shows the exact calories and nutrient ratios and

totals for that item plus the totals for the day along the top. At the end of the day I can see exactly where I stand, and decide to eat a little snack if I have calories to spare, or, if I went over, decide to cut back a bit the next day.

In total we are talking a few minutes a day - just jot down what you ate during the day, and enter it later. But then, every day, you have a daily, objective, and concrete record of your caloric behavior. It is actually a lot of fun, and every day you learn more about foods and about yourself.

“Can’t I just estimate what I have eaten?” Sure, go ahead, but if you are like me, you will cheat, and you will not be remotely accurate, and you will not lose weight. If you are not objective and accurate, on a daily basis, real progress is not likely.

There was an interesting study that looked at this tendency. A group was asked to estimate their caloric intake as well as their expenditure of energy. And at the same time they were asked to report what they actually ate and their actual exercise was tracked. It turns out they overestimated their energy expenditure by a whopping 50% and underestimated their caloric intake by another whopping 50%. Welcome to the human condition.

So if you want to learn this for yourself, go ahead, estimate and approximate for a month, or two, or three, and get back to me. I predict you will have made little or no progress.

Any serious change, in the physical, or spiritual life by the way, requires some kind of concrete, daily commitment - something you can track.

**Misconception #2** - You must break up your meals into 5-6 small meals spaced 3-4 hours apart.

This is not a bad idea at all, and in fact a good one, but it is not essential. Nor do you need to eat a good breakfast and avoid eating at night. I’m pretty sure you have heard these rules - they are not bad, just not essential. What I am trying to do is lay down the absolute fundamentals, and distinguish them from the incidentals.

This point was an absolute revelation for me, as in my early training days I did in fact force myself to eat 6 small meals, and eat a good breakfast and try to avoid eating at night. And it worked. BUT, and this is key, it was not sustainable for me. It took too much preparation, AND too much planning, AND the meals were too small, AND I am a night-time binger, so the plan was asking me to avoid eating at the time I most wanted to.

Asking me to not eat at night was attacking my defenses where they were the weakest. It was not sustainable.

The revelation, which should be a huge relief to everyone, is this: As long as you are running at a caloric deficit, as determined above, **IN THE COURSE OF A DAY, IT DOES NOT MATTER AT ALL WHEN YOU EAT, OR HOW MUCH YOU EAT AT ONE TIME.**

This is nothing short of a complete revolution in how most people think about dieting or food plans, and it gives you immense freedom to work out a routine that works for you. Remember I said you cannot defeat your defects, only learn to manage them.

Armed with the knowledge of this basic rule, I could apply it to my own life:

For example, defect #1 for me is bingeing at night, as well as eating heavily at dinner time. During a busy day I am actually not that interested in eating, and armed with this insight, I can now delay my biggest meals for the evening, and eat full meals when I am most tempted to eat junk, say, a whole box of oreos. Defect #2 is I procrastinate, so if I don't get to the gym first thing in the morning, it is likely to get kicked later and later in the day, and then be buried under a barrage of excuses and justifications. Sound familiar? But when I thought I HAD to eat a good breakfast, I had a problem. It meant going to the gym before I ate, and, on to defect #3 - I am a poor sleeper and not a morning person. I have tried getting up early enough to put in a full workout before my breakfast, but while it had wonderful aspects, it was not remotely sustainable for me.

All my life I have been taught that a healthy breakfast was essential to start the day. Well, you should eat healthy, and it is wonderful to start the day with a good breakfast, but it simply is not essential. In fact, what is called intermittent fasting (IF) is very popular nowadays, and I discovered it works extremely well for me. I do not eat from about 8:30 or 9:00 at night until about noon the next day, and feel great. I am never hungry because in the evening I eat a lot, then I am asleep, and my exercise in the mid-morning kills any possible hunger pangs.

So choose any meal plan that works for you and helps to counter your particular weaknesses. If you are like me, you should be skipping down the streets for joy over the relief from this news.

**Misconception #3** You will have to get used to occasional, intense hunger.

Honestly, I can hardly remember being hungry while I was losing those 50 lbs during the 16 months I went from 210 lbs to 161 lbs.

