

Fitness

Chances are that you are reading this because you are unhappy with past results at attaining the fitness level you desire and you're hoping the Reclaim 24 System will be your answer. Well, it will be your answer if you trust me and allow me to serve as your mentor. Follow the Reclaim 24 System! Although there are countless things in life that I know little or nothing about, fitness isn't one of them. This is an area of expertise for me. Please take advantage of that.

Without getting into unnecessary complications, there are three, primary kinds of fitness:

- Flexibility is the ability to move your joints and muscles through their full range of motion. Stretching is an exercise that helps you to be more flexible.
- Aerobic fitness means increasing how well your body uses oxygen. This depends on the condition of your heart, lungs, and muscles. Any activity that raises your heart rate, such as walking or running, can improve aerobic fitness.
- Muscle fitness means building stronger muscles and increasing how long you can use them (called endurance). Activities like weight lifting or push-ups can improve your muscular fitness.

You may be in better shape in one kind of fitness than another. For example, you might be flexible but have poor muscle strength. It's best to maintain all three kinds of fitness. But what should your goals be?

My book, *Reclaim 24*, talks about the four dimensions of wellness: **physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual**. Let's take a look at what the book says about the physical dimension of wellness.

Physical wellness is the ability to apply your knowledge, motivation, commitment, behavior, self-management, attitude, and skills toward achieving your personal fitness and health goals. You can maintain physical wellness by applying the knowledge and skills of sound nutrition, exercise, youth-extension strategies, and safety to everyday life. Hobbies can even play a large role! Physical wellness is characterized by high energy and vitality; freedom from or high adaptability to pain, dysfunction, and disability; a strong immune system; a body that feels light, balanced, strong and flexible and has good aerobic capacity; ability to meet physical challenges; and full capacity of all five senses plus a healthy libido.

As you can see, fitness plays a large role in physical wellness, which shouldn't be surprising. So, when we are deciding what our fitness goals should be, it makes great sense to be aligning our goals with the characteristics of physical wellness: high energy and vitality; freedom from or high adaptability to pain, dysfunction, and disability; and so on. Even though you might want to measure certain aspects of your fitness to see how you are progressing or sustaining—such as how fast you can run a mile, or how much weight you can bench-press—ultimately *you should be driving towards physical wellness* and your understanding of it. In fact, you should be driving towards a *lifetime* of physical wellness. But not too many people think that way. They *expect* to get old and to deteriorate, and they carry on accordingly. They *hope* they will be different or lucky, but they do nothing about it. They are not acquainted with the principles of “ageless living” or how to achieve it.

Balanced fitness usually brings with it an improvement in appearance as well as health. Appearance improvement is a large part of my program. This means balanced fitness also involves emotional wellness. That's where self-esteem and a positive emotional outlook play a large role. Not only that, but fitness is now known to improve intellectual or mental wellness, too. An individual who is not physically fit simply cannot be at the top of his or her intellectual game.

What Have I Been Doing Wrong?

Did you know that over 53% of women and 44% of men fail to make it past three weeks of a structured exercise and diet program? Why such a high failure rate? I'll tell you.

Most of us fail, even when loaded with conviction, because the information presently available concerning proper exercise and diet is flat out wrong! It's nothing but a "crapshoot" for most of us when trying to decipher all of the conflicting information. Further, food manufacturers constantly take advantage of the current confusion about health and fitness. They exploit loopholes in the food labeling laws to market their most profitable products with false or misleading claims.

For example, consider 2% milk. It's only 2% fat, right? Sounds innocuous, doesn't it? But does that mean only 2% of the calories come from fat? Not a chance. Take all of the water out of a gallon of milk and what you will have left is a mixture that is 35% fat calories. All of a sudden 2% milk doesn't look like a low-fat food product, does it? That approach of measuring fat percentage by volume rather than by caloric proportion is what I would call "watering down the public's perceptions." And there's a whole lot more misleading numbers where that comes from. See? The right information is important.

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So, what have you been doing wrong? Here are some possibilities.

- You've been looking for your inspiration in all the wrong places. The people or organizations you have trusted to give you good information may not deserve your trust! If you are getting fitness information from someone, how do *they* look? That's the real test. How long have they looked that way? If they look good, do they lead a balanced life of wellness in all its dimensions, or do they spend most of their spare time in a gym carrying on as a one-dimensional creature?
- You *know* you've been following poor fitness habits, but you don't know the best ways to turn that around.
- You've been mesmerized by the sale of junk fitness equipment.
- Your fitness programs haven't fit your lifestyle.
- You've been spending too much time with your fitness training while not getting the benefits you think you should from all the effort.
- You haven't chosen a program intended to keep you fit for life!
- You carry a lot of hope about how you'd like life to turn out for you, but you don't contribute very much otherwise. Hope is not a course of action! Here's the thing:

You need a compelling *Purpose* to act, one to propel you in the right direction and motivate you to undertake a plan designed to get you what you want.

You need a sound *Action Plan* so you have something concrete to work with and strive for, right from day one—a plan that will bring some *quick, significant results* to show you that you're indeed on the right track.

You need a *Passion* for wellness that will not only fire your imagination so you can see what a future with maximum wellness looks like, but will also inspire you to warmly embrace the continued discipline needed to carry through with your *Action plan*.

Learn How to Exercise Smarter, Not Harder

Time and again I witness individuals spending hours in the gym, five to six days a week, performing marathon sets in the futile attempt to gain muscle and body tone. I say futile because month after month and year after year these people rarely change. Yet they continue to believe that if a little is good then more must be better.

That's a myth.

If you're getting your advice from popular muscle magazines—both the male and female versions—you've probably already discovered that most of them follow the mythical more-is-better concept. You read that so-and-so pro bodybuilder or fitness queen performs four different exercises at five sets apiece per body part (for example, the chest). You think, "Well gosh, if it works for him or her, it will surely work for me!" Sorry. It doesn't work that way. Sadly, there aren't very many people who know enough about exercise physiology to explain why it doesn't work that way.

With the possible exception of athletes using performance-enhancing drugs, the more-is-better approach will lead to overtraining—the number one reason body shapers and bodybuilders fail to progress. Performance-enhancing drugs will often get results for very heavy trainers because they allow athletes to recuperate more quickly and efficiently following heavy workout stresses. These athletes, therefore, don't suffer so much from the lean tissue tear-down effects of overtraining (but they may suffer from the side effects of performance drugs).

Every once in a while an athlete blessed with superior genes will come along and be able to get spectacular results from heavy workouts year after year without using drugs. But it hardly ever happens. And you are not likely to be one with such superior genes or you'd know it. The general rule is that long-term physique builders who follow persistently heavy workout schedules must resort to stress-adapting drugs if they want superior results. This is not a pretty picture. Knowing what research has shown about the deleterious effects of overtraining, I even question the results achieved by genetically gifted athletes. I wonder what kind of results they would have gotten if they had allowed for more recuperation and had trained smarter? Would they have been able to achieve even more development if they had spent less time in the gym and more time resting? I think so.

