

Introduction

THIS BOOK WAS INSPIRED BY a powerful ideal: people can change their lives and pursue their happiness by taking the right actions. To fully embrace and benefit from this, I believe that to pursue and fully enjoy a good life requires a strong and healthy body. The purpose of any good life is not to tear down nor stand still—it's to build and create. My contribution to the ideal world filled with happy builders and creators is all the ideas that fill these pages.

How will this book help you? It will enable you to pursue a happier life by teaching you to conquer a massive barrier: physical fitness. Unfortunately, we're not born knowing how to get and stay fit. The plethora of different fitness approaches and advice can all seem confusing and contradictory. Without a clear and effective method of approach to physical fitness, most people are at an extreme disadvantage. *The Friction Factor* presents a happiness-oriented philosophy of fitness and gives a comprehensive roadmap for living that philosophy. If you embrace the system, you'll enable yourself to achieve more successes, give yourself more opportunities, and live more of the life you want.

I've learned a lot about living a healthy lifestyle since my days as a competitive athlete and coach. As a high school and college wrestler, I became acquainted with the arts of dieting, exercising, and maintaining a fit body at an early age. One of my primary jobs as an athlete was to stay in top physical shape so I could perform—and I had ample time and energy to do so back then. After retiring from athletics

and venturing out into the workforce, I quickly realized that staying fit would become a substantial challenge. It was clear that as an average working person, I'd now have significantly less time and energy to devote to taking care of my body. Though I had many career and personal ambitions that required much of my time, the importance of physical fitness to my long-term happiness was also clear to me. I was convinced that to enjoy a long life of the highest quality possible, I must find a way to make the cultivation of fitness part of my everyday behavior. This created a significant challenge for me, and it's a challenge that you undoubtedly have too: how to fit diet and exercise into your busy life.

Initially, I didn't know how to solve this problem, but my time as an athlete gave me the first lead. It taught me that achieving long-term success at any skill requires developing the right habits. Training for wrestling showed me that developing habits requires repetition. To perform a difficult action with skill and precision against a tough opponent, you must have practiced it frequently and consistently. In the heat of competition, when I was exhausted and struggling for breath, what made it possible to continue taking the right actions was my habits. I relied on what I'd trained myself to do, the skills that I'd practiced thousands of times and didn't have to think about. When my habits failed to produce the desired effect, I didn't abandon them, instead I analyzed them to determine why the failure occurred. I adjusted and improved my methods but stayed committed to the process of habit building because when the pressure was on, my habits allowed me to prevail.

My time as a high school wrestling coach taught me that the importance of developing the right habits wasn't unique to me—it applies to everyone. Many of the athletes I coached had great success; the best claimed titles of state champion and All-American, and some went on to compete at the collegiate level. Most of them reached these heights in just four years of experience, surpassing others who'd been

competing since they were toddlers. All these individuals succeeded because they learned to develop and sustain the right habits. This made clear to me that developing effective habits is a universal necessity for anyone seeking success in virtually any area. I resolved to apply this idea to solve the problem of fitting diet and exercise into a busy lifestyle.

As an athlete, I was motivated to do what was necessary to cultivate good habits because I loved to compete and win. To me, doing the work necessary to develop good habits was always worth the effort, and I could see the results of that hard work in my performance. This same dynamic exists when trying to improve your fitness by bringing diet and exercise into your life. You must understand exactly why fitness is important to you and have confidence that the actions you take will produce positive results. This theme reoccurs throughout the book. To build and maintain fitness habits requires a purpose that's meaningful to you and evidence you're making progress over time. The new approach to fitness you'll learn puts your life and values first, and it includes mechanisms for gauging your progress. The intent of this approach is to provide you with a philosophy and framework for fitness that fits into your busy life and can be followed for a lifetime. The principles, strategies, and tactics taught in this book are meant to be a reference tool that stand the test of time, a roadmap you can come back to when guidance and reassurance are needed.

In 2010, I began the serious endeavor of trying to select and implement the best fitness habits that would be effective and sustainable. After lots of trial and error, I finally discovered the two key ideas that made it possible to build optimal diet and exercise habits that fit into a busy life. After developing a system that worked for me, I spent five more years on how to present the system to other busy people—like you. It needed to be taught using simple principles and define what's necessary for long-term success.

I discovered the first principle by identifying what always kept me motivated to pursue fitness in the face of adversity. I asked myself, What has allowed me to keep dieting and exercising while building a successful marketing career, moving to different states, managing a small business, and writing a book? I realized I'm willing to put in the work that staying fit requires because I view fitness as a way to enhance my overall life. I believe that staying fit for a lifetime will make virtually every aspect of my life more enjoyable and of a higher quality. It will also make my life longer and provide me with more options for spending my time. This life-enhancing perspective of fitness is critical to staying consistently motivated to do the work that fitness requires.