In fact, during my final preparation. for the photos on the website and the brochure, I was running at a caloric deficit of over 1,000 a day, and can't recall any problems with hunger. Now how could that be?

Let me give four important factors for why hunger was never a problem:

First a key question: How many calories are contained in a pound of body fat? Fat, by the way, is just stored caloric energy, and a pound of body fat contains about 3,500 stored calories. So needing to lose 50 lbs means running at a total caloric deficit of 175,000 calories!!!! Sounds insurmountable, doesn't it?

Actually, it is not. After all, I lost those 50 lbs. over 16 months, which is 486 days. Divide the 175,000 calories I needed to lose into 486 days and you get 360 calories a day. So I only had to run at a caloric deficit of 360 calories a day which is the equivalent of one large chocolate chip cookie, or just 2 oz. of cashews, or a couple of potatoes without butter.

Given my TDEE I was reducing my daily calories by only 12% - about half of what I could have done without much stress to the body. So this was the #1 reason I did not feel hungry.

A good rule of thumb is that it is healthy to lose up to 1% of your total body weight per week. So when I was 200 lbs, it would not be unhealthy to lose up to 2 lbs per week. Therefore, if I was actually disciplined and followed my own simple formula, namely my TDEE minus say 25%, I could have attained the results I did in half the time, about 8 months, not 16.

So what is wrong with me? First, I am a crawling colony of vices and defects, and very rarely kept to the perfect script. I have never been good at disciplining my eating habits. But the beauty of this program is it kept me honest. If I cheated, I knew it, and I knew what to do about it. Second, I did not learn much of what I am writing here until well into this fitness program. In fact, at first I did just estimate meal sizes and calories, as well as follow a few simple diet guidelines.

For those of you who do not want to really get too serious about fitness, I will share those diet guidelines I followed, and they do work. First - Never drink calories. Next - Avoid junk food. Third - No snacking between meals, and Finally - Have only one helping at meal time. Follow those guidelines (and they are harder than you think), and you will get dramatic results.



But on to the #2 reason I did not feel hungry during those 16 months: In a routine that involves lifting weights at the gym, eating more protein is important, and protein is a great killer of hunger. Trust me, try it, it works. More protein generally means less hunger. On the other hand, my experience is that carbs, especially junk carbs like in all processed or snack foods, does the exact opposite, it accelerates at least the perception of hunger. It certainly generates cravings to eat more.

#3 - I did not feel hungry because when you eat healthy foods, your body tends to appreciate it, and those intense sugar cravings tend to diminish. What we often associate with legitimate hunger is often really just a craving for more sugar or junk food. When we eat junk food we give our bodies plenty of calories, but not healthy calories, and so our bodies crave more food. In a sense your body is trying to tell you something (namely, that it wants **real** food), and we mistakenly just eat more junk food, which creates a vicious cycle. Feed your body healthy food (fresh meat and vegetables and fruit), and cravings and hunger pangs will begin to disappear.

#4 - I did not feel hungry because exercise takes away feelings of hunger. I never, ever remember going to the gym and having it make me feel more hungry. Quite the opposite. So if a defect of yours is to overeat when you feel hungry, a great strategy is to time your exercise right around the time you start feeling hungry, and your hunger will disappear until long after you left the gym. Also, you will then eat exactly when you need it most - after a workout, but when you do not tend to feel cravings, so you are least likely to overeat.

OK, now back to the 8 misconceptions we are exploring:

**Misconception #4** You will have to keep to a strict diet 7 days a week and give up all those favorite, high calorie foods.

Yes, you will have to drastically reduce your intake of certain unhealthy and high calorie foods, but you do not have to give them up. You are setting yourself up for failure if you embrace an all-or-nothing diet. Remember, any meal plan that is sustainable long term has to manage your defects, not assume they will disappear!