Straight Talk about Aging Myths and Lifetime Strategies

Here's a simple question that I often receive in one form or another: "I'm 42 years old and have never been involved in any kind of structured exercise like weight training. Is it more difficult to develop this habit at my age?"

I've had hundreds of "uninvolved" patients, much older than 42, start and continue my program. They are getting simply wonderful results. Allow me to get right to the heart of wellness so you can see the larger picture and the role fitness plays.

Most people who have gone beyond their mid 30s and into their early 40s have taken stock and heard themselves saying,

“Where is my quality of life going?
I don't want to grow old, sick and fat!”

Well, you can do something about it if you dare yourself to BE WELL, NOW, before too much damage is done! Here's the secret:

It is not calendar years, but built-up damage from stress, errant thinking, and lack of crucial movement that are stealing your quality of life!

It actually starts when you are in your teens and twenties, but you don't notice it. Yet, the stress and repercussions keeps building. Then one day you “wake up” and begin to see and feel the results. Can grunts, groans, and whimpers be far behind?

No, you can't change your calendar age, but you can resist, or even reverse, years of stress damage if you're not too late. And the sooner you start, the better the results. It's all about learning science-based secrets for ageless living and shattering the perpetual myths that cloud your vision. But you really do need to recognize the early hints of runaway stress.

Early Hints of Runaway Stress

We get plenty of forewarning about runaway stress—from many directions. Here are some common signs of runaway stress. Even if you haven't experienced some of them yourself, I'm sure they won't surprise you:

- You cringe in front of a mirror because of growing bulges, fading muscle tone, or unmistakable signs of “premature aging.”
- Aches, pains, or a foggy brain have become your closest friends.
- You feel tension. You're irritable. You aren't able to concentrate.
- You experience dry mouth, teeth grinding, sweaty palms or cold hands, a pounding heart, shallow breathing, chronic headache, low self-esteem, or withdrawal.
- Your sleep quality is in the pits, and exhaustion rules your day.
- You get an upset stomach or urinate frequently.
- You have a lowered sexual drive.
- Your workouts are, well, not working out!
- Tight muscles may cause pain and trembling, or you might have nervous twitches.
- You know your hormone balances are all out of whack, but you have no idea what to do about it other than suffer.
- Your doctor has you worried about the “numbers” from your last physical exam.
- Your single greatest weapon for warding off surgery or chronic disease is hope.

- You are handling your quality-of-life problems with stimulants, products from a drugstore, and/or the services of “sickness care” professionals.
- As a spouse, parent, lover, friend, business owner, employee, student, fitness seeker, or creative worker, your *lackluster performance* is leaving others out in the cold—and you’re not feeling very warm about it, either!

Got stress?

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It’s gut-wrenching for me to see a new patient walk into my wellness clinic who is too far gone for me to help them reverse their pain and ravaged health. Sadly, too much damage has been done for too long. Oh, yes, I can almost always make them more comfortable without pill dispensers drugging them out of their senses, but I just can’t get used to serving these troubled ones and their faded hopes. I’m a big guy, yet sometimes I cry at night having examined them and listened to their stories of anguish.

The problem?

These broken souls have been on a type of descending “conveyor belt to hell,” often for many years. Yet, their quality of life began slipping from their grasp decades ago, *with plenty of forewarning*. For them, their conveyor-belt future probably contains much of what follows...

A “Conveyor-Belt-to-Hell” Future

- Chronic disease symptoms such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, and heart/circulatory disorders.
- Female problems, prostate problems, and hearing problems.
- Wheel chairs, canes, walkers, motorized carts, oxygen bottles, and adult diapers.
- Brittle bones and shrunken, stooped bodies, plus a medical specialty designed just for “old people” called geriatrics.
- Heart bypass scars and the horrors of Alzheimer’s.
- The life-altering and often life-destroying devastation of chemotherapy.
- Financial ravages resulting from explosive medical fees, drug costs, and “assisted” living expenses.

Does that list sound credible? I can’t imagine why it wouldn’t if you just look around you. So, what’s wrong with that picture?

The vast majority of those riding the lengthy conveyor belt to hell have made many, many poor health choices all their lives. The saddest thing is that most of the riders didn’t even know they were making poor choices. They listened to trusted voices, but those voices were not coming from those versed in “wellness” or even illness prevention. Rather, the voices were coming from those versed in sickness care and symptom masking through drugs. Although both sickness care and drugs are necessary under certain conditions, *they are not the tools of wellness and prevention*. Shouldn’t you know the differences? Shouldn’t you know what approaches are best for which situations?

Despite the passage of decades beyond our 20s, most of us still have access to an inborn capacity or potential for rejuvenating ourselves and living agelessly well into our “senior” years—that is

if we haven't already done too much damage to ourselves. Tapping into that potential, our "fountain of youth," gives us a new lease on life. The earlier we start, the easier it is. But bemoaning past mistakes is silly. There's an old Chinese proverb: "The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is today."

You're never too old to adopt positive changes in your life. Ending poor habits while simultaneously developing good ones is a matter of bringing some discipline to your mind. It's not about age at all.

A habit is a habit, whether a good one or a bad one. Developing good habits such as exercise and a life-affirming diet may take time and discipline, but once formed, these habits only get stronger when you see positive changes taking place. You have to decide which habits are going to bring you happiness and which will bring you grief; which will bring success and which will simply rob you of precious time and quality of life. Transforming your body into something you can be proud of will ultimately lead to transforming your inner-self as well. Once you've mastered the discipline of changing your body, you'll have gained greater mastery in other aspects of your life. It all works together.

Do you know what the single greatest myth is about aging? It's that we are in a battle against time. But that's not true. Time harbors no enemy! Our greatest enemy is fear, ignorance, and resignation promoted by harmful habits and the cultural expectations we have about aging. Let me give you just one quick viewpoint on that idea with a quote from Dave Draper who writes on davedraper.com. He's a former world champion bodybuilder who is in his 60's and still trains diligently:

"You don't lose your health and strength; you throw it away. You don't get out of condition; you're tossed out for lack of participation. Fitness is not lost; it's squandered like thankless treasure. Your muscles don't get soft; they evacuate. Strength moves out when your stomach moves in and stamina checks out while you're sleeping ... on the couch in the middle of the day."

Aging. We all do it, but some do it so much better than others! Why is that? Is it genetics? Is it the luck of the draw? Will "diet and exercise," by themselves, get you where you want to go? And do you really have a good picture of how you want your life to unfold, a picture that hasn't been distorted or even mangled by the myths about aging that flood our culture?

I'm sure you're sensitive to the gradual loss—and sometimes not so gradual loss—of people's health, vitality, and appearance, *especially if you're starting to see those losses in yourself!* **Although all of us are destined to stop breathing one day, the self-care path we choose between now and then will determine how much of that breathing time will be devoted to a rich, productive life.** The truth is we really have *much* more to say about the richness of our lives *well into advancing years* than we've been told. It's about our making the choice to be all that we can be for our families, our friends, our careers, ourselves!