The second key principle relates to how much time and energy you are willing to devote to pursuing physical fitness. For me, the biggest challenge of developing good diet and exercise habits was that everything I tried took too much time and effort. I just had too many other priorities to spend hours each day on fitness. While developing my system, I learned that I wasn't alone in this dilemma. More than 75 percent of Americans want to get more physically fit, but only 3 percent of them succeed at living a healthy lifestyle.¹ What are the main barriers preventing so many people from engaging in proper diet and exercise? Unsurprisingly, research shows that the most common reasons for not exercising or skipping planned workouts are lack of time and energy.² Likewise, the perceived complexity and time requirements for following a healthy diet are some of the most common reasons for not eating right. As evidence of this, one survey showed that 50 percent of Americans say that figuring out their income taxes is less complex than building a healthy meal plan.³

These widespread time and energy limitations are mostly process-related problems. Even though I was highly motivated, my time and energy were limited—like yours, most likely—so I needed to develop habits that maximized my limited bandwidth. To achieve this, I dissected my diet and exercising processes to discover where

my time and energy were being used inefficiently. Throughout the book, the inefficient use of time and energy is referred to as *friction*. Friction stifles habit formation by unnecessarily increasing the amount of effort required to get the benefits of diet and exercise. When your process has too much friction, you lose motivation to continue. The key to sustaining fitness motivation is to eliminate as much friction as possible from diet and exercise. The comprehensive fitness system you're about to learn is built on this idea.

Chapter 1 of this book uses the first key principle—viewing fitness as an overall life enhancer—to help you map out the major benefits you hope to gain from improved fitness. It also explains the second key principle by demonstrating how friction can easily become a motivation killer. The subsequent chapters explain how to set appropriate fitness goals and build low-friction habits capable of helping you attain more of the life-enhancing outcomes that you want. Below is a brief overview of the key topics covered in these chapters:

Habit building—If you value what physical fitness can bring you, then you should establish the most efficient means of consistently achieving it. The key to doing so is turning fitness-promoting behaviors into *habits*. Habits economize your time and energy by automating behavior, reducing the amount of friction that pursuing fitness can cause in your life.

Physical requirements—To get healthier and more fit, the two most important habits to develop are effective dieting and exercising. Consistently exercise the major muscle groups via strength training, exercise your heart via cardio training, and eat a diet with adequate nutrition.

Diet and exercise strategy—Build a system of behaviors that has maximum impact but minimizes friction in your everyday life.

Exercise tactics—Use twenty-minute at-home daily workouts that include strength training and cardio to develop and keep lean muscle and cultivate a healthy cardiovascular system.

Diet tactics—Use a simple system of staple foods and core meals to minimize dieting friction, promote muscle development, and achieve healthy body-fat levels.

You know that learning to get and stay fit can be difficult. To make this easier, the book is organized to be a roadmap for acting. It walks you through the important ideas and steps to take chronologically so that everything can be understood in context and as a complete system. In addition to reading along, the book provides many points where you can stop reading and take some action before continuing. For instance, you'll be asked to stop in chapter 1 to do some soul searching and consider how a lack of physical fitness might be impeding your happiness. Stopping to complete these exercises is crucial because it allows you to relate the abstract ideas to your concrete experiences. This allows you to build real understanding, set goals, and begin making strides toward better fitness as you read.

To make the content of this book as digestible as possible, it's broken into four distinct parts:

1. Winning the psychological game
2. Know your body and set your goals
3. The nuts and bolts of exercise
4. The nuts and bolts of diet and nutrition

The key topics of each part are organized into short sections to keep them digestible and easy to revisit for future reference. Each section uses as many example scenarios as possible to help demonstrate the real-world application of the ideas. Hopefully, when you read the

examples, you'll think, "I've been in similar scenarios" or "I've had the same thoughts as the people in these illustrations." The intention for the book's presentation style is to demonstrate how practical *The Friction Factor's* system is for busy people and how the system is different from most other solutions.

If you take nothing else from this book, remember these two axioms:

- To achieve and maintain physical fitness, be clear on how pursuing fitness will bring value to your life.
- The easiest way to consistently attain the benefits of fitness is to use the most efficient fitness methods.

These two ideas allowed me to solve my problem of how to fit diet and exercise into my busy lifestyle. As I began living by them, I was motivated to overcome the stress and pressures of life that derail so many people. In the face of twelve-hour workdays, client meetings, constant deadlines, running a small side business, writing, spending time with family, and the need for sleep, I still found a repeatable way to tend to my fitness. I became clear on what I wanted out of fitness and learned to eliminate friction from the process of pursuing it. At this point pursuing fitness became a lifelong habit for me, and by utilizing the same ideas and methods, it can become a habit for you too.

Unfortunately, understanding the big ideas isn't enough for you to achieve long-term success. If you think of pursuing fitness as a military battle, then the big ideas are the overall battle plan. Even with a great battle plan, soldiers can easily lose the fight if they don't know the right methods and tactics, such as how to choose the right weapons, attack, defend a position, or retreat. In the world of fitness, much of the friction that deters people from healthy dieting and exercising happens at the tactical level. How to fight lack of energy during workouts, how to quickly build a healthy meal when you don't have time

for calorie counting, how to exercise while out of town on a business trip—these are all examples of tactical problems that can derail a great fitness strategy. Without a robust toolkit of fitness tactics, you will be overrun with such challenges and eventually lose motivation to pursue fitness.

How do you determine the right fitness tactics? The answer is that it often takes a lot of time and trial by error, which most busy people don't have the bandwidth for. Because of this, you might have tried other fitness systems in the past. If they worked well, then you wouldn't be reading this book. Why didn't they work? The main reason is that most popular diet and exercise systems don't make the issue of people's limited time and energy a strategic concern. Because of this, they don't scratch the surface of dealing with the friction people encounter at the tactical levels of diet and exercise. This book was written to solve that problem.

