



A Collection of Top Popular Articles Written by Fitness Professionals in North America

Article 1: Fitness and the Holiday Season (5 Tips to let you revel worry free!)

The holiday season is upon us once again. It's that time of year when it seems as though there is a social gathering every other night. That time of year when we become seemingly less conscious about our health, fitness and maintain a paradoxical outlook on weight loss.

It might surprise you but I always recommend to my clients to not worry or stress about their fitness and nutrition too much during the holidays. I believe that our relationships with family and friends are so intrinsically important to our overall well being that they should be our primary focus throughout the holiday season. None the less it only makes sense as to give you tips and thoughts on fitness for the holidays:

1) Don't Sweat the Small Stuff – Not just a famous book series but words to live by. Even worse than overindulging during the holidays is stressing about it. Physiologically increased physical and emotional stress for any length of time are more potentially damaging to your health than two weeks of bad habits ever could be.

2) If You've Been Doing Your Homework You Have Nothing to Worry About – Truth is if you've been exercising regularly and eating well for at least 6 weeks prior to the holidays than nothing you can do during this time will be a major setback. Solid, regular lifestyle habits do not deteriorate with a brief interruption; though you might see the scale and your energy levels fluctuate they will quickly return once you resume your exercise program at the conclusion of the holiday season.

3) Unfortunately, Alcohol is Always the Biggest Problem – Many people are seemingly confused about a few social beverages. Numerous times I've had someone try to explain to me that by eliminating the calories in the mix they are going to coast through unscathed. As bad as sugar is this logic is very flawed. 1-2 ounces of alcohol is all that is needed to suppress hormonal function (significantly impairing the metabolism) for a period of 72 hours or longer. The more you drink the longer you remain impaired, no pun intended. (Ok maybe a little.)

4) Water it Down – No not your favourite beverage, but by that I mean you. Consume even more water if possible, ideally 4 liters or more per day. By consuming significantly more water than usual you will not only minimize your tendency or desire to overeat but also help your body shed excess toxins from processed food and alcohol faster. This is a great way to further insulate your

metabolism during periods where you know your habits will be less than ideal. Yes, you may wind up in the bathroom more but even that will subside with consistency for 72 hours or longer.

5) Gaze Down the Highway – Set your goals for the New Year now. Don't wait until after the holidays and the rush to set your fitness and weight loss goals. By setting your goals now before the holidays you are programming your subconscious to turn on course to reach them. It sounds silly but this little exercise will give you the will to ensure your holiday deviation from the beaten path doesn't leave you lost in the woods.

However, you choose to enjoy the holidays I hope they are joyous and merry. Spend time with loved ones; take much deserved time for yourself. Look at the year ahead and know great things will come if you wish them to. From my family to yours, Merry Christmas.

Article 2: Twelve Tips of Fitness for the Holiday Season

Merry Christmas everyone, it's amazing to think another year has nearly come and gone. As a personal trainer and weight loss coach, the holiday season is an interesting time. It might surprise you to know that many people find December a good time to begin a new exercise and weight loss program and finally make a little time for themselves. I think for many the fear of holiday weight gain or the forward thoughts of the New Year's resolution helps push them to action.

Either way, the holiday season is a time like none other when it comes to fitness, I think it's also greatly misunderstood in terms of its effects on your long-term fitness and weight loss goals. So for you, I have my Twelve Tips of Fitness for the Holiday Season.

- 1) If you can begin consistently eating 5-6 small meals per day combined with 30-45 minutes of exercise per day 7-10 days before Christmas you will significantly reduce your chances of holiday weight gain.
- 2) Water is always the answer. The absolute best thing to stimulate and maintain a great metabolism, mood, energy and more, at any time, is water.
- 3) When in doubt, eat some more. Permanent weight loss is greatly misunderstood, by restricting calories significantly, or punishing yourself after a bad night you will always do more harm than good. You will be in a much better position to achieve permanent weight loss in the new year by eating more and eating more often through the holiday season if it's not exactly the right foods. Use those extra calories to push through your workouts!

4) Enjoy some Christmas cheer, but maybe hold back just a little. There are no two ways about it, alcohol is the deal breaker. As little as an ounce kills your ability to burn fat, heal, suppresses your immune system and much more for 72 hours or longer. The more you drink, the worse it is. But with that being said, enjoy the season, everything in moderation and please never drink and drive.