Also, you will actually do better if at least one day a week you do not run at a caloric deficit, but feed your body at maintenance level. It is very important to understand why this is so, and it explains why crash diets are a disastrous idea. On a super strict or extreme diet you run the risk of putting your body into starvation mode, as it will think you are never going to give it even a maintenance level of calories. What does it do? It slows down its metabolism (the rate at which you burn energy), makes you

very tired so you move as little as possible, sends urgent hunger pangs to your brain saying you will die if you do not eat everything in the refrigerator immediately, and it can start shedding healthy muscle while keeping fat, as muscle uses up calories while fat only stores them. You feel terrible, lose mental and physical stamina, and have almost no chance of persevering long term. What is happening is that your body's instinct for self-preservation is fighting against your own weak will power to lose weight for some imagined benefit, and the self-preservation instinct **always** wins.

So strong hunger pangs are usually a sign you are not dieting properly. One day a week you should have a meal where you eat whatever you most enjoy. Call it a reward meal, or a free meal, but you should enjoy it without guilt and know it is in fact important to show your body you are not going to starve it, and show your mind that you really can keep up this improved diet for the long haul. I admit that doing this in moderation is difficult, but it is comforting to know you do not need to say good-bye forever to ice cream, cookies, pastries, pizza, or whatever you consider your most indulgent food and drink.

So the good news is that a proper diet would never involved serious or sustained hunger, as you do not want your body to panic. The problem is that even though the daily calorie deficit should not be drastic, it **MUST** be consistent, and this is why keeping track is important, because we will not be able to “guess” at a modest, but steady deficit. In my case I dieted well for 5 days, and took the weekend off, only to find that I was making no progress. If I had tracked the calories, I would have seen that the two days of indulgent eating was more than canceling out the 5 days of modest dieting.

Another wonderful benefit to this approach is flexibility, so that if I do go off my meal plan, even when I shouldn't, I can just call that detour a reward meal, or, heck, a reward day, and know it is not a big deal. And if you have some family celebration where you know you will eat more than usual, just make that your free meal, or your free day.

A final warning. It is great news that a proper diet does not involve any serious or sustained hunger, as you do not want your body to panic. However, while you caloric deficit should not be drastic, it **MUST** be consistent. and this is why keeping track is so important, because we will not be able to “guess” at a modest but steady deficit.

In the beginning I used to take a day off a full day a week, and eat whatever I wanted, but discovered I was taking such advantage of the opportunity to over indulge, that I would wipe out the progress of the previous six days. Think about it: if you are cutting just 400 calories a day, that is 2,400 calories in 6 days. If on the seventh day you

eat normally but just add a pint of Ben and Jerrys ice cream (1,000 calories), and an everything-on-it cheeseburger and large soda at a fast food restaurant (1,400 calories) you have wiped out your entire week's deficit. You should not count the calories of your reward meal, but try not to go overboard either. Better - track those calories of your free meal a few times just to learn how many calories are involved. Is it really worth sabotaging a whole week of discipline for one or two binge meals?

### **Misconception #5** - Change is the key to muscle growth

Actually, it is important NOT to change your weight routine too often, as otherwise you would have no way of knowing what is working and what is not. Yes, it is good to try different routines, especially in the beginning to see what you most enjoy, and also if you have been doing the exact same thing for many months, but really, the best exercise routine in the world is.....the one you can stick with. For you it might be yoga classes, aerobic classes or cycling class, using the cable machines, or the free weights, or the kettle bells, or the bands. As you advance you can become more technical and more precise, but there is not a one-size-fits-all routine, and in general, keeping a steady routine you enjoy is much better than constant change.

**Misconception #6** While lifting weights is essential if you want to build muscle, cardio is the most efficient way to lose fat.

Well, while it is true that lifting weights, and not cardio, is essential in gaining muscle, it is not true that cardio is the premiere way to lose fat.

Again, with limited time I have to oversimplify, but the math is pretty simple. On a treadmill you will burn about 300-350 calories in 45-60 minutes. That is equivalent to eating just a couple of cookies - a whole hour sweating on the treadmill! And worse, cardio tends to increase hunger and binging, as well as making you feel drained - I have a lot of trouble controlling my eating after lots of cardio.

Lifting weights, on the other hand, actually has the opposite effect, and it also builds muscle. Muscle, unlike fat, is dynamic - it requires constant energy to maintain itself, even at rest. A pound of muscle eats about 50 calories a day just to maintain itself, even while you are asleep. In other words if you gained 10 pounds of muscle, you would need 500 more calories a day to just maintain your weight, even without exercising at all. Plus muscle makes you look better, it gives you more energy, and you will be more healthy. Finally, lifting weights can give you plenty of cardio vascular exercise if you don't delay between exercises.