I'll bet you have some vague pictures in your mind about what you don't want to see happening to you over time. Let me guess. You don't want growing bulges in your waistline, thighs, butt, breasts, or prostate. You don't want your hormones going haywire. You don't want your life turned upside down by cancer or chronic diseases such as arthritis and diabetes. You don't want to lose your flexibility with each passing year, either in motion or disposition. You don't want to see yourself at the growing mercy of drugs and surgery, or in a weak, frail, feeble state. And when those wonderful years of retirement and

greater personal freedom arrive (if they haven't already), you don't want to see yourself languish—possibly for decades—in a state of, well, doing little more than breathing; a state where you struggle and depend on others to get you through the day—and maybe even change your diapers.

No, you don't want those things for yourself. Nor do I. Are they totally avoidable? Of course not. Must you experience them? That's another question altogether. And choice is paramount.

So I ask you a serious question at this point, one that you should think about deeply: *Are you depending on hope and myths to avoid experiencing the things you don't want to see happen? **Are you consciously or unconsciously depending on the grace of God to save you from the typical ravages of aging?***

I have news for you. With rare exceptions, God has a track record of helping those who help themselves. Look around you. How many “hope-filled” people are delivered from their self-destructive follies without their own efforts? Wellness is 95% self-care.

So if you haven't already started, it's high time to think and act upon what you do want to experience and not what you don't want to experience. For example, did you know that men with stronger muscles from regular weight training are up to 40 percent less likely to die from cancer, according to new research by an international team? Those findings suggest that muscular strength is as important as staying slim and eating healthfully when it comes to protecting your body against deadly tumors. What will you do with that information?

Even if you are a “senior,” nothing about the *Reclaim 24 System* will keep you from enjoying the same quality-of-life benefits that younger practitioners of the system enjoy. Good habits will carry the day no matter what your age.

Everyone is destined to leave the planet some day ... even us “boomers.” Yes, we have genetics and accidents to account for, but today we know that genetics determines destiny far less than we thought at one time. In fact, the impact of genetics on long-term health is now being turned on its head. We're learning that life choices often affect whether or not mischievous genes ever get to do their dirty deeds. Choices—by a very wide margin—are what determine our wellness destinies.

If you'd also like to live a fabulous, productive, vital life and then just cease to run when your time has come, then you need to know much more than medicine, pharmacology, and TV drug commercials teach you. For example, you now know that it's not calendar years that harm us, but accumulated stress, inactivity, and faulty thinking! You need to know about the many alternatives that self-care provides.

In the very end, our bodies just stop working and we “check out.” My fondest vision for those I care for is that we will cavort through life, including our “senior” years, with pep in our step, a twinkle in our eyes, and the joy of getting out of bed each morning under our own steam while looking deliciously to the adventures of the day. Then, one morning we just don't wake up, or maybe we keel over mid afternoon and stir no more, or just spend a few days in the hospital saying our grateful goodbyes to those whom we love. Now that's a picture I can embrace, *and one that I know is well within your grasp and mine*. Yes, I'd much rather just keel over following a fulfilling, vital life than take a long, desolate ride on the conveyor belt to hell, waiting—or even hoping—for nature to bid my body adieu. And I'm willing to do my part to make that fulfilling, vital life my reality for both my loved ones and myself. How about you?

The *Reclaim 24 System* works because it's easy to follow and not built on a foundation of myth. Rather, it's built upon a foundation of scientific research that hasn't been mangled by lobbies, special interests, and government bureaucrats. It's also built upon decades of cautious and painstaking personal research and experience.

There's no reason why your 20s should be your peak years! There's no overwhelming reason why you can't "flatten" that peak over three, four, five, or even more decades. But in order to live that way, *you must stop practicing the mistakes that prevent ageless living*—repeated mistakes that eventually make damage recovery and rejuvenation impossible. If we insist on making the same old mistakes, our lives start revolving around drugs, surgery, dependence on medical intervention, and a long, disheartening trip on the conveyor belt to hell. On the other hand, those who practice an inspired program of optimized living dramatically increase their chances of extending their youth far beyond what medicine terms "normal." Does that work for you?

Exercise Physiology

Muscles are made up of bundles of fibers that contract. Individual fibers within these bundles react in "all or nothing" patterns. In other words, any given fiber—called a myofibril—is either fully "fired" by the nervous system for shortening, or it isn't fired at all. This means that the variability in contraction of the *overall* muscle is based on the *number* of fibers that contract. Therefore, good muscle-building exercises will engage as many muscle fibers as possible, and for a sufficient amount of time to stimulate them fully. Muscles grow best with the intense stimulation of as many muscle fibers as possible.

It's muscle growth (both size and density) that ultimately shapes our bodies, speeds our metabolism, and enables us to readily maintain our desired contours and dimensions. As you add muscle, you'll become stronger and firmer, you'll increase bone density (which may help prevent osteoporosis later in life), and your metabolism will increase, enhancing your ability to burn off nasty, unwanted, unsightly fat. At the bottom of it all, resistance training is mandatory if a lean, wonderfully contoured body is part of your fitness goal. All will be well if you don't "overtrain."

Overtraining is the act of working a muscle or group of muscles beyond what is needed to cause a maximum stimulus for growth. That means you should focus only on performing a *quality* set or sets of exercises rather than increasing the number of sets. **If you want to maximize your individual potential, you must avoid overtraining at all costs.** Overtraining is the number one reason so many people fail to progress in muscle and lean tissue development.

In my system, once you have completed the number of sets outlined, you need to discontinue exercising that particular muscle group. *If you press ahead with additional sets, it means either you did not fatigue yourself with the required number of sets, or you're simply choosing to ignore this rule—at your peril.*

It's true that our muscles will respond and grow under high intensity stress much better than low intensity stress. But if you overdo high intensity by working out too long or performing too many sets, new muscle development will *stop* and you'll start getting injured. In fact, ***it's even possible for your muscles to shrink because too much stress creates a hormonal condition that converts muscle into fuel to protect the body from the additional stress.*** And there goes all your efforts to build muscle!

On the other hand, if workout intensity is too low, your muscles may never get the full stimulus they need and won't fully develop, even with adequate time in the gym.

You can easily see how this principle works with professional athletes. Compare the sport of sprinting with that of long distance running. Sprinters have lean, well-muscled physiques (both men and women). Their workouts consist of high intensity, short duration routines. In contrast, when you look at long distance or marathon runners—those who typically run over 100 miles per

week at slow speeds (relative to sprinters)—you’ll see they have somewhat soft, stringy muscles with little definition. They look absolutely nothing like the athletes who run 100-yard dashes. In truth, marathon runners are severely overtrained. This can be verified by several objective tests. Further, their blood levels of antioxidants rank just below smokers, which isn’t good at all!

For a muscle to change, it must first be subject to a stimulus such as weight resistance exercise. This stress or stimulus results in micro-trauma to the individual fibers (myofibrils) that make up that muscle. When the body repairs these micro-tears—a typical process for muscles—it leads to a stronger and more developed muscle. If the repair process is hindered in any way, the full potential for growth is minimized and the results are disappointing.