The Friction Factor gives you a fitness strategy—a battle plan—that's solely focused on addressing the primary reasons busy people fail at fitness: lack of time and energy. Based on this strategy, it teaches you the crucial tactical methods—a sort of soldier's field manual—for overcoming common sources of friction. These tips, tricks, hacks, and cheat codes are the secrets to eliminating friction from diet and exercise. Once you've mastered them, you'll be able to form lifelong fitness habits. What does that mean? It means that making the effort to pursue fitness becomes easier and part of your everyday life. It means that all the benefits you want out of fitness will come to you more consistently. Most importantly, it means that you can change your mindset and see the pursuit of fitness for what it truly is: an essential means of enhancing your life.

PART 1



Winning the Psychological Game

Part 1 is all about understanding how to establish lasting motivation and avoid the friction that stifles most people. It covers

- Fundamental strategies and tactics for building a repeatable exercise habit.
- The basic principles of where, when, and how often to exercise.
- Building new fitness habits so that the right behaviors feel virtually automatic—such as taking a shower or brushing your teeth.

By the end of this section, you'll have a unique new perspective on how to eliminate friction from the exercise process and set yourself up for long-term fitness success.

CHAPTER 1



Motivation and Behavior Change

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE THAT MOST people face when trying to improve their physical fitness is a lack of motivation. You've probably experienced this in the past. Maybe you were excited about some new diet or workout program at first, but after a short time, the motivation faded. Lacking a sustained drive is a problem because to enjoy the benefits of healthy behaviors, you must be motivated to keep doing them. One of the main reasons people can't stay motivated is that they're not totally clear on what they're trying to achieve.

People's fitness goals are usually too vague. They'll make statements such as, "I want to get healthier," "I want to have more energy," or "I want to lose weight." These goals are great starting points, but they're not focused enough. To stay motivated long term, answer this important question: Why? Why do you want to get healthier? Why do you want more energy? Why do you want to lose weight? There must be specific reasons why you want these outcomes, and defining those reasons is required for staying motivated.

The following example demonstrates how defining *why* you want to get healthier can maintain your motivation. Bill is a sixty-two-year-old man who never put much stock in living a healthy lifestyle. His philosophy was “something’s going to kill me one day regardless of whether I exercise and eat right, so I might as well eat, drink, and do what I want while I’m alive.” For most of his life, Bill had no clear reason or goal to develop healthier habits. Everything changed after he narrowly survived his first heart attack. After that, it became clear to him that everything he cared about would be lost unless he adopted healthier behaviors. He’d lose opportunities to spend more time with family and friends and to pursue his hobbies and passions—all because his lifestyle was shortening his lifespan. Bill finally recognized the connection between health-promoting behaviors such as diet and exercise and attaining what he wanted out of life.

What can you learn from this example? Be completely clear on what you hope to gain from being fit and what’s at stake if you aren’t. You don’t need to have a near-death experience to gain these insights, but you should put serious thought into what benefits the pursuit of fitness can bring into your life—and these benefits must be worth the effort in the long run.

If you already know exactly what you want out of pursuing better fitness, and you’re 100 percent certain that these benefits will be motivational long-term, then you’re in rare company. If you’re like most people, you need some direction on selecting appropriate sources of motivation. Rather than guessing at what will motivate you, try examining the trouble spots in your life. You should identify the main ways that a lack of physical fitness might be causing you problems. The idea is to pinpoint how health- and fitness-related issues are making your life more difficult or unhappy. Identifying these trouble spots helps establish good sources of motivation because they usually indicate that something valuable is missing from your life. Finding sustainable motivation is much easier once you analyze and understand how *not*

pursuing fitness is depriving you of life-enhancing benefits. While this approach may seem counterintuitive, it's an effective way to determine how pursuing fitness can make your life significantly better.

Let's look at some examples of how identifying the negative impacts of poor fitness can help uncover important benefits you're missing out on. Sandra, now in her forties, used to enjoy playing team sports. In high school, college, and her twenties, she played on many competitive and recreational volleyball and basketball teams. She especially enjoyed the camaraderie and friendships she developed through these activities and the confidence that came from honing and using her skills. Unfortunately, twenty years of office work and the demands of family life have caused her to become overweight, out of shape, and no longer fit enough to play team sports. Sandra's dissatisfaction with the lack of a cherished pastime—playing sports—and lack of confidence in her physical abilities have created a void in her life. She is depressed about the absence of the benefits she used to gain from sports and now has a dampened outlook for the future. She believes that as she gets older, her ability to get back to her cherished pastime is unlikely. In Sandra's case, poor physical fitness is depriving her of a highly valued type of social relationship and a source of pride and self-confidence.

Let's look at Jeffrey, a man in his late thirties who is seeking a romantic partner. He'd like to find someone nice and eventually settle down and start a family. Unfortunately, he is continually hindered in his romantic pursuits by his poor physical fitness. Most of the women that he's romantically interested in just don't find him physically attractive, and he feels very limited in his options. This is a major problem for Jeffrey because he values romantic love and companionship highly but is struggling to attain it due to his poor fitness. Just like with Sandra, the lack of fitness is depriving Jeffrey of results and outcomes that are important to him. Notice that in both examples, an especially unpleasant or unwanted type of experience—a trouble spot—helps point out when something important is missing from the person's life.