Cardio exercise is important for endurance, for sports training, and for improved health for the heart, lungs, and circulation, but as you can tell I do not put it high on my list for losing substantial weight long-term and it can be counterproductive in gaining muscle.

So if you enjoy doing aerobics, continue, by all means. But also be aware that generally people who do cardio do not do it long enough or hard enough to really drop lots of weight.

**Misconception #7:** You need to target areas of your body where you want to lose weight. This is completely false, and I think even among the general public this is pretty well known. If you came to me and said you have too much fat around your stomach, I would say the most important exercises for you would be in your legs and back, as those are the largest muscles and will burn the most energy when exercised. The bottom line is: you cannot lose fat locally. When you lose fat, you lose it from your head to your toes. Genetically, you might have a tendency to lose it in one place a little bit sooner than another, but your genetic disposition cannot be changed, and by and large fat is lost holistically. Yes, ladies, I am afraid that usually means you will lose fat as fast in the places you want it, as in the places you don't. If you exercise small muscles like your stomach or arms or inner thighs, you will burn much less energy, build much less muscle, and be that much further from running at a caloric deficit, which is the ONLY way you will start to lose fat. All those commercials marketing ab machines to get that six pack of abs are utter nonsense. There is only one way to get those 6 packs to show, and it is to drop your total body fat down to 10% for men and about 15% for women. Period. And the best way to do that is to focus on compound movements that target your largest muscles. Of course, if you have the time and interest, it is great to exercise smaller muscles, and everyone should exercise their core for stability, but these things will not transform your physique.

**Misconception #8** Fat will be converted into muscle when your weight training reaches a certain intensity.

Men, this will not be good news for you, as we almost always want to lose fat and gain muscle. The reality is you have to decide on one or the other. If you want to lose fat, you must run at a caloric deficit. If you want to gain muscle, you must run at a slight caloric overage (about 10% above your TDEE).

The only exception to this rule is if you are very overweight and new to lifting weights. In these cases you can do both at the same time, at least for a while.

But think about it - if your body is being given less calories than it needs to even maintain its current weight, where will it get the caloric energy to build brand new muscles, especially since those new muscles require more calories every day just to remain at rest? You cannot tell your body to do diametrically opposed things at the same time.

A textbook example of this is my own experience. When I began my campaign of losing weight, almost a year and a half ago, my strategy was to focus almost entirely on lifting heavy weights to keep or increase my muscle. I did get stronger, as my muscles learned to deal with heavier weights, but the actual amount of muscle in my body changed very little over all that time, despite the growing visibility of the muscles. I look very fit in the photos, but the reality is my total amount of muscle was very close what it was when I started. Sad but true. If I want to gain muscle, I will have to start eating above my TDEE and will see all that muscle definition disappear for a while. Once new muscle is gained, it will tend to stay there if I eat healthy, but I will not see the evidence until I again moderately restrict calories to strip off the fat. Again, you must do one or the other. It is interesting to note that your routine in the gym does not change that much, whether you want to gain muscle or lose weight, the key lies in the amount you are eating - slightly above or slightly below your TDEE.

## SIX FUNDAMENTAL AREAS THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

When I give this talk as a live presentation, I ask the audience to come up with the fundamentals of a fitness program. Of course, people usually mention exercise, which needs to be separated into resistance training (lifting weights usually) and cardio (or aerobic exercise). And of course people immediately mention diet or a meal plan. Then vitamins or what I would term “supplements.” And I like to add rest as a key ingredient.

Ok, then I prioritize them. I put diet as #2, resistance training as #3, rest as #4, cardio at #5, and supplements as #6. Hmm, number one is missing? What is it? What could possibly be more important than diet and exercise? Number 1 is Mental preparation, maybe better - mental training.