When does the repair process take place? Well it certainly doesn’t take place while you’re forcing additional sets upon a muscle group after you’ve adequately stressed it!

Muscle growth and repair occur only when you are resting. No rest equals no growth!

This following point is strange but true. When a muscle has been fully stressed but not overstressed, *rest is the closest thing you can get to using anabolic steroids for muscle growth*. The effects are quite similar. So, if you want those muscles to respond to the hard work you put in at the gym or at home, you simply *must* allow plenty of time for rest, which even includes taking an occasional nap. My system *never* has you working out two days in a row. There is always one or two days of rest between your three-times-per-week workouts.

Naps are anabolic (tissue building) in nature and work wonders for mental recuperation as well. Rest also means staying away from the gym between workouts. You use these rest days to take care of other life matters, or to simply enjoy some leisure time. Could this be any clearer? Could following the work-until-you-drop myth be any dumber? The exercise world is chock full of amateur and professional “experts” who don’t understand muscle physiology. Don’t be a part of that group!

One of the greatest handicaps an undisciplined body builder or body shaper faces is the strong impulse (at least until the impulse is retrained) to perform any given exercise *in the easiest way possible*. This means he or she will instinctively take advantage of inertia and the ready “availability” of adjoining muscles (plus posture deviations) to complete a given repetition. This is called “cheating” in gym parlance.

The problem with cheating is that fewer muscle fibers are stimulated to contract than if a slower, more controlled approach is used to lift the weight. In other words, for muscle building, well-controlled movements do not use inertia to aid completion. Remember, the name of the game is to stimulate as many fibers as possible, but only in the muscle *being trained*. Inertial movements and other forms of cheating work against this. That’s why my system avoids such movements.

The common problem with inertial movements is they usually require the assistance of other muscle groups in order to gather the momentum needed for cheating. These are muscles that you *don’t* want to train with the given exercise. For example, it’s common to see a lifter arch his or her back during the explosive part of a biceps curl. This certainly makes the curl easier. But it defeats the principle of maximum muscle-fiber stimulation. The result is that the bicep group you *want* to be training isn’t getting the fully intended benefit because other muscle groups—both the back and the shoulders—have inadvertently been recruited during the movement to make the biceps curl easier. So, fewer bicep muscle fibers get stimulated.

The solution to the problem of inertia and cheating is to attempt to complete your repetition in a slow and controlled manner while staunchly retaining your posture. In this way, the largest number of fibers in the desired muscle group is acted upon effectively. This stimulates the muscle to its full capacity.

To perform your repetitions in a slow, controlled, posture-preserving manner may mean you have to use a lighter weight initially. As you continue to exercise properly, you'll soon find your strength increasing as well as the need to increase the weight.

Resistance training requires two-phase movements for each exercise repetition. The first phase of the movement tightens and shortens the muscles being stimulated (contraction), and the second phase of the movement releases and lengthens the muscles. For the best results, phase 2 should be done slowly, in a controlled way. Numerous studies have shown that slow, controlled movements in *both* directions are necessary to stimulate a muscle to its full capacity.

I explained the importance of high-intensity training earlier, but how do you achieve this? Well, one component of intensity is making certain you continue to push through your set until your muscles can no longer complete a full, additional repetition. This is what we call "proceeding to muscle failure." This means that, on a scale of 1 to 10, *you should be performing at intensity level 10 for each set that isn't a warm-up set*. It's because of this 10-level intensity that only two to four sets are needed to maximize the stress load on the muscle or muscle group you're training. Besides, after pushing this hard for two sets, you won't want to do additional sets!

To enhance high-intensity training even further, we use three techniques to stress muscles at the end of a set, *after* you've completed your final, full repetition. These techniques add to the intensity level, which in turn force the muscle to continue to respond and develop. I fully explain these additional techniques in my *Reclaim 24* book.

To repeat, more important than the number of repetitions in a set is the *quality and intensity of the movements you perform*. The most crucial set in any given workout is the one you're performing now, meaning not the last one you did or the next one, but *this* one. Always concentrate solely on your current set and finish it with your best effort.

All in all, a rep range between 6 and 12 will allow you to adequately stimulate the most fibers and therefore best stimulate muscle growth. For beginners I recommend initially choosing resistances or weights that keep you around the 10–12 repetition range. Later, attempt heavier weight that will force you into the 6-8 rep range. But please don't preoccupy yourself with the number of repetitions completed as long as you can feel you're taxing your muscles to their limit.

You'll no doubt hear, if you haven't already, that repetitions in the range of 15 to 20 are better when trying to achieve better muscle definition. This is ludicrous. You'll get lean when you add muscle and watch your diet, not when you simply perform long sets. If you want to do this for the occasional "shock value" to your muscles to help prevent adaptation, go for it. Just don't feel that you need to do it very often or that it will help you get the definition you seek. It won't.

How much rest should you allow between sets? As a rule of thumb, you need only 30 seconds of rest following warm-up sets and about 60 seconds between your high-intensity sets. The main point is to make certain you have ample time to recuperate between your high intensity sets. A little more or less than 60 seconds isn't going to make a difference.

The Role Played By “Neuromuscular Recruitment”

This term is really less technical than it sounds at first blush. It will make sense with an illustration. In order for your muscles to contract, there must be a signal sent from your brain to activate the fibers that make up the bulk of your muscle. When preparing to lift a pencil, your brain sends signals to just enough fibers to accomplish this task (remember, the fibers that make up a muscle contract independently, and are either contracted completely, or not contracted at all). Because you've trained your brain to know that the weight of a pencil is quite small, the proper signals are sent to the muscles of your arm, hand, and fingers to fire a minimal number of fibers.

Now, let's suppose you're instructed to bend down and lift a barbell weighing 200 lbs. Knowing this, you'll prepare yourself mentally, get into position, breathe in deeply, and go for it. But what if someone has fooled you and the real weight of the barbell is only 10 lbs? What will happen? You will most likely jerk that weight with everything you have and fall on your backside in total surprise!

That's neuromuscular recruitment in action! Your nervous system recruits the number of muscle fibers it expects will be required for the task. In the above situation, your brain is fooled into thinking it needs to send enough signals to your muscles to achieve a 200 lb. lift when in fact the weight is only 10 lbs. Because of this, *all* your muscle fibers contract; but since the actual resistance is only 10 lbs., you will fall on your butt. If you know beforehand that the weight is only 10 lbs., this will not happen and you will complete your lift eloquently (we can hope).

When it comes to resistance training, it's important to educate the brain to effectively and efficiently do its job. Your warm-up sets not only warm your muscles for the more intense sets to come, they also prepare the brain for adequate neuromuscular recruitment by incrementally informing it that more weight is on the way. The brain is therefore better equipped to send out the number of signals you will need to lift the heaviest weight you can for 6–12 intense reps. Furthermore, two intense sets per exercise will convince the brain to activate greater numbers of fibers than only one set. Better “coverage.”