5) Try chocolate covered chicken. Ok no don't, but I surely got your attention. One of the reasons the holidays are so notorious for weight gain is the unusual, frequent and increased consumption of sugar. The additional refined sugar, in my opinion, is much more problematic than greater amounts of fat. You can help to reduce the effects of this sugar by finding ways to consume protein in close proximity to sugar consumption. This will lessen the weight gain response from all this sugar. Convenient suggestions might be greek yogurt and cottage cheese.

6) Have late nights followed by late mornings. I think any time of year sleep is almost at a premium for many of us in North America. Disrupted sleep places all kinds of extra demands on our bodies, particularly when our wake and sleep time greatly varies. Do your best to get 7-8 continual hours of sleep.

7) Eat your Brussel sprouts. Actually, just eat any vegetable you can, particularly raw, dark green ones. They contain tremendous amounts of anti-oxidants and really help to offset the acidity created by additional sugar, alcohol and processed foods consumed. Not to mention they require more calories to digest than they generally contain, much better than hanging out on the treadmill.

8) Stay active. Enjoy time with family, do physical activities together. Our convenient lifestyle gives us less and less reason to be active. Our bodies are designed to move, keep them moving and they will more likely stay in the shape you want them to.

9) Write your goals now. Don't wait until the New Year. The power of the subconscious mind is well documented whatever you plant in it now will begin to work right away. Just by writing your goals down now you will begin to act upon them without even knowing.

10) Have a loose plan. Generally, most family activities are in the evenings; this still leaves it reasonably easy to maintain good habits for most of the day. Don't worry about things being to the letter but try to keep a few simple things on track, this is the key to long-term success.

11) Reduce stress. Few times a year present a greater opportunity to get lost in the moment, yet it seems like the list of things that you need to do is never-ending. Take a few deep breaths and try to keep stress to a minimum.

12) Focus on relationships. Absolutely the most important tip for the holidays. Don't let anything on this list stop you from spending time with your family, spouse, kids and loved ones. Focus on those relationships that matter most. I want you to be healthy, fit and live forever but it can wait a few days.

Merry Christmas everyone, I hope you have a safe and wonderful holiday season full of joy.

Article 3: 14 Days to Reset Your Metabolism

This is not a scientific fact but rather an observation over time while dealing with thousands of local people trying to reach their weight loss goals. We've continually found it takes about 14 days of 100% consistency and balance to reset or initiate positive change within your metabolism. Those that don't commit fully to the first 14 days are 8 times more likely not to reach their weight loss goals. To make matters of worse, there is little to no margin of error, even the two bites of dessert and the three crackers another day will require you to start this 14-day marathon over again.

You might think this absurd, it certainly may not fall in line with what other weight loss gurus or systems are telling you, but let me remind you obesity statistics have risen more significantly in the last 25 years than ever before, the mainstream ideas for effective weight loss are failing.

The reason this consistency is so critical is because of the powerful effects of hormones, most notably insulin, that are produced and released in conjunction with how much, how often, and what kind of food we consume.

A 14 day period of absolute consistency will yield a significant opportunity for detoxification. You could visually think of this like performing an oil change on a car where residues and waste products are carried away. Additionally, 14 days for most is a long enough period to stabilize blood sugar leading to a lesser expression of insulin and related hormones. This, in turn, creates a cascade of increased physical well being. Though during the 14 days many may feel worse instead of better (making it even harder) by the end energy levels equalize, mood becomes more stable, focus and stamina greatly improve. We've now found our level starting point.

Once this is achieved weight loss, gain, or improved physical performance truly does become a mathematical equation. A little more of this type of fuel (starch, fibrous, or even protein), a little less of another will yield adaptation and progression toward our goal. It's calculated trial and error which ultimately allows you to find your individual mix. Again, you could think of this as a car, a little diesel in a gasoline engine will make it run poorly, a lot and it won't run at all, add water and we have the same problem. Our body just happens to be much more sophisticated and our genes determine whether my fuel mix will be the same, similar, or different than yours.