To help you identify the best sources of motivation, below is a list of eleven primary questions about your physical fitness and lifestyle. The questions were selected because they relate to some of the most common difficulties and dissatisfactions that people have in these areas. Consider each question and respond with either yes or no.

- Do you suffer from any lifestyle-related chronic medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, obesity, heart disease)?
- Do you lack energy on a regular basis?
- Are you uncomfortable with the appearance of your physique?
- Do you struggle with controlling your body weight?
- Do you feel physically weak?
- Does the state of your physical fitness ever cause you to feel unsafe or unhealthy?
- Do you experience a lack of self-confidence due to the state of your physical fitness?
- Does the state of your physical fitness degrade the quality of your romantic life?
- Does the state of your physical fitness cause you feelings of guilt or shame?
- Do you think your lifestyle choices will significantly reduce the length and or quality of your life?
- Do you think your fitness-related lifestyle choices are setting a bad example for your children, family, or other loved ones?

For each of the questions where you answered yes, answer the following two subquestions:

1. How has this limitation negatively impacted your life?
2. What would diminishing or totally removing this limitation enable you to do?

Remember that these eleven questions reflect just some of the most common problems and limitations that relate to health and fitness. If you experience other relevant sources of unhappiness or limitation, list them and ask yourself the same two subquestions about them.

Identify Your Motivational Sources

After completing the exercise, the next step is to use your responses to identify your most significant fitness-related trouble spots. To do this, pay special attention to how you answered each subquestion. The first subquestion asks you to explain how each difficulty or dissatisfaction negatively impacts your life. Doing so forces you to clearly identify some of your values you aren't currently living out—for Sandra it was friendships and self-confidence, for Jeffrey it was romantic love. The second subquestion asks you what the removal of each trouble spot would enable you to do. In other words, how would your life be better if the trouble spot were eliminated? This step is critical for establishing motivation because it helps you paint a mental picture of what your ideal life would look like. This is effective because, for most people, developing motivation for an outcome is much easier once they've visualized it. By considering your responses to this exercise, you'll be well on your way to visualizing the enhanced life that pursuing fitness can bring you.

Let's look at some examples of how examining your responses can help you paint a picture of a better life.

Example 1: Patricia

The primary question that stood out for Patricia was “Do you lack energy on a regular basis?” She answered yes.

- Subquestion 1: How has this limitation negatively impacted your life? Patricia's answer: "I often lack energy to play with my kids and help them with schoolwork when I return home from the office. My inability to do these activities has spurred frequent arguments with my spouse, which has negatively impacted our relationship."
- Subquestion 2: What would diminishing or totally removing this limitation enable you to do? Patricia's answer: "It would allow me to have the energy to play and interact with my children more regularly. It would also allow me to help more with their homework and remove a major catalyst for disagreements with my spouse."

In this example, Patricia believes that lack of physical energy is the result of her unhealthy lifestyle. This limitation makes it difficult for her to have the positive interactions she wants with family members. She identifies many ways that this occurs through her answer to the first subquestion. In response to the second subquestion, she says that having more energy would allow for better family interactions. For her, the motivating vision of an enhanced life is one where she has ample energy to put toward her family relationships.

Example 2: Reuben

The primary question that stood out for Reuben was "Do you struggle with controlling your body weight?" He answered yes.

- Subquestion 1: How has this limitation negatively impacted your life? Reuben's answer: "It has diminished my confidence in my appearance, which has made my demeanor more passive and reserved. I'm no longer comfortable with how my clothes fit, being photographed, or being in a bathing suit."

- Subquestion 2: What would diminishing or totally removing this limitation enable you to do? Reuben's answer: "I would be much more confident and wouldn't worry if people were judging my appearance. I would feel more comfortable in my own skin and engage in more social activities."

In this example Reuben identifies lack of self-confidence in his appearance as a significant limitation, which he believes is caused by being overweight. In response to the first subquestion, he cites several specific examples of how this limitation impacts him. In response to the second subquestion, he says that he'd be more confident and would engage in different behaviors if he could solve the problem. Based on his responses, Reuben's self-confidence is clearly impacted by his physique. For him, the motivating vision of a better life includes being much more confident in his physique.

Your Turn

Now use your responses to build a motivating vision of your future, one where improved physical fitness adds significant value to your life. First, identify the main ways in which a lack of physical fitness is negatively impacting your life. Then select the most powerful visions of how your life would be enhanced if those bad effects were removed. A word of caution as you form your life-enhancing vision: avoid making short-range fitness benefits a focal point of your vision. When the benefits of fitness are too short range, they won't be a sustainable source of motivation.

What is a short-range benefit? They are limited, time-bound advantages that come from improved fitness that generally have little or no lasting effect on your overall quality of life. For example, people often begin a fitness program so they can lose a few pounds and look good on their summer vacation.

The problem with making a short-term benefit (e.g., looking good for a few days on a special occasion) your primary source of motivation is that it has no staying power. Consider the real impact that something such as “making your goal weight” for vacation can really have on your life long term. Other than a few days of pride about your improved physique, there won’t be a lasting effect for most people because the results are usually short lived.