The Role of Interval Training for Cardiovascular Fitness

Cardiovascular interval training is a high-intensity, short-duration type of exertion meant to work the heart and lungs as well as burn off excessive glycogen stores. The burn-off works like this...

The blood sugar, glucose, is stored within the muscles or liver in a form called glycogen, a form that the body quickly and easily converts back to glucose. The interesting thing about glucose is that it requires no oxygen to burn. This means it is an anaerobic fuel ideal for fueling high-intensity, short-duration workouts—workouts for which energy needs must be satisfied when oxygen is in short supply. Yet, when glycogen stores run low, the body will also convert its lean tissue and fat into glucose and certain fatty acids that will burn. Your lean tissue, by the way, includes muscle, bone, connective tissue, and so on—tissue that you don't want to be using for fuel!

Now here's where caution comes in. The brain runs on glucose, and the body protects the brain—the body's command and control center—more than any other organ. When glycogen stores start running low, the body will conserve the remainder for brain use and automatically shift to other sources of fuel to support non-brain functions. This means it will start to burn its own lean tissue and stored fat. But since fat converts more slowly to fuel than lean tissue, it is the

last to go under anaerobic conditions. So, any time your workout burns too much glycogen, you are putting your muscles and other lean tissue at risk of being used for fuel. This is the last thing you want your workouts to do for you!

However, once an intense workout has ended and you are back in an aerobic state, the body's demand for quick energy lessens. In its biological wisdom, the body will happily switch to metabolizing stored fat for fuel rather than consume its lean tissue. Fat's slower conversion rate will not serve as a hindrance; and your fat reserves *will* burn if your hormone system is healthy.

So, the secret is to keep your workout short and sweet. You'll burn up much of your glycogen stores during the 30 minutes of resistance training and consume an additional amount during your 10-minute interval training that immediately follows. With your intense, 40-minute workout, you'll deplete a large portion of your body's glycogen stores without getting into the danger zone. In turn, that will signal the brain to dip into the body's fat reserves when your workout ends.

In fact, you want to take advantage of the fat-burning mode for the next 30-45 minutes following your workout. This means ingesting nothing but water for that interval. But you don't want to go much beyond 30-45 minutes without eating once again. You need to replenish your exercised muscles for recuperation and growth. If you wait too long, that won't happen. By using this strategy, you not only exercise your heart and lungs, but you also get approximately 30-45 minutes of fat burning during the rest period before your next meal. Doesn't this sound like a better alternative to your typical aerobic workout?

Now, most people don't know this, but interval training—which means go fast then go slow then repeat—offers definite advantages over low-intensity cardio work, even though it is more challenging. For example:

1. It burns more calories than low intensity training, meaning you can burn more fat in shorter workouts.
2. Higher intensities stimulate your metabolism far more *after* the workouts than lower intensity training. This means you continue to burn calories and fat for long periods after you're done training. This is not true with low intensity training.
3. Training at higher speeds, such as with high intensity, training can dramatically improve sports performance for those interested in that. Football players can sprint faster and recover more quickly between plays. Tennis players can keep chasing down balls during longer points. Even endurance athletes benefit by teaching their bodies to work at a faster pace.

And so, that's why high-intensity interval training is a part of the *Reclaim 24 System*. I would like to emphasize that before beginning the *Reclaim 24* high-intensity workout and interval training, visit your doctor if you have any health concerns. Such concerns would include, but not be limited to, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, asthma, abnormal blood profiles, and a history of stroke or seizure. Proper exercise rarely places us at risk, but you should always take caution.

To further help prevent complications, begin slowly, using moderate intensity until you feel confident in pushing harder. There is simply no need to gain a few days of higher intensity for something you will be doing for a lifetime. As I've seen with all of the individuals who have

adopted this system, I'm confident that you'll not only get results, but that you'll also find it to be an enjoyable experience—one that's easy to continue as a lifestyle.

No Need to Spend 30 to 60 Minutes on a Treadmill!

Q: Can I develop a nice body taking aerobic classes, jogging, or using a treadmill?

A: Unfortunately not. Please understand that by performing only aerobic exercises, you may improve your cardiovascular health and might even keep your weight in check. You'll not, however, develop a toned, muscle-defined body to any great extent. The visual differences between straight aerobic training and resistance training are dramatic. Aerobic training will have very little if any effect on changing the shape of your body. In fact, many people find that they can't even control their weight with aerobics because it makes them eat more!

Please keep in mind that cardiovascular training is not an exact science, although many would like you to believe it is by publishing charts for different age groups. Moreover, it's been seriously overrated in its ability to shed fat and chisel the abs. If you're lucky, you may actually lose some weight with aerobics over time. But then you'll just be a flabby, skinny person. Why, then, do all the so-called fitness "gurus" say you must do aerobic training? Because they are working with the wrong information.

If you want to change your body composition, waste no more of your precious time trying to do it with boring aerobic activities. Too much aerobic training can actually hinder your progress since it can lead to both muscle atrophy and a slower metabolism. However, if you feel you really want to take part in an occasional aerobics class, spin class, or romp on the treadmill or stair-stepper, go for it. But do it for the fun of it as well as the cardiovascular fitness. Just limit such activities to two or three times per week. Although jogging on a treadmill won't offer much in the way of toning and shaping your body, it will offer tremendous benefits toward your cardiovascular health.

Although I don't see much value in low-intensity aerobic training for body shaping, I do believe in maintaining cardiovascular fitness. Here's how it works with the *Reclaim 24 System*.

Any type of exercise that makes the heart and lungs work harder is, by definition, cardiovascular fitness training. This includes moderately paced resistance training. As you move through your *Reclaim 24* workout, you'll soon find you have no time to chat with fellow gym members or take calls on your cell phone. Instead, you'll have to stay focused and move through the workout at a steady pace if you're to complete it in the allotted time of 30 minutes. This will keep your heart rate elevated throughout this period and improve your cardiovascular fitness as a result. But for those of you who wish to really get the heart and lungs pumping, I've included 10 minutes of interval training at the end of your resistance training.

Therefore, you can relax if you thought I was going to tell you that you must do 30-40 minutes of aerobic training five days a week. That's enough to scare most people to the couch. It's true that maintaining your heart rate at an elevated but not overly rapid rate for a period of 15 minutes or more will begin to coax your metabolism to shift gears and begin to burn fat as its main fuel source. Isn't this what everyone wants? Of course it is, but there are different ways to meet this goal—some better than others.

You shouldn't be spending large portions of your life in the gym chasing fitness myths. **Two hours of *total* exercise a week, at the most, will serve all your fitness needs!** And just think:

you no longer have to spend 30 to 60 minutes on a treadmill or stair-stepper to reach your fitness goals. It's much better that you devote the time you save to other areas of your life such as career, family, spiritual health, and mental health. What good is a dynamite exterior without an interesting, mature, capable interior to go along with it?

