

## General Fitness

As a personal trainer, the majority of clients I work with fall into one category: general fitness enthusiasts. These are people who share very common goals. The first of these goals is almost always to lose fat. The second is to gain lean mass, whether they state it directly or in other terms such as, 'firm up', improve shape' or 'get tighter'. The third goal is overall health and disease prevention. I would say that 90% of the folks I deal with fall into this general fitness category, and for good reason: Americans are in their worst shape ever, and at the same time, we place more emphasis on physical appearance than ever before. So millions of people are very motivated to improve their looks, whether they be 18 or 80.

With such a huge demand for similar goals, why is there such confusion? Well, for the same reason: because there is such huge demand, everybody is out professing their method to achieve these goals, often with a hefty price tag attached. Marketing is an incredible thing, and we are bombarded by it hundreds of times daily until it convinces us that Brand X or Such and So is the only way to achieve our desires. Unfortunately, the majority of these 'solutions' are false or inefficient at best. So the average American is left confused and discouraged.

This should not be the case! For this enormous segment of society, the needed knowledge is not complex or secret. Unlike the competitive athlete seeking to gain that last fraction of a percent of improvement, your average Joe does not need special routines, equipment or diets to succeed. The information needed has been around for decades but has been swept under the rug in favor of other gimmicks that produce far more revenue. In short, general fitness goals are the simplest to prescribe and to attain. It just ain't rocket science, regardless of what the infomercials want you to believe.

To clear up this confusion, I will present some very tried and true, and basic, routines to follow. Armed with this knowledge, an individual familiar with the weight room, cardio equipment and the supermarket can achieve their goals. If you are new to fitness, get easily intimidated or lack the accountability to make this lifestyle change, no problem. Just present this plan to any trainer and they will get you rolling along right away. And if they are smart, they might be happy to see someone willing to concentrate on what works instead of fad approaches.

### STEP ONE: NUTRITION

That's right, more important than exercise initially is a change in diet. Before you buy a gym membership or even some new spandex, take a week to make some dietary changes. If you have access to a good dietician or trainer, you can get more detailed than what I present here. For instance, they can analyze your current eating habits to calculate how many calories you currently consume, then construct a meal plan with the exact amount of nutrients to insure steady weight loss. And that's great. But it is not necessary. The base diet I present here is virtually guaranteed to be an improvement over your

existing habits. In order to maintain weight loss, all you must do is weigh yourself once weekly. If your weight goes up after the first week, reduce the portions slightly. If your weight drops too quickly, add a bit. Again, it doesn't have to be complicated. You don't need to buy any books or scales. Just apply the basic principles. And they are...

- 1) Eat frequently. Five meals per day is great. Increase gradually if needed. If you have only been eating twice, go to three, then four, and so on. The meal replacements that are recommended here make it very convenient. Do not allow more than four hours to go by without eating if at all possible.
- 2) Eat only natural foods. Notice I did not say organic. Organic is great. Fantastic stuff. But not necessary at this point. What I am calling for are regular vegetables and whole foods. If it is processed or has chemicals added, skip it. That isn't food; it's a cancer concoction.
- 3) Reduce sugars. This goes along with number 3. Most of the carbohydrate, which is sugar, in the Standard American Diet (SAD) comes from processed sources. Examples are soda, mashed potatoes, pies, breads. Notice how none of these 'foods' occur in nature in this form. Again, it isn't natural.
- 4) Drink lots of clean water. Use a water purifier at home and work if possible. Beware of bottled waters, especially spring; they have no higher standards of purity than regular tap. Distilled is best, followed by UV and microfiltration waters. But most importantly, just drink lots of water. A gallon per day is a safe bet for most folks.
- 5) Take a multivitamin/mineral. If you are doing anything other than laying on the couch, do not buy a typical drug store one-a-day. Those are crap. Get a potent athletic multi that you can take at least twice per day. Your body can only absorb so much at one time, so it's best to spread it out in multiple doses.