The main problem with relying solely on point-in-time events—such as vacations, weddings, or pool parties—for motivation is that they are intermittent and infrequent. Where will your motivation come from when one of these special occasions isn’t on the near horizon? When you take this approach, the answer is *nowhere*. When devoid of short-term motivation, most people revert to old—usually less healthy—behavior patterns until the next special event impels them to get fit. This ebb-and-flow type of motivation is one of the main reasons that people are constantly starting, stopping, and restarting fitness endeavors. If you’ve found yourself cycling between periods of exercising and then not exercising, dieting and then not dieting, feeling motivated and then defeated, you’ve been too focused on the short-term benefits of fitness.

How do you then avoid focusing on short-term fitness benefits? The trick is to identify the most significant ways you would benefit if the fitness-related trouble spots in your life were eliminated. As you do this, carefully consider which of these fitness benefits would continue to bring you long-term value. After putting some serious thought into this, select the top two or three benefits that you stand to gain from consistently pursuing fitness; choose the ones with the greatest capacity to increase your overall happiness. These benefits should be your primary sources of motivation. This crucial step forces you to reframe your ideas about fitness and begin thinking of it as a life-enhancing activity, not some chore or duty that you ought to do but dread.

Most people struggle to develop healthy behaviors because they don't see how doing so will really enhance their everyday life. In fact, many people view implementing healthier behaviors as extremely disruptive to their way of living. When you see that pursuing fitness will generate significant long-term benefits, finding and sustaining motivation gets easier, and you'll likely conclude that pursuing fitness might be worth the effort. In the next section, you'll learn about what's necessary to make pursuing fitness *always* worth the effort.

The Friction Factor

Once you know which long-term benefits will fuel your desire to pursue physical fitness, turn your attention to the challenge of implementing new behaviors. Most people implement new behaviors by forcing new activities into their routines without considering the potential negative impacts of those activities. In other words, they implement new behaviors without fully considering the compatibility of those behaviors with the rest of their life. For example, Heather gets motivated to exercise and lose weight as a New Year's resolution. She commits to hitting the gym for an hour per day after work. What she fails to consider is how this commitment will impact her other routines and activities.

After a few weeks, the long workouts and extra commuting time have made her evenings too hectic. She's staying up later to complete daily tasks, sleeping less, feeling more tired at work, and spending less time with her kids. After only a few weeks, Heather realizes the behaviors she's using to pursue her goal aren't sustainable, so she abandons her goal and quits going to the gym. This is an example of a crucial concept that was first mentioned in the introduction—*friction*. Friction occurs when the tactical behaviors you're using to achieve a goal cause too much disruption in your life to be sustainable. As friction increases, your ability to stay motivated decreases.

To make the pursuit of any goal sustainable, put special emphasis on selecting behaviors and tactics that minimize friction in your life. For example, using nicotine gum or patches is a lower friction tactic for quitting smoking than trying to quit cold turkey. Smokers who attempt to quit cold turkey usually will suffer withdrawal symptoms and be anxious and irritable, which can create a lot of friction. When the friction becomes too significant, they often relapse. In contrast, smokers using nicotine supplements to gradually wean themselves will generally experience less friction. They'll be much less anxious and irritable, so the new behavior that they've implemented—chewing nicotine gum—has less of a negative impact on their lives. Quitting cold turkey achieves the goal faster in theory, but using nicotine supplements is more likely to be effective because it causes less friction. In the same way, you can be more successful in your pursuit of fitness by being selective about the behaviors and tactics that you choose.

Let's look at how friction is a factor when it comes to pursuing fitness, even for people who are very fit. Daniel is a fitness enthusiast who loves exercising outdoors, but his employer just relocated him to a colder climate where he can no longer do this. This change of circumstance requires Daniel to change the type of workouts he does and the equipment he needs. To adjust to his new situation, he must consider how to continue pursuing his fitness goals without creating unnecessary friction. Here are a few examples of questions he might ask:

- Should I create a workout area in my house? Will this cause issues with my family by reducing our living space?
- Should I start exercising in a commercial gym? Do I have time to regularly commute to a gym? Can I afford to pay a gym membership long term?

Regardless of the solution he chooses, he should consider only new behaviors and tactics that don't cause significant friction in his life.

Where to Focus Your Effort: Diet and Exercise

Now that you understand the importance of choosing low-friction behaviors and tactics, the next question is, Where should you focus your efforts to improve physical fitness? The two crucial areas where new behaviors are required are diet and exercise. The right behaviors in these arenas will maximize your ability to control and improve your fitness. Most people fail to integrate diet and exercise into their lifestyle because the methods they select tend to generate massive amounts of friction. This is common because virtually none of the typically followed fitness programs are specifically designed to minimize disruption to everyday life (though some are better than others).

Why aren't common diet and exercise programs compatible with most people's lifestyle? The fundamental reason is that most don't put enough emphasis on the efficient use of time and energy. Here are a few common ways that popular fitness programs are disruptive to daily life:

- Many exercise programs and classes require
 - Traveling to a remote location
 - Working out for long sessions
 - Exercising at scheduled times (e.g., fitness classes or gyms with limited operational hours)
- Many diet programs require
 - Eating meals that require excessive preparation
 - Buying unusual foods that can't be found in most grocery stores
 - Adhering to a rigid meal plan, regardless of where you are and what foods you have access to

Common exercise programs are unsustainable for most people because they don't put an emphasis on economizing time and energy.