Let me just briefly review those six areas to add some details to what I have already shared. I will address them in reverse order:

#6 supplements. The only supplements I take on a continual basis are fish oil, a multivitamin, creatine, and protein powder. On a less regular basis I have taken something for sore joints and the last several months I will add a powder with caffeine to my water bottle at the gym. I buy all my supplements from the website called Legion Athletics. Protein powder is not a necessary supplement, but if you lift weights, you need above average protein, and shakes are a tasty and quick solution. And the king of all supplements is.....water. Drink lots of water (about 3/4 gallon a day for men, 1/2 gallon for women).

#5 Cardio - I really have never done cardio consistently, going as long as 9 months without ever stepping on a treadmill. But when I really want to get rid of stubborn fat, I will do intense cardio workouts 3 times a week for about 30 minutes each.

#4 Rest - Most of us should get about 7 or even 8 hours of sleep a night. Your muscles only grow when at rest, so make sleep a high priority. I myself am a bad sleeper, so I cannot offer any wise advice on this one. If you have secrets to sleeping well, do let me know!

#3 Resistance training - This essay has focused mostly on management of food intake, because that is almost always the reason people do not get results, or any results they can see. But it needs to be emphasized that transformation in your physique requires the interaction of both diet and exercise. They are like the two legs of progress - trying to cover distance on one leg just doesn't work.

In my case, because I was often undisciplined in my eating, I had to counteract the extra calories eaten by doing more intense workouts at the gym. That is a good example of using a strength (in my case enjoying tough workouts), to manage a defect (in my case eating more than I should). Exactly how you need to balance restricting calories (the intake) and burning calories (the output) depends on your own character and circumstances. In general, because exercise is good for you and starving yourself is unhealthy, it is better to increase your exercise (within reason) rather than decrease your calories excessively.

How, when, and what weights to lift is too large a topic to cover here of course. And in this area too one has to be clever in managing one's defects. In my case I have rotator cuff damage in my shoulders so I have to avoid any lifts above my head. And due to a crushed disc in my spine I have to avoid very heavy weights when doing Squats, for example. This is where a trainer might be helpful, as, with a little bit of creativity and experience, one can almost always work around any physical limitation.

I recommend two excellent books: "Feed the Muscle, Burn the Fat" by Tom Venuto, and "Bigger, Leaner, Stronger" by Michael Matthews (he has a companion book for women entitled Thinner, Leaner, Stronger". There are no doubt many other superb books on the market, but these are two I happen to have read and found very helpful. They lay out a fairly complete theory of fitness - the science of nutrition, what to eat, when; when to exercise and how.

In general, the advice for weights is the same as for a food plan - the best routine is the one you can stick to. Don't be afraid of trying all kinds of different routines, classes, and machines - always looking for something you enjoy enough to keep doing. But whatever you do, do with complete focus and effort, and get to the gym 4-5 days a week.

#2 Diet - As I hope I have shown, this is an area people make much more complicated than it needs to be. Magazines are full of articles on why you **have** to eat blueberries, or avocado, or quinoa, or kale, or whatever. Certain foods may have certain wonderful properties, but for the purposes of losing weight, nothing really matters except the calorie count and macronutrient ratio. Also keep in mind that often packaged foods advertise they contain healthy vitamins or minerals, while failing to mention that they are only in trace amounts that are of no real value.

We all know we should eat fresh and healthy food, and in my case I boiled it down to only one simple guideline, five words in fact, that sum up my entire diet plan. Eat FOOOI foods, or Food Of Only One Ingredient. That's F.O.O.O.I

In case it is not clear, you can eat a dish with lots of things in it, like a salad with lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, sunflower seeds, vinegar and oil; or a stew with chicken, peas, potatoes, rice, cheese, etc, - but each item is made of just one ingredient. Any and all spices are fine. In other words, avoid all processed foods. I realize that is a tall order for most people, but keep it as a goal to work towards. And keep in mind you can still eat all those forbidden foods you might miss, every week.

So at the end of each day I transfer the 3 macronutrient totals (the grams of protein, carbs, and fat eaten that day) to a separate summary sheet, along with my calorie totals for that day.