The key is to adjust subtly and monitor. Mainstream weight loss has conformed to our expectations of instant gratification so if it doesn't immediately work it wouldn't be uncommon

to adjust calories by as much as 20%, or start at a very restricted point, or to attempt to create an artificial situation by using herbal diuretics, appetite suppressants, or drastically different revolving nutritional plans. These are not long-term sustainable options but rather band-aids in an attempt to produce immediate results/customer satisfaction.

Just remember the body is truly a symbol of perfection, it will continually and rapidly adapt to its environment. What you see in the mirror is a product of your lifestyle both in terms of activity, stress and most importantly food. By carefully controlling these variables you will have absolute control over what you see in the mirror.

Article 4: Oatmeal, Possibly the World's Greatest Food

Oatmeal, in my opinion, is possibly the world's greatest food and one of the least eaten. Only 5% of all oat crops in the world are consumed by humans. Don't let that fool you though this grain is a powerhouse when it comes to nutrition. If Oatmeal doesn't currently fill a consistent spot within your daily food intake here are four reasons why maybe it should:

1) A large percentage of North America is becoming increasingly aware of sensitivities to wheat gluten, which happens to be in just about everything. Reactions range from likely noted indigestion and bloating all the way to major inflammation, fatigue, and vomiting. Oatmeal, by comparison, doesn't cause such uncomfortable allergic reactions and in fact can aid in reducing internal inflammation which has been suggested to assist in the prevention of inflammatory diseases, even cancer.

2) By now you likely understand that balancing blood sugar can be a key ingredient for weight management, oatmeal just happens to be an all-star in this category for its slower consistent digestion. Compared to many similar grains it produces a much less dramatic blood sugar spike upon digestion. This also means that it will help you maintain a feeling of being full longer helping to reduce cravings and provide you with more stable energy levels for hours after you eat.

3) Oatmeal is also packed with goodness; it's a great source of essential water-soluble B-vitamins, calcium, and iron. However, even more, important but less known, is that Oatmeal is also a great source of GLA (Gamma Linolenic Acid) an Omega 6 essential fatty acid (in fact next to breast milk Oatmeal is one of the best-known sources.) Essential fatty acids are used extensively in hormone production, maintaining tissue, and aiding in preventing free radical

damage, among many other things. This links oatmeal to be a positive contributor to reducing cholesterol and reducing risk factors for heart and cardiovascular disease.

4) Another great reason to eat oatmeal is that it's very portable. Having been a personal trainer for well over a decade I can tell you one of the biggest challenges for my clients (and even me) is to be able to eat the right things all throughout a busy day on the run. Oatmeal only takes minutes to prepare in the morning, it can enjoyably be eaten hot or cold and lasts pretty much the whole day even unrefrigerated.

So there you have it, next time you're at the grocery store head to the cereal aisle and grab yourself a bag of oats. To ensure we don't leave you still somewhat confused know that oatmeal is available in three most common forms. Steel Cut Oats are the least processed and the best for you, they will contain the highest amounts for nutrients available for your body, they will also take the longest to prepare. Rolled oats are the most common form available in slow cooking and quick. Slow cooking will be the better choice nutritionally as they are still less processed than the quick variety (and in my opinion taste a lot better.)

Here's a little final challenge for you for next week to improve your health and find your new favorite breakfast. Mix 1 cup prepared slow cooking rolled oats with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup cottage cheese (or vanilla protein powder but trust me try the cottage cheese), $\frac{1}{2}$ cup strawberries or your other favorite fruit. Add a sprinkle of Cinnamon, walnuts or pecans, and Stevia, Agave, Honey or real Maple Syrup to sweeten. This amazing breakfast or snack will provide about 480 cal of top quality nutrition. (Approx 65g Carbs, 25g Protein, 8g Fat).

Article 5: Fear The Fluoride

Fluoride has come under fire as of late and quite frankly I'm glad. As a fitness professional for nearly two decades, I'm thankful this topic is hitting the forefront.