The result is the inefficient pursuit of fitness, which creates friction in many other areas of life. For instance, if your diet and exercise plan require a significant portion of your daily time and energy, you'll have less ability to pursue other interests such as personal relationships, family obligations, careers, or hobbies. When the pursuit of fitness becomes a barrier to a better life (rather than an enabler), it won't be sustainable. The key to creating sustainable diet and exercise habits is to select behaviors and tactics that maximize the use of your time and energy. In other words, select the methods that are most efficient.

Conclusion

At this point, you've identified how a lifestyle that includes diet and exercise can bring you significant life-enhancing benefits. You understand that the ongoing opportunity to gain those benefits is the best motivation to consistently pursue fitness and that you're not currently getting the benefits because you haven't formed the right habits. You also know that improving fitness means introducing new behaviors and that sustainable behaviors are those that minimize friction in daily life. Finally, you learned that most people fail to make diet and exercise sustainable behaviors because the methods they use aren't time or energy efficient. To overcome this challenge, you need a new approach to diet and exercise that focuses on minimizing friction and maximizing the use of your time and energy. The rest of this book presents a complete and systematic method for doing exactly that. With the foundation you've gained in this chapter, you're ready to begin the journey that will result in effective and efficient diet and exercise habits.

CHAPTER 2



Introduction to Building Exercise Habits

LEARNING TO EXERCISE CONSISTENTLY IS essential to improving physical fitness. Nearly everyone knows this, but training yourself to do it can be extremely difficult. Just consider that about 80 percent of Americans who sign up for gym or fitness classes every January have stopped attending after one month.¹ Chances are that you've started and stopped an exercise routine at least once in your life. Why is keeping up a fitness regimen so difficult? The first reason was presented in the previous chapter: people tend to make exercise commitments that create too much friction in their lives. The other major reason is that people tend to set unrealistic short-term goals. They hold goals such as losing twenty pounds in a month or gaining ten pounds of muscle in a month. When they don't have the rapid success they hoped for, they usually lose motivation and stop exercising consistently.

The Need for Habit Development

When people attempt to exercise regularly, they often put too much emphasis on how much exercise they do and how quickly they can

realize physical results. Exercise volume and improving your physique are important in the right context, but what value are they ultimately if the results can't be maintained long term? The truth is that attaining and *sustaining* positive results requires making regular exercise a repeatable behavior pattern. Initially, getting your body engaged in some type of regular exercise is more important than how long you work out or how fast you make progress. This means, for instance, that consistently doing five to ten minutes of jumping jacks is better than committing to an intense exercise class that's not sustainable. In the beginning, taking the emphasis off intensity and physical results allows you to focus on what's most important: the development of an exercise habit.

The word *habit* was mentioned a few times in the previous chapter, but let's give it a formal definition and explain the importance of the concept. A habit is a behavior that's been repeated so often that it requires little conscious effort to be initiated or performed. The steps for executing these behaviors are stored in the long-term memory and are often cued or triggered by some external event or situation. Some good examples of common habits are activities such as brushing your teeth in the morning, showering before work, or reading before bed.

The primary benefit of habits is that they make the execution of repetitive behaviors more time and energy efficient because they require minimal conscious effort. They make many of our daily routines and tasks seem automatic because we don't have to think through everything step by step. You should be aiming to create this dynamic for your exercise. When you turn exercise into a habit, you address the primary reasons that most people fail to exercise consistently: lack of time and energy. Once working out becomes habitual, it'll begin feeling automatic and will require less mental bandwidth to complete.

Daily Exercise

With all this in mind, you should ask, What's the most efficient way to make exercise a habit? The answer is to do short *daily* exercise sessions. The reason for this is simple: habits are formed through consistent repetition. The more frequently a behavior is performed, the easier it is to make into a habit. Note here that the *frequency* of a behavior is much more important to habit building than the total amount of time spent engaged in the behavior. This means you're generally more likely to build a habit through short daily workouts than from longer workouts done less frequently.

Consider the following example. Anne does short workouts every day for a week (for a total of seven workouts). Chris does three much longer workouts during the same week. Though Chris spends more total time exercising, Anne initiates exercise more frequently than Chris—seven times versus three times. This means that she exercised 133 percent more frequently than he did. Anne is on the faster path to forming a habit because repetition is what instills the cues and steps of a behavior into the long-term memory. As the act of exercising becomes more ingrained, it will begin to require less conscious effort to initiate and will begin to feel more like an automatic reflex. This is what you want. With frequent repetition, exercise will come to feel extremely familiar, something that requires little thought or effort to initiate and engage in. If you exercise less frequently, it will feel unfamiliar and require significant conscious effort to initiate. In other words, less exercise frequency creates more exercise friction.