In my system, three sessions per week involve high-intensity, short-duration resistance training exercises for 30 minutes capped off by a 10-minute interval approach to aerobics. The good thing about performing resistance exercises at a high intensity level is that it takes very few sets to stimulate a muscle for its maximum growth. Further, 10 more minutes on a treadmill, stair stepper, or similar equipment, then burns off some additional glycogen stores and stretches the aerobic workout you began with your resistance exercises. Overall, this means workouts are short and sweet.

Variety of Choices

To avoid boredom—and to keep your muscles from adapting and becoming too “efficient” for effective growth—you want to avoid performing the same exercise more than once for any given body part (which would use the same equipment and same motion). Rather, you'll want to choose two different exercises from a menu of exercises for that body part. This will give your muscles some variety. My system supports this kind of variety.

If possible, you also will want to use different equipment for your 10-minute interval training at the end of each workout (treadmill, stair-stepper, rower, and so on). That will not only give you some variety, but also work your muscles in slightly different ways, preventing adaptation. There's nothing quite so unproductive as becoming “aerobically efficient” by doing the same exercise in the same way all the time. You no longer get the same benefits from your motions. And you can tell because your interval training will continue to get easier with time. It's similar to cheating with weights!

Cortisol: Why You Must Avoid Over-Exercise at All Costs

Earlier I talked about the deleterious effects of overtraining or over-exercise. For the doubters and non-believers, I'll now go into detail as to why overtraining is a problem. It's all about stress and the hormone, cortisol.

Cortisol is an important hormone in the body. It is secreted by the adrenal glands and involved in the following functions and more:

- Proper glucose metabolism
- Regulation of blood pressure
- Insulin release for blood sugar maintenance
- Immune function
- Inflammatory response

Normally, cortisol is present in the body at higher levels in the morning, and at it is lowest at night. Although stress isn't the only reason cortisol is secreted into the bloodstream, it has been termed “the stress hormone” because it's also secreted in higher levels during the body's “fight or flight” response to stress. It is responsible for several stress-related changes in the body.

Small increases of cortisol have some positive effects in the body:

- A quick burst of energy for survival reasons
- Heightened memory functions
- A burst of increased immunity
- Lower sensitivity to pain
- Helps maintain homeostasis in the body

While cortisol is an important and helpful part of the body's response to stress, it's also important for the body to activate its *relaxation response* following a stressful event. This allows the body's functions to return to normal.

Unfortunately, in our current high-stress culture, the body's stress response is activated so often that the body doesn't always have a chance to return to normal. This results in a state of chronic stress and higher—and more prolonged—levels of cortisol in the bloodstream. Moreover, you should know that **high intensity exercise and prolonged exercise both increase cortisol levels. Further, overtraining creates chronic stress in the body and high, prolonged levels of cortisol!**

Cortisol levels remain elevated for about 2 hours following an exercise session since exercise is a stressor. Therefore, repeated or prolonged exercise sessions without appropriate rest in between result in chronic elevated cortisol. Additionally, poor diet, inadequate supplementation, and lack of rest also play key roles in cortisol secretion.

Chronically high cortisol levels have negative effects, such as a decrease in muscle tissue. That's right: cortisol has a catabolic (muscle breakdown) effect on tissue and is associated with a decrease in anabolic (muscle growth) hormones like IGF-1 and GH. This means that minimizing cortisol levels is ideal for an athlete if one wishes to achieve tissue growth and positive adaptations to exercise training.

Another negative outcome of too much cortisol is increased abdominal fat. Aside from the appearance issues that creates (or frustrates), increased abdominal fat is associated with a greater number of health problems than fat deposited in other areas of the body. Some of the health problems associated with increased stomach fat are heart attacks, strokes, and a poor cholesterol profile that can lead to other health problems.

Still other negative effects of too much cortisol are:

- Reduction in athletic performance because of fatigue and inflammation
- Reduction in ligament health
- Poorer sleep quality
- Mood swings
- Sex drive
- Decreased bone density
- Slowed wound healing
- Impaired cognitive performance
- Suppressed thyroid function
- Blood sugar imbalances such as hyperglycemia

- Higher blood pressure
- Lowered immunity and inflammatory responses in the body

Cortisol secretion varies among individuals. People are biologically ‘wired’ to react differently to stress. One person may secrete higher levels of cortisol than another in the same situation. Studies have also shown that people who secrete higher levels of cortisol in response to stress also tend to eat more food, and food that is higher in carbohydrates than people who secrete less cortisol. If you’re more sensitive to stress, it’s especially important for you to learn stress management techniques and maintain a low-stress lifestyle.

Here's How the Cortisol Cycle Works

Elevated cortisol secretion from physical or mental stress causes fat, protein, and carbohydrates to be rapidly mobilized in order for you to take action against the stressor (the “fight or flight” response). The mobilization of these nutrients in addition to epinephrine and a number of other endocrine hormones allows you to take quick action when presented with stress. During this mobilization, cortisol and adrenaline increase while DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone) and testosterone decrease. A chronically elevated cortisol level causes your body to enter a state of constant muscle breakdown and suppressed immune function, increasing your risk of illness and injury while cannibalizing muscle tissue.

How Do I know If My Cortisol Levels Are High?

Mood swings, lack of motivation to train, loss of muscle, and loss of appetite are all symptoms of an elevated cortisol level. Sound familiar? That's right: It's **overtraining syndrome!**

If you are not taking steps to modulate your cortisol, you are breaking down your muscle, storing fat, and getting sick, none of which make sense for someone interested in wellness!

A more scientific approach is to have your testosterone/cortisol or IGF-1/cortisol levels tested. A suppressed ratio of either IGF or testosterone over cortisol is a sure sign of decreased exercise capacity and overtraining. **There is also strong evidence that athletes exercising in a carbohydrate-depleted state experience greater increases in cortisol.** Decreased frequency of menstrual periods in women (amenorrhea) has been linked to insufficient energy availability that triggers a stress hormone response and suppresses estrogen and progesterone.

How Does Cortisol Affect My Endurance Performance?

It is only with chronically elevated cortisol levels that your performance will suffer, but the effect is dramatic. Excess cortisol suppresses your immune system, producing a greater risk of upper respiratory infections. On top of that, your body will be in a catabolic state—breaking down muscle and storing fat.

In addition to reducing your muscle and getting sick, suppressed testosterone means suppressed recovery. Aerobic and anaerobic muscle fibers need time to repair and recover from hard workouts to improve their capacity to exercise. Elevated cortisol and suppressed testosterone do not allow you to maximize your recovery, leading to slower performance gains. Additionally, amenorrhea in women and low testosterone in men may increase risk for stress fractures.

How Can I Modulate Cortisol?

Cortisol can be modulated through rest, nutrition and supplementation. First, since repeated bouts of exercise cause chronic elevated cortisol, it is key to get plenty of rest between workouts. A day or two days between workouts work wonders!

Do You Know How to Burn Fat?