Your dentist will argue that fluoride is critical for good dental health, an argument based primarily on studies performed nearly 70 years ago. Coincidentally most of Europe outlawed fluoride decades ago and yet has shown similar improvements in dental health to those in North America. In many more recent studies, you might read several more disturbing considerations, there are many questions about fluoride's long-term effects on the body and suggested links to instances of chronic kidney disease, bone cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, dental fluorosis and a strong link to hypothyroidism to name a few. (Fluoride mimics a primary thyroid hormone thyrotropin or TSH; so many documented symptoms of hypothyroidism are also symptoms of fluoride poisoning.)

Even if you are steadfast on the benefits of fluoride, and dispute its dangers, it still doesn't make sense to add it to the city's water supply. The optimal level of fluoride consumption was set in the 1940s as approximately 1 mg/day; this was based on a fluoride level of about 1ppm or 1mg/L. (eg. Red Deer water is listed at 0.8mg/L) Meaning you would ingest 0.8 mg after consuming just 4 glasses of Red Deer water. Considering by today's standards the minimum water recommendation is 8 glasses (and if you train with me I'm going to encourage you to consume 12-14 glasses per day.) Even before we consider processed food, toothpaste with fluoride, soft drinks, vitamin and mineral supplements, and many other sources you've now consumed 2-3 times what's considered the "optimal" amount. The sheer availability of fluoride in our North American diets eliminates any need for it to be added to water if you believe in its benefits. Additionally, today our bodies are more physiologically overloaded by chemicals and different forms of stress than ever before. Fluoride like many other chemicals has been shown to be residual, meaning the more you consume the more that hangs around in fat cells and other tissues in our body for weeks, months and years building up to higher and higher levels.

It's common sense that too much of anything is rarely a good thing but if anything is clear dangerous or not there is no longer any real need to add fluoride to our water.

Article 6: Do Not Fear Carbohydrates, Instead, Understand Them

Over the years a number of different diets have come and gone, but through Atkins, The Zone, South Beach, and many others one thing seems to remain consistent, be cautious of how many carbohydrates you consume.

This is reasonably good advice and yet oversimplified. For most of us the only reason that carbohydrate consumption ever becomes a problem is for these two reasons:

- 1) The abundance of food processing or additives used in food preparation contains countless grams of hidden sugars you never realize you're consuming.
- 2) Most people don't understand the differences between a starchy carbohydrate and a fibrous carbohydrate and how each has its distinct benefits.

No matter what your belief about carbohydrates if I could urge you to make one positive change in your own nutritional habits today; it would be to reduce processed food and food additive

consumption. By doing everything you can to eliminate as much or all processed food and keeping dining out to a minimum you will eliminate many food additives. This decision alone will potentially reduce your daily caloric intake by 15-25%, all of which will be primarily sugar and fat. We've seen new clients at lose as much as 8lbs in their first week as their bodies detoxify from all of these hidden sugars and additives.

Next, if steady weight loss is your goal it's important that you understand the differences between starches and fibrous carbohydrates and what they mean to your goals.

Starchy carbohydrates include potatoes, rice, oatmeal, other grains, and vegetables like peas and corn. When you consume a starchy carbohydrate it is quickly devoured in the stomach. This quick reaction results in an equally quick elevation of blood sugar prompting an insulin release. Insulin, in our body, is like the master key, it unlocks any door to any cell. Once blood sugar is elevated insulin quickly goes to work unlocking doors and allowing the blood glucose to enter, first to muscle cells, then to our liver. Once the liver is topped up the excess blood sugar cannot remain in the bloodstream it must go somewhere. The body's want not, waste not attitude begins to assemble leftover blood sugar into triglycerides which become just as you expect, body fat. So in this simplified word picture, you can perhaps see the basic component of managing the shape of your body, we simply need to find ways to manage our blood sugar ensuring we never do more than top up the liver with blood sugar.

One of the ways to use excess blood sugar before it's assembled into triglycerides is, of course, to exercise or be active, something we all need to do for a variety of reasons. But we can also add to your fitness and weight loss strategy another form of efficiency, fibrous carbohydrates.

Fibrous carbohydrates consist primary of your dense vegetables such as Celery, Broccoli, Cauliflower, Peppers, Asparagus and so on. Fibrous vegetables in comparative volumes to their starchy counterparts don't contain nearly as many calories, additionally, those precious energy calories are very difficult to extract. Within the stomach, the body must often expend more calories than it receives breaking down fibrous vegetables. This means you've effectively turned your stomach into an engine to consume some otherwise excess blood sugar, in fact when your nutrition is balanced your 24/7 hard working stomach can become one of the best fat burning tools available to you.