Problems with Lower Frequency Exercise Plans

Most traditional programs advocate training for three- to four-days-per-week for forty-five- to ninety-minute sessions. When taking this approach, you generally have certain days scheduled for exercise and

certain days scheduled for rest and recovery. Here's an example of what this type of regimen can look like:

Monday: ninety-minute strength training and cardio
Tuesday: off day
Wednesday: ninety-minute strength training and cardio
Thursday: off day
Friday: ninety-minute strength training and cardio
Saturday: off day
Sunday: off day

While programs such as this can deliver great physical results, they allow people too many opportunities to juggle workout days and off days. The main culprit is the longer exercise sessions, which require a significant amount of time and energy. When life gets busy, people don't always have the time and energy necessary for long workouts. When this happens, they tend to say, "I'll skip my workout today and make up for it on a more convenient day." They might even commit to doing a double exercise session to compensate for skipping. This creates a significant challenge for busy people because they struggle to consistently find any convenient time to exercise, let alone forty-five to ninety minutes. The main dilemma is that lack of time and energy is being used as the justification for skipping workouts, but busy people often lack both. This results in people constantly waiting for the "ideal days" to exercise, but they rarely come. This mindset leads to quitting exercise for two main reasons:

- If you're exercising infrequently, then you will experience more friction when you work out because it's not habitual behavior.
- If you're exercising infrequently, you won't see significant results, which will drive you to ask, Are the infrequent workouts I'm doing worth the effort? When the answer is no, people usually give up on trying to exercise.

What does it mean if you constantly struggle to fit the traditional three- to four-day-per-week workouts into your life? It means that traditional exercise systems aren't compatible with your lifestyle; you're trying to fit a square peg into a round hole (which doesn't work). The solution is to ask a different question, which is, What type of exercise system is compatible with my busy lifestyle? The answer is one that creates minimal friction and is the most conducive to forming an exercise habit—which short daily workouts do best. While there's no way to completely remove the temptation to skip, the daily approach eliminates the feature of most exercise programs that encourages consistent skipping: off days. Keeping daily workouts short also removes much of the friction inherent in longer workouts because they require far less time and energy to get through.

To further support the daily exercise approach, research indicates that people who exercise daily are more successful at staying physically fit. For instance, the National Weight Control Registry keeps records of Americans who've lost more than thirty pounds and kept the weight off for more than one year. The data shows that 90 percent of those individuals exercise daily.² While weight loss and maintenance aren't the only measures of success, they're strong indicators that someone is in control of his or her physical fitness. Contrast this with the overwhelming number of people who set exercise goals every January and abandon them by March. Those in the latter group usually fail to avoid friction and form habits because (among other reasons) most of them are following a traditional three- to four-day-per-week exercise program.

Other Benefits of Daily Exercise

In addition to being best for habit development, daily workouts have other unique benefits that make them preferable to systems with off days.

The list below highlights some of these benefits:

- *Better mood and stress management*—Daily exercise helps you feel calmer and more content in stressful situations by increasing the production of endorphins and neurotransmitters.³ Production of these substances increases after a bout of exercise and can have a lasting effect on your mood during the day.⁴
- *Enhanced mental capacities*—Twenty minutes of daily physical activity makes the regions of your brain responsible for learning and retaining memories work more efficiently.⁵
- *Increased energy*—Exercise can have an immediate effect on how fatigued you feel. The energy produced by the body at the cellular level is dependent on your daily activity level—more movement means more energy production.⁶
- *Better sleep*—Exercise increases the amount of deep sleep you get.⁷ In addition, the stress-reducing effects of exercise can make falling asleep easier.
- *Curbed hunger*—An exercise session produces ghrelin and peptide YY, which are hormones associated with hunger suppression. Some research has also indicated that the increased body heat caused by exercise may help with appetite suppression.⁸

While following a three- to four-day-per-week workout plan can improve your fitness, it won't provide all these great benefits in the same degree as a daily program. The first reason for this is that because traditional programs don't prescribe daily exercise, they obviously can't provide all these health benefits daily. The second reason is that because traditional programs increase the likelihood of skipping workouts often, they also reduce the number of opportunities to get the daily benefits. The best way to maximize the benefits of exercise is to make it a sustainable habit—which is achieved most easily through short daily workouts. The fact that consistent daily exercise happens to provide additional health benefits compared to other approaches is

just a bonus.

What about Rest Days?

A common objection to daily workouts is that they cause overtraining (putting undue stress on the body and increasing the risk of injury).⁹ Of course, your body needs recovery time after exercise—especially after strength training. The easy solution is to work different body parts on different days. This is the same approach taken by traditional strength-training programs. They prescribe three to four unique workouts throughout the week that each focus on different exercises that work different body parts. The daily-workout approach just spreads these different exercises across a seven-day period. This provides plenty of recovery time for the individual muscle groups being worked if the program is properly designed.

While the daily workout approach doesn't allow traditional recovery or off days, every day is essentially a rest day for the body parts not being worked. In part 3, you'll learn exactly how to build a daily exercise program that adequately works the entire body without causing overtraining. For now, just know that a daily workout plan can be safe and effective for most people if properly structured.

Are Short Workouts Enough?

Another common objection to short daily workouts is that they aren't substantial enough to significantly improve your physical fitness. This just isn't true. The right exercises done consistently in twenty-minute daily sessions can help you get fit—though some people need to gradually build up to twenty-minute workouts.