As the days pass, I can see exactly what my caloric deficit is, and on the day I weigh myself, which is once a week, there is no mystery - If I was honest and accurate, I will lose exactly as much weight as was expected. If the results are not what I want, I know the answer is a larger caloric deficit, created by either dropping the calories I take in when I eat, or increasing the calories I burn when I exercise. I also measure my waist, as that will tell me if I am losing fat rather than muscle. A set of body fat calipers, say from Accumeasure, and which cost only \$5, is also helpful.

While calorie counting may seem burdensome, it is actually quite liberating. In theory one could eat the same meal over and over and never really need to count after the first meal, but that is a class A example of a tidy theory that will never fit reality. It is why diets that ask you to eat just certain things in certain ratios, will never last long-term. In normal life, one day there is a food unexpectedly missing, or a new food you didn't expect, or a food you want to try, or a food you want to add. Or you can decide you want some fatty bacon that day and just adjust your other foods accordingly. Anything goes, as long as you weigh it or measure it, and scribble down the number for entry later in the day.

Over time you will develop a meal plan that you really enjoy, and that fits your caloric goals. The system is also self correcting, because if you do make bad food choices, like eating a bag of potato chips (not the snack size), it will jump out at you when you look at your totals for the day. You will never again have that deep frustration as you ask yourself “why am I not losing weight?!” because you will know exactly what you are doing, and what your target calorie intake should be.

Also, the macronutrient ratios recommended earlier are hard to meet unless you eat mostly healthy foods.

In summary then, if I said doing something new that takes maybe 5-10 minutes a day could transform your physique, would you be interested? And if it cost virtually nothing, except a few dollars for a food scale, and a tape measure for your waistline?

If it sounds like a good deal, it is, and the longer you do it the more second nature it becomes and the more you learn about food in general and about your own habits.

## MENTAL PREPARATION

There is not time to give a comprehensive treatment to the very important topic of mental preparation, but the two books I just referenced have excellent chapters on mental preparation and motivation. Even if you don't read the books through, read those chapters. I could put it this way: your physical transformation will go only so far as the support of your mental preparation.

After all, you and I are not animals, driven by blind instinct or mechanical conditioning. We are a composite of body and soul, of the physical and the spiritual, and our actions are usually guided by our mind, by our desires and goals and hopes and plans. If we don't have a very clear vision of where we want to go, and why we want to go there, we almost certainly are not going to get there, or anywhere far from where we already are. And this is not just important in the beginning, but all along the way - we have to keep remembering why we are doing what we are doing, and keep working to express those goals in daily, objective, concrete benchmarks (DOCs).

Here I will treat just two aspects of mental preparation: Defect Management, and the Why of Mental Preparation.

## PART ONE - DEFECT MANAGEMENT

Nice theories never work unless and until you translate them into something that fits your own character and pattern of defects.



I mentioned in the beginning that I think we all have a tendency to cheat, and we are very bad at seeing ourselves objectively. This is why the daily, objective, concrete steps outlined above, particularly in relation to diet, are such an effective antidote to those tendencies.

In addition I think it is fair to say there is also a good dose of vanity, laziness, love of comfort, and procrastination in each of us. As an amusing aside, in my early drafts of this talk I tried to address each defect separately, but I found that my vices are so intertwined and grow in such clusters, that I gave up on the project of trying to put them in neat categories.

Instead I will simply list different tactics, some big, some very small, that I have used to deal with my own fallen nature. You will need to make up your own, of course:

- 1) Perhaps the single biggest motivator, at least from the vanity/shame angle, is to take a picture of yourself in a bathing suit, in a relaxed position, and post that picture somewhere you see it every day, such as in your phone. A picture is worth a thousand words. Do you really want to keep looking like that person in the photo?
- 2) Certain people can work out at home, but I need the gym. I need those big mirrors to shame me into action or, when I look better, motivate me to continue. I need to see the pretty women, and watch the sports programs. I need the fancy machines to give me variety. For many, the social aspect of having and making friends at the gym is a big motivator also.
- 3) A minor adjustment I made was wearing a shirt to the gym that was a bit too tight for me when I was still 20 lbs overweight. Yes, wearing a baggy sweatshirt would be more appealing for me and others to look at, but I wanted to confront what I was: a chubby old man, and drive me to change.
- 4) I weigh myself only once a week. If you do more you can become neurotic and discouraged. If you do less you will lose valuable time before you know results and see if you are on track. The most likely days to over-eat are Friday night through Sunday, so I weigh myself on Sunday morning. That way, that drive to “see results” for the week, to impress myself, pushes back the temptations to overeat the day right before I will be weighed. And Sunday is usually my free-meal, and a good day to be with the family and relax in general, to reward myself for a week well done. And it is 7 days away from my next weigh in, so plenty of time to “get back with the program.”