The question, “Do you know how to burn fat?” seems deceptively simple to answer. Most people would say, just eat less and you’ll burn fat. But they would be wrong so often that it’s ludicrous. Here are some reasons why:

- Hunger is a powerful physiological and emotional urge. *Very few people can simply eat less as a way of life while they are hungry!* Most often, hunger is not directly related to calories ingested, especially in unhealthy individuals who follow poor habits.
- Reducing calories—which the body may interpret as a stress—may scare your body into a conservative, fat-storing mode where lean tissue is burned for fuel before fat stores are released.
- A stressful, cortisol-drenched life will tend to store fat and burn muscle and bone.
- If you fuel your workouts with too few carbohydrates, you’ll end up burning lean tissue before you burn fat.
- You have to be healthy to burn fat efficiently and maintain your status once you achieve it! If your hormones are out of whack because of stress or other issues, *it may be impossible to burn fat* even with tons of exercise and calorie reduction. Many people—who do not sneak extra food in secret—can verify this. It’s all about hormone health.
- Many people confuse losing weight with burning fat. They are not necessarily the same thing.

Here’s are a few things to consider:

1. You must control your cortisol levels if you want to burn fat. You must know how to do that. This means, among other things, that you must get healthy if you want to control your fat burning.
2. Even at rest, a pound of muscle burns seven to ten calories per day while a pound of fat burns only two. However, the average adult just doesn’t put on enough lean muscle mass to make this difference significant.
3. Muscle is more dense and aesthetically shaped than lumpy fat, so a person with less fat and more muscle will look smaller even though they weigh the same. For example, a woman weighing 150 pounds with 19% fat will look *much* smaller, will look better, and be much healthier than a woman at 150 pounds with 35% fat. They weigh the same, but *their body composition is different!*

A scale isn’t very helpful to measure success in fat burning *if you only want to burn fat*. Here’s an important question.

If you find yourself losing weight and taking up less space, do you know how much of that weight loss was fat and how much was lean tissue—the tissue that you <i>don’t</i> want to lose?

If you don't follow a program such as *Reclaim 24*, you may be able to lose weight, but it may also include a large percentage of muscle. The irony is that muscle tissue burns significantly more calories, 24/7, than does fat. If you have lost weight but have burned lean body tissue away in the process, your likelihood of *maintaining* your weight loss decreases dramatically.

If you only have a small amount of weight to lose, then you may feel as though the *Reclaim 24 System* is not helping you lower the pressure on your scale. But *Reclaim 24* is not a scale-protection program! It is a wellness, rejuvenation, and appearance program. In fact, if your particular body composition requires it, you may even find your scale numbers going up a bit. But you will shrink, look better, be healthier, and have more energy when you transform yourself with *Reclaim 24*.

So, you must decide what program you want to follow. While you are deciding, **don't forget to look at the long-term success (beyond five years) that others have had on any weight-loss program you are considering.** It's not a month, or a year, that counts (and that's normally all you'll hear about). A person must be able to maintain her weight and body composition for at least five years to say she has found a program that works. *And don't forget to look at their health.* Being trim, sick, and stressed is hardly a lifestyle worth living. Please don't get trapped into short-term, quick-fix, emotion-driven thinking that promises short-term success but delivers simply awful, long-term consequences.

Q & A

Q: The *Reclaim 24* weight resistance routine requires me to perform only four high-intensity sets per body part. This is quite different from the old school of thought that suggests many more sets. What's the difference?

A: Most training literature suggests three exercises per body part times three sets per exercise for a total of nine sets. Many athletes perform even a greater number, thinking more must be better. There is no logical or scientific reason for performing so many sets.

Reason and science began to play a role when thinkers such as Arthur Jones, inventor of Nautilus equipment, and Mike Mentzer, champion professional body builder, came on the scene and questioned the validity of such myths. Those two pioneers saw no concrete evidence that performing multiple sets would result in more lean tissue. On the contrary, what they saw was that such overtraining most often hindered improvement by hurting the body's ability to recuperate. It's during recuperation or rest that the body repairs and grows muscle (it's called hypertrophy).

With that in mind, it seemed logical to reduce the number of sets to a bare minimum, while performing the sets at a high-intensity level. After all, it's high intensity that stimulates the growth of muscle tissue. When performing too many sets, the exerciser tires before reaching the best level of intensity, minimizing his or her ability to stress a muscle properly for stimulating growth. In other words, the multiple-set theory results in many burned calories but not in the best muscle development.

Whether you want to add muscle size and bulk or simply develop an attractive and toned physique, it's the stimulation of muscle at a high level that's required.

Q: I am a 33 year-old mother of two who is 20 pounds heavier than I was before having children. I am excited about getting back in shape, but I don't wish to look masculine by adding a lot of muscle. Will training with weights make me bulky?

A: Absolutely not! Let's put that age-old myth to rest. Amongst those who have trained with weights for many years, it's quite apparent that adding muscle is no easy task, especially if you're a woman. Weight resistance exercise is the only way to increase muscle and muscle tone, and ultimately change your physique. Developing size comes from increasing your caloric intake. If you're restricting calories in an effort to lose fat or control your weight, there is no way you're going to "bulk-up." It's simply impossible to grow larger muscles without adding calories. That's the science. By the way, those women with the perfectly toned bodies seen on the covers of many health magazines look that way because they train with weights.

Q: I've never really been fond of weight training, but I know I must exercise because I am soft and out of shape. Can I develop a nice body taking aerobic classes?

A: Unfortunately not. Please understand that by performing only aerobic exercises, you may improve your cardiovascular health and possibly even keep your overall weight in check. You won't, however, develop shapely, toned muscles to any great extent.

To prove this for yourself, just look at the people in the gym who spend countless hours each week on the treadmill or stationary bike, but who don't train with resistance. Do they ever change? Do they really have the toned, athletic bodies of weight lifters? I don't think so.

Don't be fooled by the TV infomercials showing guys and gals performing exercises on ridiculous exercise equipment that is serving as the fad-of-the-day. That fad equipment did not give them the hard bodies that they display through their skimpy clothing. In truth, they are athletes who train exceptionally hard to develop their physiques. They never, ever use the worthless junk being promoted in the ads.

Q: I've always been told that aerobic exercise burns the most fat. If this is true, then why does the Reclaim 24 Workout not include this?

A: First of all, aerobic training does indeed have an impact on fat metabolism while we perform the work. However, when the work stops, so does the extra fat burning! In contrast, muscles are like 24-hour fat-burning engines. Extra muscle growth means an increase in your metabolic rate because muscle, unlike fat, needs calories just for maintenance. This means that added muscle burns calories throughout the day and night, even when the work stops. When you have your cortisol under control, much of that calorie burning comes from fat.

Although the Reclaim 24 Workout doesn't seem to incorporate aerobics, it actually does. During the first 30 minutes of the workout, you are performing high-intensity, weight-resistance exercises. To complete the program in 30 minutes, you must move at a rapid pace. This elevates your heart rate throughout the entire 30 minutes to a level achieved with aerobic exercise. So, although you are training with weights, you receive the benefits of 30 minutes of aerobic training at the same time. Then, when you add the additional 10 minutes of interval training for further glycogen burn-off, you will have achieved 40 minutes of aerobics. And this occurs three times each week. That is sufficient to keep you aerobically healthy. Of course, if you do any other aerobic activities for fun, that just adds to the numbers.

