



Snips from The Fit Blog



What is Fitness?



Watching a bit of the Tour de France, when the riders seem to effortlessly climb up massive mountain sides, there's no question in our minds – those guys are in good shape. When a new 100m sprinting record is set, nobody questions the sprinter's fitness level. A marathon runner? Yep – definitely fit. How about one of the cast on “Dancing with the Stars”? See their abs? They're as lean as lean can be. And what about bodybuilders, gymnasts, weight lifters, firefighters, action heroes, golf players and pole vaulters? Would we classify all of these individuals as being fit? Probably. But what does that really mean?



At first, it seems a simple question. Everyone knows what fitness is. Or do we? We can easily peg a person who is fit and in shape, but are they really fit? What does it mean to be fit? Is it a low body fat percentage? Is it an abundance of muscle mass? Is it speed and agility? Is it strength? Or is it simply the ability to perform well at whatever you do?

For practical purposes, being functionally good at the day to day tasks that require some form of physical exertion may be the essence of what being fit is. The dancer is fit because she can dance well. The gymnast is fit because he possesses a significant amount of strength. But a computer programmer (like myself) wouldn't be classified as being fit because he is good at rolling out of bed and getting to the office on time. Being fit requires additional attributes besides being able to exceed at one's own work. In order to be fit, one must be able to do well at a variety of physical activities.

The dancer and gymnast each exceed in numerous physical abilities that contribute to their ability to perform. Strength, endurance and flexibility are just a few of these attributes. By exceeding in these multiple areas, they are also likely to do well in physical tasks outside of their domain. The computer programmer, on the other hand, may not possess enough additional abilities, outside of the scope of his or her job, to be classified as fit. While the programmer may exceed at specific tasks, he or she may not exceed in other areas. Therefore, they must work in extra curricular physical activities in order to achieve a higher fitness level.

The definition of being fit, therefore, is to not only be functionally able, but being functionally able across multiple domains. For most of us, who aren't gymnasts or dancers, this requires going to the gym, getting out for runs and possibly taking up Yoga or Tennis or a joining a rec league of some sort.



The benefits of truly being fit, then, are significant. Many of us strive to be fit simply to be healthy and look good, but besides helping us maintain a good body weight, fitness **enables** individuals.

Being fit allows us to lift heavier items without injury. It lets us pick up our children or grandchildren to give them a bear hug. It helps us balance when on the roof, putting up our Christmas lights. Fitness lets us play soccer with our kids after school. It helps us run up 5 flights of stairs when we're late for class. Whether hiking or biking, being fit helps us enjoy our environments. We can take pleasure in canoing a river or exploring the wilderness. The long walking tours when traveling abroad are easier. Shoveling snow or mowing the lawn are less taxing.

No matter who we are, what we do or what our age is, striving to be fit should be an important part of every one's life. For being fit gives us the means to do the things that need to get done and live our lives as we wish.



Why Weight Training is Important for Weight Loss



When most people think of a weight loss program, they first probably think of dieting. Second to that is usually some form of cardio – walking, running, elliptical, whatever. These two components are definitely important parts of losing weight. However, what many people don't realize is that resistance training is also very important.

Resistance training is pretty much synonymous with strength training. It's working your muscles against some sort of resistance. This includes body weight exercises like pushups, situps and air squats as well as other forms of resistance training including weight training.

Yikes – did you just say weight training? But I don't want to get huge like Arnold. I just want to lose the bulge.



A common misconception is that weight training should be relegated for those individuals looking to gain muscle mass – who want the big guns. While it's true that weight training is a necessity for bodybuilders, it's pretty much a myth that lifting dumbbells and barbells translates into getting huge. In order for this to occur, bodybuilders need to eat a large number of calories on a daily basis. It's just a difficult thing to do – especially for women. Substantial muscle growth requires hormones (like testosterone) that just isn't as readily available in women. Even many men have much difficulty getting the big guns. For dieters, who are probably on some sort of strict diet (hopefully a Zone diet), getting huge should not be a worry at all. It aint gonna happen – not even close.

But muscle mass is a good thing for the dieter and it's very important to include resistance training in any sort of weight loss program. Here are some reasons why.

- More muscle equals a higher metabolic rate. Research has shown that regular resistance training may boost your metabolic rate up to 15%. A higher metabolism means more fuel gets burned faster making it easier to maintain a healthy weight.
- Resistance training can boost bone mineral density, decreasing the risk of osteoporosis and fractures.
- It can strengthen weak body parts and joints, reducing the risk of injury in day to day activities and sports.
- Resistance training creates muscle and changes the body composition which improves an individual's appearance.
- Muscle takes up less space than fat. Building muscle changes the ratio of fat to muscle on the body, helping to create tone.

So if you're currently on a diet and have been thinking about getting to the gym and incorporating some weights, find a good weight training program and add it to your weekly routine. If you have always thought of weight lifting as a guy's thing or something that's strictly for bodybuilders, think again. Weight lifting and resistance training is great for all of us, regardless of our goals.