Now that you understand the basics you can see why eliminating processed foods and food additives; as well as combining starchy carbohydrates with fibrous carbohydrates may be a

helpful addition to anyone with a weight loss goal. Your body is much like an engine making it perform optimally or change physically is much about finding the right mix of fuel, and taking it out for a drive (exercise) on a regular basis.

Article 7: You Can't Out Train a Bad Diet

It's a very common mentality for many to think that when trying to lose weight or a few unwanted inches that the answer solely lies in an effective exercise program. Though it's true in a sense that your exercise program is a critical component of looking and feeling the way you want in the mirror; the body transforming benefits of exercise quickly diminish when your nutrition is even slightly less than ideal. First let me clarify, not for a moment am I suggesting that if your nutritional intake is less than ideal that you shouldn't exercise. From an overall health standpoint, living without pain, posture, bone density and a multitude of other reasons regular cardiovascular and resistance exercise is critical.

What I am talking about is the frustration and discouragement many people feel within a couple weeks of starting a new exercise program. Quite often people will begin to exercise with the best of intentions with their new habits, including their nutritional habits. The idea of "eating clean" allows them at first to eliminate the notably bad things they're currently consuming; they may eliminate some processed food, sugar, caffeine, saturated fat and so on. Unfortunately, most of these things taste good or consuming them usually results in a positive experience. At the same time their new exercise program, an increased amount of activity, begins to stimulate the metabolism causing them to be hungrier and hungry more often (generally a positive sign) leading to eating more often (also positive). The problem lies in what I've discussed many times before, the mixture of proteins, carbs, and fats. Each time you begin a new nutritional program or a change in habits this mixture changes. Even if you know and understand your ideal mixture and how to monitor it at first changing these habits will be met with physical and psychological resistance, usually in the form of cravings.

Because cravings are never positive, that is until you satisfy them leading to guilt, many people find reasons to dislike their new nutritional habits or find their mood deteriorating as they subconsciously push themselves to incorporate some or all of the old habits. Essentially this is a detoxification period, much like a drug or alcohol; food exudes very powerful habit-forming effects. Our own form of psychology then begins to go to work validating why it's ok to slide on our new habits, we justify that, "we can work out a little longer or a little harder to compensate having _____." This validation comes from the generalized approach of calories in versus

calories out made popular by many mainstream weight loss systems in the last couple of decades. Unfortunately in the simplest form burning more calories than you consume is completely logical, and with a severe enough restriction it's likely you will lose weight for two reasons: 1) You are literally starving your body and 2) (oversimplified) food consumed enters cells and brings water with it, less food, less water. The downside to this is it's like trying to complete an algebra problem with only addition and subtraction. What isn't considered in the calories in versus calories out philosophy is that when you restrict calories your body also restricts hormone production and many metabolic functions. Less water in the cells means less nutrients leading to decreased strength, performance, an increased chance of injury and a suppressed immune system. Oh, and there is one more thing, a much higher chance of rebound weight gain.

The answer is absolute consistency with nutrition and exercise for a 14 day period; in fact, we strongly encourage our new clients to weigh and measure their food and consume exactly the same things (at the same times if possible) for the first 10-14 days of any new fitness program. The statistics are staggering, those that do have nearly a 100% success rate and find their lives run smoother, their much happier, have more energy, and are more productive while their body begins to change like clockwork. Those that don't are 5 times more likely not to reach their goal in the weeks that follow. It's not an easy 14 days but it's well worth it. When starting a new exercise and nutritional program I do highly recommend seeking the advice of an expert, everyone is different there is no absolutely right place for everyone to start. When it comes to nutrition if you'd like to learn on your own, I do make a book suggestion of The Metabolic Typing Diet by William Wolcott as a place to start.

Article 8: New Year's Resolutions Survival And Perspective

Happy New Year! Most think of each new year as new beginnings, a clean slate, an opportunity to set goals and make big changes. Weight loss goals quite often are at the top of these lists.