5) I time the start of my workout to be just when I might tend to start feeling hungry. Exercise kills hunger, and afterwards I feel the most inspired to have a healthy, high-protein meal.

6) As already mentioned, in my case I avoid eating when I don't have a desire to eat (middle of the busy day), and eat most when I am most likely to binge (evening).

7) Never store your "cheat" foods in the house. Buy a half gallon of ice cream on Tuesday so that next Sunday you can eat half a cup? Who am I kidding? Better to go out and order two scoops at an ice cream store. Buy a box of oreos so you can have 4 oreos at the end of the week? It will never happen, the box will be gone in two days, max (at least in my case). Of course you do not want to deprive your family of snacks, etc. but try to find things they like which you do not, or only buy enough for the rest of the family to eat immediately. In general, if you stock it, you will eat it.

8) How did I break my addiction to butter? The truth is, I used to view butter as the main course - bread or rice or vegetables were just the template, the butter holder. This one took time. In my case, due to side effects from the cancer treatment, I suffer from dry mouth, so in addition to finding something like plain brown rice not very tasty, I also really need some moisture. And butter makes everything go down so well. So for a time I mixed no-calories or low calorie dressing with rice. The zero calorie butter sprays also worked well. But these are not Foooi foods, so my long term solution was to make many of my meals into a stew, combining meat and vegetables and water and adding low fat cottage cheese, which, when spices are added, makes a very tasty kind of sauce. I either add rice to the stew or ladle the sauce over the rice. By the way, there is nothing wrong with butter, it is just an extremely calorie dense food that is difficult to consume in a disciplined manner. If you track your calories and keep to your macronutrient ratio, you will figure this out very quickly.

While I have managed to remove all butter or oil from my diet for many months, I remain a restrained chocoholic. I manage to get in small amounts of chocolate (such as sucking on a few chocolate chips) or eat chocolate on my day off.

9) If I am confronted with a lack of healthy foods, or am short on time, I am very likely to eat whatever is in front of me. So in the evening, I try to make at least initial preparations for the next day. I might dole out all my vitamins for the next day (put them in a small plastic cup or bag), weigh out the chicken, or even cut and weigh the vegetables. Many people cook and freeze whole meals, which is great, but I prefer to eat everything fresh and have enough control over my schedule so that I can do that. But as a general rule, the more you prepare, the less you will cheat. If you "wing it" you will "blow it." At least I do.

10) While your meals can have infinite variety, I have found it helpful to develop particular meals I really enjoy that can be repeated over and over. It means much less preparation, you can be sure you have plenty of the healthy foods on hand, and then there is less chance you will “wing it” and “blow it.”

11) I do not sleep well. Never have. So in this case I have to actually try to re-program my brain to put more effort into getting enough rest. It is silly, but a simple mantra, like “Invest in rest” or “Rest is best” repeated over and over has helped me to give rest a higher priority, so even if I am not sleeping, I am sure to stay in bed resting.

12) Like most people, I think, my will power is not very strong when confronted directly with a strong temptation. If there is a chocolate chip cookie in front of me, I will eat it. If there are ten, I will eat ten, and so on. So the only solution is to accept this weakness and work to avoid being in front of that plate of cookies. This means you may have to be in a different part of the house when the family is having dessert or snacks, or ask the family not to buy certain foods you have trouble resisting, or don’t choose a restaurant that has large portions and high calorie foods, and so on. In short, avoid the occasion of a strong temptation, admitting you will not do well if confronted with it directly.

13) Never let the day end without adding in your calories for the day and moving the essential figures onto your summary sheet. That way every single day you are reminded of your goals and your progress. By the way, a daily examination of conscience, to review the day and make resolutions for the next, is also absolutely essential for developing a spiritual life. The fact that we have forgotten something so simple is why so many of us are spiritually flabby, as well as physically flabby.