The notion of effective twenty-minute workouts is foreign to most people because they believe that pursuing fitness requires regularly spending hours in the gym. A main source of this misconception is

the assumption that improving fitness requires training like a competitive athlete. Most people think that since athletes train for long hours and they are fit, getting fit must require a huge time commitment. What's commonly missed in this line of thinking is the reason that athletes train for long hours. Their goal is to develop special skills and abilities for competition, and lots of training is the best way to achieve this. Improved fitness is just a positive side effect of athletes pursuing their primary objective (skill enhancement). This means that people attempting to train like athletes are taking an indirect approach, which is inherently inefficient. The twenty-minute-daily-exercise approach makes improved fitness the primary objective and the efficient use of time and energy the guiding principle.

Another common reason for thinking that long workouts are necessary is the belief that exercise is all about burning calories. Most people want to lose excess body fat; they know that burning calories results in fat loss and that workouts burn calories. This leads them to believe that they'll burn fat faster if they exercise a lot. This is technically true, but most people accept the idea out of context. For the average person, frequent long workouts are unsustainable because they cause lots of friction in other areas of life. Attempting lengthy workouts won't ultimately help much with fat loss because they're hard to do consistently. Instead, research suggests that you'll be more successful at reducing body fat by combining regular exercise with a calorie restricted diet. While short daily workouts alone won't bring all your fitness goals to fruition, they will deliver significant cardiovascular and muscle-strengthening benefits.¹⁰

How Long Does Habit Building Take?

Once you recognize the power of making daily exercise a habit, you'll ask, Will working out eventually begin feeling easier and a part of my normal routine? The answer is that while the physical labor of exercise

basically stays the same, habit formation reduces the amount of mental effort that exercise requires. This happens because habits create psychological efficiency. As was said earlier in the chapter, repeating the process of exercise over time ingrains every step of your workout into your long-term memory. The result of this is that progressively it starts taking less mental bandwidth for you to get through the steps of a workout. When you reach this point, exercising requires much less active thought because you've memorized the process, making it feel familiar and automatic.

After accepting that having an exercise habit makes pursuing fitness easier, you'll probably ask, How long does habit formation take? Recent studies have shown that it can take anywhere from two to eight months, but on average, new behavior starts feeling routine and automatic after about sixty-six days.¹¹ Note that habits are formed *gradually*, which means that exercise won't be extremely difficult for sixty-five days and then suddenly become effortless on the sixty-sixth day. Rather, each workout gets a little easier as the process becomes more familiar. Eventually, it comes to feel as normal and routine as brushing your teeth or taking a shower.

If developing an exercise habit is taking longer than expected, you've probably overcommitted. Even if you value the benefits of exercise, the amount you've committed to might be creating too much friction in your life. Forcing yourself to do something that's not compatible with the overarching lifestyle that you want isn't sustainable. If you find yourself in this situation with daily workouts, the best solution is to reduce your exercise commitment. Remember, when trying to form an exercise habit, working out *frequently* is much more important than getting the *ideal* amount of exercise. This means that if you can't handle twenty-minute workouts in the beginning, you can shorten them to fifteen, ten, or even five minutes. When the goal is habit building, exercising for just five minutes per day is better than committing to something that you can't sustain

long term.

If you need to begin your daily exercise journey with workouts that are less than twenty minutes, remember that you can build up to twenty-minute sessions over time. In most cases you'll feel encouraged to gradually increase time spent exercising as you begin solidifying the daily habit and experiencing success. For example, Kimberly has been doing ten-minute daily workouts for two months. During this time, she lost some excess weight, got stronger, and became comfortable doing short workouts. At the end of this period she said, "Doing ten-minute workouts is now easy for me, and the results have improved my life. I'm now willing to increase the length of my workouts to get even more life-enhancing results." Moving forward, she decides to increase the length of her workouts by one minute per week until she builds up to the twenty-minute mark. She could also try jumping right into fifteen-minute workouts to see if that's sustainable for her. The point is that while you may need to start slower, your personal threshold for what's repeatable will probably increase over time.

Note that certain life circumstances can arise that reduce the amount of daily exercise that's feasible for you. Even the most consistent exercisers can find themselves in situations that might require temporarily reducing their exercise commitment. Say you've been exercising for twenty minutes daily for years, but you have a new baby or are trying to get up to speed at a demanding new job. In these scenarios, temporarily reducing to fifteen- or ten-minute daily workouts is better than ceasing exercise altogether. Once you get your other priorities under control, you can ramp back up to twenty minutes.

Though sometimes temporarily shortening workouts is appropriate, this is *not* the same thing as skipping workouts. Doing shorter exercise sessions still supports habit building—outright skipping does not. A good analogy for maintaining the habit of exercise during difficult times is fueling a campfire when you have no logs. If you've ever made a campfire and run low on logs, you know that keeping a

few flames alive with sticks and leaves is better than letting the fire go out completely. Why? Because turning a small flame back into a large fire is much easier than trying to spark a new flame. Habits are like flames; building on a small habit is much easier than creating a new one. Doing *some* daily exercise when life gets hectic still helps keep the habit alive. This makes it much easier to build back up to twenty-minute workouts later when your time and energy bandwidth improve.

Conclusion

Short daily workouts are the most effective way for the average person to achieve long-term fitness success. This strategy helps you maximize the use of time and energy and is the best way to develop a sustainable exercise habit. Daily workouts also deliver many unique physiological and psychological benefits that other exercise strategies do not. The next chapter explores many of the common ways that implementing an exercise routine can create friction and presents tactics for avoiding them.