Q: I've always been told to perform my aerobic exercises to warm up before lifting weights. I noticed that your interval training, which partially replaces low-intensity aerobics, follows the weight lifting. Can you explain this?

A: The purpose of interval training is twofold. First, interval training improves cardiovascular fitness and endurance with great efficiency. Second, it's included at the end of the workout to

burn off some of the glycogen stores (a form of sugar stored within muscles and the liver) not used by the workout. By initially using glycogen to fuel your weight resistance exercises, you allow for the maximum energy bursts and strength required to grow muscle. Following this, interval training has a tendency to burn through a large portion of the remaining stores. With glycogen largely depleted (but not overly depleted), the body starts using another source of energy after your workout ... FAT! You continue to burn a larger percentage of fat until you ingest calories 30-45 minutes after your workout is finished. This beats running on the treadmill for 40 minutes straight, don't you think?

Q: My work schedule does not allow me the free time to exercise. What are people in my situation supposed to do?

A: Finding 40 minutes, three times per week is a choice. So please be truthful with yourself. If you try hard enough to find excuses, you will. Humans are extraordinarily creative in avoiding things they don't want to do. Getting in shape and caring for your health is either important to you and those you care about or it is not. Only you can decide this. If you're now a person who doesn't have much discipline for following through and maintaining an exercise schedule, then you'll have to find a purpose to change. If you cannot find enough reason or purpose within yourself, then think about your family, your significant other, or other loved ones.

Second, if you'll allow it to happen, you'll soon find that dedicating two hours per week to exercise actually increases your energy levels, thereby increasing your productivity. Increased productivity leads to accomplishing more with less time. Any more excuses?

Q: I'm 42 years old and have never been involved in any kind of structured exercise such as weight training. Is it more difficult to develop this habit at my age?

A: You're never too old to adopt positive changes in your life. Ending poor habits while simultaneously developing good ones is a matter of bringing some discipline to your mind. It's not about age.

A habit is a habit, whether a good one or a bad one. Developing good habits such as exercise and a life-affirming diet may take time and discipline, but once formed, these habits only get stronger when you see positive changes taking place. You have to decide which habits bring you happiness and which bring you grief, which will bring success and which will simply rob you of precious time and quality of life. Transforming your body into something you can be proud of ultimately leads to transforming your inner-self as well. Once you master the discipline of changing your body, you gain greater mastery in other departments of your life, too.

Q: I am a frequent traveler, which places me in hotels two weeks out of every month. What do you suggest for people like me or for those in the airline industry?

A: Although hotels often don't have much to offer in terms of a variety of exercise equipment, some do. In either case, you can always make best use of what they have available.

If a hotel facility is missing many of the machines or equipment you're used to, you'll find that what they do have can often be used in a variety of ways to train other muscle groups. You might even have to perform a higher number of repetitions if they are limited to only light dumbbells, for example. As long as you follow the principles of the Reclaim 24 Workout, it's all right to periodically alter your exercises as well as the number of repetitions. Remember, the idea is to attempt to always perform your high-intensity sets to the point of muscle failure. This ensures that your muscles get a sufficient stimulus to respond.

If you don't mind leaving the comforts of your hotel, it's likely you'll find a gym nearby. Almost every city has a variety of nice health clubs that offer up-to-date weight resistance and cardiovascular equipment.

Finally, there are certain lightweight exercise products you can carry in your luggage such as exercise bands. I talk about such possibilities on this website.

Q: A few guys at my health club have pretty large muscular physiques. They appear to train more frequently and far longer than your program suggests. Why is it that they have seemed to put on quality muscle if their type of program leads to overtraining?

A: Yes, it's true that many athletes, mostly men, perform many more sets per body part than what my program calls for. Those same athletes would probably do well with almost any weight resistance program. You see, a few of us are genetically gifted, but most of us are not. The gifted ones have the ability to respond better as well as recuperate more quickly. Some less-gifted folks manage to respond and recuperate better because they use anabolic steroids.

Yet, whether gifted or a user of enhancement drugs, those same athletes would respond even better if they used the Reclaim 24 high-intensity, minimal-sets principles. In other words, they are probably limiting their progress by excessive training, but they fail to realize this because their current program has proven to offer some continued results. They certainly fear losing what they have gained and therefore find it hard to change, especially when the change means performing fewer exercises! In a worst-case scenario, such athletes would maintain their current shapes while freeing up much gym time to work on other aspects of their lives. If only they understood the research and results that others have achieved... But they are unlikely to heed the science behind muscle development out of fear and habit. Maybe the gym is the only place they can socialize, so it fulfills more than just a bodybuilding or strength-training need.

Remember, one of the main reasons for physical transformation is to learn how to form good habits and carry that knowledge into other—or all—areas of your life. Do you really think it's productive to stay in the gym or exercise longer than necessary? If 40 minutes of training three times a week is enough, then it's enough! Outside of simply enjoying some form of leisure sport, you need to spend your time on other important life activities such as your career, family, mental health, and spiritual health. These things all take much more time than developing your body—and should.

Q: My wife showed her personal trainer your Reclaim 24 body-shaping program just to get her opinion. Her trainer felt that results would come faster with additional sets and additional time spent on cardio equipment. Do these trainers really know what is best?

A: I can certainly appreciate your wife's curiosity and need for second opinions. I imagine that in starting a new 12-week program, your wife, like most others, would want to tell friends about her new goal and the program that is going to get her there. Her friends, most of them well intentioned I'm sure, would be giving her second opinions. Each would have her own idea how to get the best results.

Her personal trainer may also have her own ideas. I know of some trainers who are well educated and thoroughly understand the fundamentals of my program and use it. I'm also aware of many trainers who simply took a quick certification course and magically became experts in the field.

Here's a general bit of advice to help with such issues. Just take a good look at the person giving you the advice and note a couple of things.

1. Does the trainer look to be in good shape? If the people dispensing advice are doing this for their livelihoods, you should expect them to be in good shape, yes?
2. What do their personal clients look like? If the trainers know what they are doing, then a substantial number of their clients will look quite good.

Q: My husband and I have three young children at home. We would really be more comfortable exercising within the home than away at a gym. Can we put together the proper equipment without spending a ton of money?

A: Like many of my friends, I started weight training with little more than a couple of dumbbells (with interchangeable weights) and a bench. With this I was able to develop a well-toned and proportioned physique. The dumbbells supplied all my upper body movements, while I used my own body weight, in the form of one-legged squats, to develop my thighs.

So, the answer is yes! You don't need fancy equipment or a gym membership to obtain your fitness goals. What you do need is Desire, Discipline, and Dedication. Put these three "Ds" together with my high-intensity, body-shaping program and you get the best results possible.

The minimal amount of equipment should include a stable bench, a mat, and a couple of weight-interchangeable dumbbells. If you don't mind spending a few more dollars, you may prefer to purchase five or six sets of dumbbells so you can move more quickly from one set to another.