The Benefits of Interval Training



Going for a 5 or 10 km run is a fantastic aerobic exercise that will burn lots of calories. However, the normal run is generally a moderate intensity exercise.

Long bouts of moderate intensity exercise may actually preferentially burn more muscle tissue than one would like [\[1\]](#). The goal, after all, is usually to burn calories from carbohydrate storage and maintain muscle.

Some studies have found that brief intervals of high intensity training are more effective at maintaining muscle and building their capacity for lactic acid oxidation [\[2\]](#).



Lactic acid builds up as muscles undergo intense strain. You may recognize this as the burning sensation you might sometimes feel as you're trying to lift that last rep or trying to sprint the last 100m of a good jog. During the recovery from bout of the high intensity, lactic acid is broken down. This process uses energy from carbohydrate storage or fat [3]. Translation – interval training may be better than a moderate intensity run for losing fat and getting lean.

So next time you're heading out for your weekly (or monthly or whenever you can get yourself off the couch) run, perhaps head down to the track instead and run 5 or 6 400m sprints, each followed by 2 minutes of rest. It may take less time than a 10k jog, but it may be just as effective.



My Gym



I belong to a nice gym. It just went through a good renovation and acquired some more equipment (having another couple pullup bars is nice). It's not a huge franchise like Golds but it tries to cater to a similar crowd with the machines and whatnot. Nope, it's nothing special, but I like it and besides, it's down the street.

Regardless of the proximity of the gym to my home, however, there are those nights where I just don't get home from work in time to get there for a good workout before they close. Or maybe I'm just short on time one day and can only get a half an hour in. On these days, I'm very glad that besides my gym membership, I also have a great home gym.

At my home gym, I can do all sorts of exercises – squats, cleans, deadlifts, presses, jerks,



snatches, curls, hit the core, the shoulders, the legs, the arms and the back all in the comfort of my own home. And how much did this home gym cost? Nothing. Wha?!?! Yep, that's right.

You see, all my gym consists of is a 25lb barbell and about 50 lb's in plates. All it cost me was a trip down to my parents' basement where I knew my Dad had a few weights sitting around gathering dust since his days when he was my age. Sure I'm not going to be pressing my max or deadlifting hundreds of pounds, but even with this measly setup, I can whip off a few sets of high intensity, high rep sets of several full body exercises.

There is no need to have the latest bowflex machine for \$20 per month for the next 50 years. No real need to get an elliptical or high cost treadmill. All anyone really needs is some inexpensive weights (or possibly free for the lucky ones), a bit of empty space in the house (or the garage, or outside) and maybe a good outdoor route to occasionally run.

A good spot to find cheap weights are garage sales. Typically a good hunt early on a Summer Saturday morning will reveal some weightlifting equipment that was laying around in someone's basement. Salvation Army and other second hand stores will also occasionally carry exercise equipment.



No Time to Sleep? No Good.



With all of our busy lives these days – the long stressful workdays, families to be with, houses to fix up, appointments to meet, errands to run, and all that good TV, many times we find ourselves going to bed really late and waking up earlier than our body would like. Sometimes it gets so bad that we just try and push through the work week and look forward to sleeping in on the weekend to catch up on the lost Z's. Thank goodness for coffee – our World would be faced with a zombie crisis if it weren't for caffeine.

It's unfortunate though. Sleep is important. We're all mostly aware of that fact. Usually, however, we completely disregard it. Sleep is something that we more or less take for granted. In fact, I used to think of sleep as a waste of time. So many things to do and so little time, why would I want to sleep at all? Well, there are a bunch of reasons.

From a fitness perspective, sleep is important for muscle maintenance and growth. When you're at



the gym, lifting weights, muscle fibers are ripped and damaged (hence the pain you might sometimes feel). In order for muscles to repair themselves, sleep is needed. While sleeping (particular while in deep sleep), our bodies go into repair mode and rebuild the muscle. For bodybuilders, sleep is essential for muscle growth. Repair mode also requires substantial energy and depends on energy stores in our bodies. The energy stores include fat storage. In an indirect way, sleeping actually burns off calories.

Of course, there's also the fact that the earlier and longer you're in dream land, the less likely you are to spend any more of your day munching on chocolate bars or nachos. Sure, it's an obvious point, but I'm sure there have been countless times that you found yourself raiding the fridge at midnight.

Besides the physical benefits of sleep, the mental benefits are huge. More sleep leads to higher levels of alertness and cognitive function. Taking a siesta in the afternoon has been shown to cause higher levels of productivity into the later parts of the working day. Memories are improved and better solidified during sleep. Your brain files daily events and works subconsciously on problems. I can recall numerous times when working on programming bugs when I would be getting absolutely nowhere to the point that I'd actually be moving backwards. I'd decide to call it quits and come back to it in the morning. I'd wake up, logon to the computer and fire up my code and almost instantly figure it out.