Statistically, only 12% of New Year's weight loss goals come to fruition. I'm hoping by explaining the backward approach to reaching your goals I can help influence that number. We are all resistant to change physically and psychologically. So when we set dramatic goals that require a significant change from our current day to day habits we run the risk of "running out of willpower." I've heard that comment many times throughout my personal training career, "I just don't have the willpower."

Everybody has all the willpower they need to achieve any goal. The problem is that we get very focused on the end result but don't actually think about how to get there. It's an old analogy but just think about trying to drive from here to a specific address across the country without a map (or GPS), I doubt any of us have the "willpower" for that either. Yet that same task with a little more planning could become easy, comfortable, and even enjoyable. You could take multiple days, plan to stop at some nice relaxing points along the way, see the sights and remove all stress and worry about the difficulty of reaching the final destination.

If you want to reach your weight loss goal this New Year's it's time to start thinking backward. When I first meet with many of my clients, I always tell them the secret to reaching their goals is changing as little as possible about their lifestyle to reach their goals. The less things you have to change from how they are now, the more likely you are to stick with it.

So if you have a weight loss goal here are a few things that will likely be needed to ensure you reach that goal:

- Eating 5-6 meals. Plan your meals!
- Drinking 3-4 L of water per day.
- Resistance exercise 3-4 days per week.

Right now you may not be doing any of these things and only eating 2-3 meals per day. For the first week choose something comfortable like simply adding a piece of fruit and a handful of almonds a couple times a day outside of your meals. And start with activity just twice a week. It just has to feel like no big deal. The real secret is to plan out these baby steps so you always know what you are working toward next week. As long as each step is gradual and feels like no big deal, you will continually find it easy to adapt these habits to your lifestyle for the long term. Don't get hung up on the scale, it doesn't need to drop rapidly, in fact, it's better if it doesn't. Generally, the faster you lose the weight, the more likely you are to gain it back. No one likes to hear that but it's the certain truth I've seen repeatedly throughout my twenty years in the industry. Losing just 1-2lbs per week is almost a guarantee you are likely to keep it off forever. It doesn't sound like much but just think about how it adds up, 2lbs/week would be over 100lbs in the next year!

Review your weight loss goal, pick a realistic target and then work backward with baby steps to where you are now. Make sure each week incorporates just a couple new baby steps that make each little step comfortable and no big deal. At first people around you, may criticize, but come

March, April and May you'll be in the 12% when almost all other New Year's Resolutions are forgotten. 😊

Article 9: Adaptation

The body is so amazing it adapts to absolutely everything in the best way it can, unfortunately not always in the way we want it to. With so many different dieting and exercise methods available to choose from the process of getting your body to look the way you want can't be anything but confusing. At the center of it all is one simple concept, adaptation. More important than any particular exercise program or diet program, I'd like to help you better understand how using a simple process of adaptation will guarantee physical change.

I've always been a night owl, I feel better in the evening, I'm more creative and I enjoy working in my home office in the evenings. The personal training industry demands early morning availability, we all work so much it's nice to get your workout out of the way before heading to work. Each year we close our studio at Christmas for a refresh week and to spend time with family, for me this means not getting up quite so early. When the studio reopens, well you know where I'm headed, those first few days it's hard to leap out of bed at 5:00 AM feeling supercharged and ready to roll, but over time my body adapts.

This same measure of adaptation applies to pretty much any aspect of diet and exercise and you'll do well to understand it and to apply it. For instance one of the biggest mistakes people make when setting goals (especially with New Year's Resolutions) is at times of high inspiration we create unrealistic demands of adaptation. Instead of starting with a few minutes of exercise per day, something that seems effortless, we dive into 1-2 hours/day. Instead of gradually adjusting our dietary habits we scratch everything quit our bad habits cold turkey and start fresh tomorrow.

Ultimately, we create a demand for adaptation that physically or emotionally our body can't safely accomplish so instead it resists. This resistance comes in the form of emotional fatigue or feeling unmotivated or it manifests as physical fatigue, ailment or injury. It is oversimplified but basically true that any time you feel less than spectacular it's because the measure of adaptation has been too great. It may be too little rest, too little water, too little food, too much sugar or fats at certain times or a variety of other things.

