

A Fitness Trainer's Regimen

I wrote the following article in 1990 while I was working at the University of Hawaii and doing fitness training programs part time.

My runners and triathletes often ask me how I stay in shape. "I work at it," I say. "But less than you may think." I'm not into long, hard training, but being fit for life. I just want to be able to lift a heavy box without hurting myself or work hard into the evening without getting stressed out or exhausted.

Fitness encompasses aerobics, strengthening, stretching, and proper nutrition. I start with nutrition because it's my source of daily energy. I maintain my energy by eating three moderate meals a day, with a snack at four in the afternoon. Eating moderately means I never feel starved before a meal or stuffed afterwards. Thus my body doesn't have to store excess calories from large meals it doesn't need for normal work and play. As a result, my weight is the same as it was in high school.

Thin people like myself would never think of missing a meal. And breakfast is the most important meal. I absolutely never fail to eat a healthful breakfast. If time is short I sleep less so I can prepare a breakfast I can eat before leaving home or later when I arrive at work. One of my favorite breakfast meals is chopped fruit in a bowl of freshly squeezed orange juice, with toasted whole wheat bread and a squirt of flaxseed oil, instead of butter. This breakfast gives me sustainable energy (without coffee) until I eat my lunch-time meal.

I prepare most of my meals so I know exactly what I'm eating. And I serve myself, adjusting the portions so I never over-eat. My diet consists mostly of high energy food: vegetables, beans, rice, pasta, bread and potatoes. I eat homemade chicken-vegetable soup or stew with bread and tossed green salad most days for lunch and dinner. One of my favorite dinners is baked potato and salad. I often have a small desert of cookies or ice cream, and my favorite afternoon snack is a bowl of cereal and apple juice.

To maintain muscle tone, I take advantage of a nearby weight-lifting facility. I do 15 upper body exercises that takes only 17 minutes. I keep the weights moderate, never using a weight that causes me to strain. I've burned out on weight lifting before, but now I'm in for the long-term. Usually I jog to the gym and back as part of noon-time workout. The whole workout takes only 30 minutes, yet has marvelous benefits:

A chronic shoulder ailment disappeared with gentle weight lifting. I feel stronger and more self confident. I can lift and move things that might have injured me a few years ago. Best of all, I get good feedback from my wife who notices some handsome muscle definition. I also jog in the evening for 35 minutes on days when I don't lift weights. I take my radio and enjoy the time with music or a sports broadcast. I like to jog because it relieves and balances the stress of office work with something physical.

It feels great to take a shower and eat a nutritious meal after a workout. But exercise and office work can make my muscles feel stiff and uncomfortable. To maintain flexibility, I do a 10-minute stretching routine before workouts. I also stretch when I'm awake in the middle of the night because it helps me get back to sleep. It's a simple routine I learned in a yoga class, but it relaxes and soothes the mild aches and pains that are part of normal living.

I wasted six months before I asked a friend to help me initiate my weight-lifting regimen. But having developed the habit, I've maintained it with only occasional lapses. I don't get down on myself if I get off my jogging, weightlifting, stretching, or nutritional regimen. I just notice that I've gotten off the path, and I get back on.

It's good to have a fitness vision. My vision is the way certain eighty year-olds look as they enjoy their old age with fitness, vibrancy, and verve. I'm committed to being that way myself.