And then there are health reasons too. Your immune system and organs function immensely better when you get more sleep. It's the reason why bed rest is next only to chicken soup when it comes to fighting a flu or a cold.

So the moral of the story is to get your sleep. If you find that there aren't enough hours in the day



to get enough sleep at night, re prioritize. Work at becoming more organized. Downgrade to basic cable. Set solid bedtimes for yourself. If you have to be awake by 7am, try to get to bed by 11pm. Aim for 8 hours a night. Once you get into the swing of a good sleep schedule, it will become a piece of cake (low cal cake, of course). You will feel way better, more productive, more alert, more energized and your body will thank you.



Going Paleo and Eating Quality Food



Once upon a time ago there were humans who didn't have smart phones, didn't have books, heck - didn't even have a written language. In fact, these humans were a vague (although genetically equal) version of us. These were our ancestors - the first of our kind - the first to inhabit our genetic makeup. And their genes had been developed for great lengths of time for specific reasons - to enable upright walking and complex thinking, emotion and survival instincts. Genetically, our ancestors were primed for hunting and gathering - survival, and their diets consisted of gathered vegetation and hunted animal meats. Sugar was unknown for the most part - as was bread and pasta. Many days these people would go without eating much at all. A successful hunt would bring back a nice meaty meal that would be quickly devoured before spoiled... It was an "eat to live" mentality. And diseases like we encounter today were nonexistent.

Their existence may have been a long time ago, but in the context of evolution, it was only just a moment ago - a moment in which nothing has changed in our genetic makeup. Cell for cell, we are



identical to the humans of our hunter and gatherer past. However, technologically we are light-years away. Our technology has brought about many new things - much of which has enabled the massive success of our civilizations. But when it comes to food, there has been a giant separation between what (and how) humans used to eat and what (and how) humans eat today.

And this is fundamentally what Paleo is all about. Our bodies evolved to consume a hunter-gatherer diet. Yet the modern world consumes a diet based on mass production. Human technology gave way to food processing and subsequently wheat based and sugary products - concentrated high calorie foods that although were particularly viable and useful for an exponentially growing population, were a far cry from the meats and vegetation days.

The Paleo diet is nothing more than ditching today's processed food habits and switching to high quality (preferably raw) foods that our digestive systems were meant to consume. By doing so, the argument is that our bodies begin to run in a best state. Anecdotally (and scientifically), reports are all saying the same thing about this type of diet - that multitudes of health problems go away, digestion operates efficiently, migraines go away, excess weight is lost, sleep disruption and anxiety problems decline and energy levels become optimum.

And it's exceptionally simple! Following a Paleo diet involves no measuring or calorie counting (if you aren't interested in quick weight loss anyway). All you need to do is remember this mantra:

Meats and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruit, a little starch and NO SUGAR!

You can get a little more complicated than that by also avoiding legumes and nightshade type foods or consuming everything (including meat) raw, but in a nutshell (pun intended) the simple sentence above is all you need to keep in mind when eating.

The basic theory is that food should only be eaten as they were by our ancestors - as food should be eaten, given how our bodies and organs operate. So some of the things that should not be



eaten include dairy products, sugar or sugar substitutes and wheat based products or high glycemic veggies such as corn. Animal fat is fine (and actually encouraged).

A nice Paleo friendly day of meals, for example, could look like this:

Breakfast: 2 eggs, an apple and a handful of almonds

Snack 1: homemade beef jerky (low sodium) and some berries

Lunch: Salad with chicken, lettuce, cucumber, snow peas and an oil based dressing

Snack 2: Some trail mix - dried berries (no sugar added) and nuts

Dinner: BBQ'd Salmon filet with a spinach salad (with sesame seeds and strawberries)

Snack 3: Some pistachios and pumpkin seeds or maybe a bit of chicken or some more jerky

Paleo diet friendly foods are low glycemic and have minimal effect on blood glucose levels. As such, those of us with blood sugar related problems (that are generally related to food) often find that episodes of hypoglycemia, for example, are more or less gone while on a paleo diet. Similarly, Paleo diets tend to keep hunger at bay and as such, it is possible to maintain a calorie restricted diet more easily on a Paleo diet.

For liquids, water, tea (unsweetened, no milk), coffee (black) are the basic drinks. Alcohol is unfortunately a no-no (although many Paleo dieters tend to disregard that in a social setting).

Keep in mind that it's very difficult to maintain a strict Paleo diet along side a social life. When engaging in social situations, don't feel overly guilty for falling off the bandwagon temporarily. Keep prepared, however, and try to consume protein with drinks and try as much as possible to avoid the sweets.

If you're finding that the newest and greatest diet isn't working for you or if you simply don't have the time to measure out your portions and count calories, try out the Paleo way. It's simple - just



eat high quality foods as your body is meant to and remember: meats and veggies, nuts and seeds, some fruit, a little starch and NO SUGAR!!