Keep in mind that while we often have flabby muscles, we also tend to have flabby will power. We will not go from eating lots of junk food to eating 100% whole foods overnight, or over many nights. We have to be patient with ourselves, and realize this is a long term program.

Of course each one of us also has unique strengths that we bring to the discussion, and it is of course very helpful to identify your strengths and work to implement them. But that is another discussion, and, rather unfortunately, outside the scope of this brief talk.

## PART TWO - THE WHY OF MENTAL PREPARATION

I have been focusing on the how and the what of diet and defect management. But it would be good to end with the crowning jewel of human behavior and motivation: the WHY we do what we do. The Tom Venuto book has a wonderful chapter on this, and he guides you in writing out a statement of purpose, which you should put in a prominent place at your desk or in your wallet or on your phone - somewhere so that you can review it often. And it should be entirely positive - not dwelling on what you want to avoid, but on where you want to go.

Achieving a physical transformation can lead to increased vanity, pride, and self absorption - I would guess this is a temptation for nearly everyone. But it does not have to be that way - we are free to direct our efforts to a more selfless, and even a more supernatural, end.

For example

Being fit can be an act of service to our children, who look up to us and need a good role model.

Being fit can be an act of service to our spouse, who appreciates when we are physically attractive, healthy, and full of energy.

Being fit can be an act of service to our grandchildren, (for us old folks), or future grandchildren as it makes it much more likely that we will live long enough to enjoy them and be of service to them.

Being fit can be a “thank you” to the Creator for bringing us into existence. It is a sign of respect for the gift of life and good health.

Being fit can be an act of prayer, as we work to submit our bodies and our appetites to more noble goals than our own short term cravings and addiction to quick pleasures.

One of my greatest joys in life is when I am able to transform my hard work at the gym into an act of prayer. At those times, my heart is bursting with love and thanksgiving for my Creator, and my mind is dwelling on those I love and whom I want to serve. So I push on with one more rep, for my daughter, for my son, for my wife, and so on.

Here is my own, very personal, and very concrete, “Statement of purpose” which helped motivate me to push on in the tough times (and there WILL be tough times, when we want to give up):

May I give glory to God, and, in a spirit of thanksgiving and mortification:  
be a more desirable husband,  
a leader to my children,

a long-lived and energetic grandfather,  
and a good example to friends.

by losing 2 lbs a week until I weigh 190 (June 14) and have a waist of 38".

When achieved, continue to 15% body fat, regardless of weight or waist.

I will eat 2,000 calories each day, lift weights 5X week, and do aerobics 3X week.

That statement is a bit out of date, as I enjoyed the process so much that I dropped not 2" but 10" from my waist, and cut my body fat by another 50%. Doing this was one of the most rewarding and satisfying experiences of my life. And as is so often the case when we do the right thing, the benefits far exceed our expectations, and the temptation to return to old ways grows weaker. The feeling of being in control of one's eating habits, of learning to "just say no," and of being in harmony with one's body, brings a joy it is impossible to describe. And growing in discipline, will-power, and self-mastery brings benefits to all areas of life, including one's spiritual life.

Let me give at least a hint of what I mean by "the benefits exceed our expectations." In the beginning, I could not imagine living without certain foods (for example, putting butter on just about everything). I thought I needed stronger will power, and I needed to learn to live with deprivation, to do without what I really enjoyed. This is the beginning of the process, but the end is quite different. In the end, you no longer feel deprived at all, but actually get more pleasure from healthy foods than you did from junk foods. The impossible becomes not only possible, but desirable! What was once bitter, is now actually sweet. This is one of those experiences it is hard to imagine until you are actually there. And I cannot resist asking you to contemplate this idea from the perspective of the spiritual life, as there is the exact same progression.

If you are embarking on your own journey towards physical transformation, I wish you the very best, and hope these remarks will help you on your way.

When you do achieve your goals, please let me know and we can celebrate together. Or contact me for help along the way. My email is:  
[embracethemboth@gmail.com](mailto:embracethemboth@gmail.com)