OK, so those are the rules. Put it all together and you get something like this:

Meal 1: Oatmeal, 100% rolled, not packaged junk, ½ cup precooked  
Yogurt, sugar free variety, any type, 1 normal serving  
Juice, Milk or soy milk, 4 oz (half a glass)  
3 egg whites, scrambled or boiled OR  
3 oz lean meat, no pork

Meal 2: Meal replacement such as Optimum Nutrition's brand, found here:  
<http://www.bodybuilding.com/store/opt/mrp2.html>  
OR  
one handful nuts and one cup cottage cheese

Meal 3: Large mixed salad  
4 oz lean meat, any style (no pork!)  
½ cup brown rice (precooked) or 1 medium sweet potato or 1 piece fruit

Meal 4: Repeat meal 2

Meal 5: ½ pound of mixed steamed vegetables, any type  
4 oz lean meat, any style  
½ cup brown rice (precooked) or 2 cups cooked wheat flour pasta  
any sauce to taste, such as teriyaki, sweet and sour or salsa

That's it. The first thing out of most folk's mouth is shock and surprise at the quantity of food that I am requiring. The problem with the SAD is a horrible lack of proper nutrients from vegetable sources and a huge over abundance of the wrong foods, such as sugars and fats. If you eat properly, you actually get a much larger volume of food than if you do not. Skip breakfast, have a couple of Big Macs for lunch, wash 'em down with a large Pepsi, then go out and have some soft tacos for dinner with a beer and compare the results. Less frequent eating, less overall volume but no comparison to the results you will see with this plan. And again, this is not necessarily *my* plan, this is just good common sense eating. Nothing radical here. Follow it for a week, weigh before you start and after, then adjust as necessary. Gain a pound? No big deal, just reduce the rice or pasta. Lose five? Add some more oatmeal in the morning or a piece of fruit to dinner.

## STEP TWO : TRAINING

Let's start with cardiovascular training. If you have been inactive recently, I recommend you build a decent aerobic base before you hit the weights. You will receive more benefit from your resistance training and minimize injury potential if you do. Therefore, I advise you to do only the following for the first four weeks: Any form of cardiovascular exercise, indoor or out, for approximately 30-45 minutes at least three times weekly. Follow each session with ten minutes of full body stretching, with an emphasis on the hamstrings and lower back. Some basic stretching guidelines are covered here : <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/pierce7ccc.htm>. If you have a gym membership that includes yoga or other stretching classes, try those too. I know you want to hop right into a full exercise program including weight training, but trust me, you are more likely to continue your routine if you start gradually like this and you will be much less likely to overwork any area of the body. After this first month, you should be accustomed to the dietary changes and have an aerobic base developed that is adequate for more intensive training. Let's go...

Do the following routine two to three times weekly. Three is better but not set in stone. If you have a busy schedule or work a physically demanding job, stick with twice weekly for the first few months. Keep your cardio at three times weekly, on the same days or alternate ones if it is more convenient for you. Just make sure you are warmed up and have done some light stretching before getting started.

**Leg Curl**  
**Squat, machine or freeweight, OR Lunge**  
**Calf Raise**

**Leg Raise**  
**Incline Bench Press**  
**Pulldown**  
**Lateral Raise**  
**Lying Tricep Extension aka 'Nosebusters'**  
**Incline Bench Curl**

Do only one set of each movement the first week, increase to two the second and finally three by the fourth week. Rest less than one minute between sets. Stick with about ten reps on your upper body and fifteen on your lower. Most importantly, continue to increase your weights whenever possible. Your strength levels should be improving quite rapidly for the first several months.

Each month, you should switch exercises. Buy one of the many books on weight training for a list of movements, or spend some time with your trainer. The body adapts to any set routine within three to four weeks, so it becomes difficult to continue to see progress without change. Stick with the oldest, most basic moves instead of fancy machines and cables. Just pick one exercise per bodypart, stick with three sets and increase your strength whenever possible. Work hard! An example of an alternate routine to be followed after the first couple of month's training would be:

**Stiff Leg Deadlift**  
**Leg Press**  
**Seated Calf Raise**  
**Incline Sit Up**  
**Bench Press**  
**Bent Over Row**  
**Dumbbell Military Press**  
**Tricep Pushdown**  
**Barbell Curl**

Increase your strength levels at every opportunity and your lean mass will increase. This will, in turn, increase your metabolic rate. The training, in conjunction with the nutrition plan presented above, will quickly bring about the desired changes in your body. Within six months, you can feel better than ever before, and within a year, your own relatives may not recognize you. There is no secret; it's just common sense and hard work. Now get to it!