It may seem impossible to know and understand on your own what to correct, and you know what; that's ok. You now understand that it just means you must keep changing variables at a reasonable result until you achieve the desired result, enter consistency. If weight loss is your goal any program, coach, or trainer is basically going to demand some measure of consistency through accountability. You will be asked to follow their program which is ultimately a designed set of variables that force you into a path of consistency. Sure, these programs can greatly differ but the underlying concept is the same, consistency, moderate and incremental change to force adaptation.

You can apply this now by making a list of your current habits. Form them into a rough schedule, try to do as many things the same as possible. Simply change one or two things (examples might be the number of workout days, duration, total calories, carbohydrate intake, sleep, water consumption, etc) for a week and note the result of how you look and feel. The critical caveat is to make sure any changes you make are done so in a "no big deal" fashion. This means the changes need to be comfortable or they won't be sustainable, and by sustainable I mean for a period of weeks or months rather than just the week of implementation. Over time if you slowly adjust variables your body has no choice but to adapt. The difference in using this process on your own versus working with an expert is the expert can provide the reassurance at the times you inevitably doubt yourself and the expert will often guide change a little quicker based on the historical performance of others, but then I guess that's what makes them an expert.

Article 10: Barbells, Biceps, and Better Posture

One thing I will say about being a personal trainer is that you are always learning, whether you mean to or not. I know I've written other columns on improving posture and the common occurrence of head forward, rounded shoulder posture. Today I wanted to share with you something I've recently found to be instantly effective in improving my clients' posture.

If you are not familiar with head forward posture run to the mirror and glance quickly at your standing profile, there's a good chance it's affecting you. You'll quickly be able to identify it by noting the appearance of a rounded upper back, the front of the shoulder seemingly protruding out sometimes creating a concave appearance of the chest and the ears sitting forward of the bony top of the shoulder.

Head forward posture notoriously is associated with headaches, back pain, and rotator cuff injuries. With all the time we spend looking at screens these days it becomes quite easy to see why this type of posture is the most common. We spend a large part of our lives in this position.

Traditionally as trainers, we educated people on the anatomy and movements of the upper back, why they are weak and the opposing muscles on the front of the body are overly strong in relation. We taught people row movements, retraction movements and all kinds of things. What we haven't done is encouraged bicep curls, and from a purely technical perspective, we shouldn't.

Here's where I contradict myself. The bicep is also often one of the many related culprits to head forward posture. As the bicep shortens it pulls our shoulders forward. The stronger it becomes the more it pulls.

There is a large muscle that originates on the back side of the shoulder blade, between the shoulder blade and the ribs, it's called Serratus. The serratus muscle wraps around our ribcage and attaches to a number of ribs on the front side of our body. One of the neat things that serratus does (or is supposed to do) is actually flatten the shoulder blades against the rib cage. As things like our chest muscle and biceps get stronger and pull our shoulders forward the ability of serratus to perform this function decreases. This is where all the rowing and retraction movements come from as fitness experts like myself try to improve your posture. Unfortunately, if it's not working properly it's very difficult for your brain to fire this muscle and make it start working properly, I mean it's basically forgotten how. Your brain has now become very

comfortable with the idea of recruiting other muscles to do these tasks since it's not generally a major or common exertion we do so for many years.

Now in the typical sense as mentioned above the bicep curl compounds this problem but if performed the way I am about to explain it's also the thing that will help you feel, recruit and understand exactly what should be happening with serratus muscle to rapidly improve your posture.

Start with a shoulder width grip on a barbell, use a weight that's light enough that you could easily perform 20 bicep curls with. Now before starting the movement concentrate on lifting the chest up and squeezing the lower tips of the shoulder blades together. Your shoulders should not elevate at all as you do this. Now as you perform the bicep curl don't allow your shoulders to move, it will feel very different, much more difficult and you will feel the muscle on the underside of your shoulder blade tire long before your biceps. You are feeling the muscle fibers of your serratus and lower trapezius firing, both critical for the improvement of head forward posture. Repeat this for three sets of fifteen repetitions 1-2 times per week. Admittedly this is often easier if someone knowledgeable helps you position your shoulder blades and keeps their hands on your shoulder blades to detect movement while you perform the exercise. Maybe bicep curls can lead to better posture after all.