

21 Under
DAYS

**My Story of Graduating,
Surviving, and Thriving in
the New China**

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“21tiger days” Version 1.0

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PROLOGUE

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The sun was bearing down on me, my clothes were drenched with sweat, and I had been dragging three huge bags through a crowded subway terminal. As I dodged the locals, I tried to keep an eye on a little black bobbing head in front of me. I think her name was Betty, one of the office girls, she was middle-aged, about 5'6, and husky. In broken English she mumbled and pointed at things,

“Watch stairs... Keep you wallet safe... You go there... Buy ticket now...”

We rounded a corner, and just as I thought we'd arrived at the right platform, she announced she was going home.

“What? Where do I go?? I've never been here.” I was flustered.

She was expressionless, “You get on the train, right to the end. When it stop you get out. Then just keep a-walking. It’s there. That’s China. That-a-way.”

Without waiting for my response, she turned and disappeared into the crowd of black bobbing heads.

Yes, I was tired. Yes I was still jet-lagged from a 15 hour flight. Yes I was inappropriately dressed for a Canadian winter in a South China summer. But that woman was the only contact I had with the real world. And she was breaking up with me. The last thing I can remember her saying, before I dragged my worldly possessions onto a packed subway car was something about following everyone else. I guess everyone is going to China.

The story of how I survived that first year in China is a little bit about China, and a little bit about what I learned there, and I couldn’t tell one without the other. I’ll try to break it up into chunks, starting with the Body.

PART ONE

21 *tiger days*

chapter one
Body

Luohu Station

Shenzhen, China

The subway car took forever to get to the Mainland. It was packed, and everyone looked at me quizzically with my huge bags. When we got out there was a long walkway: no signs in English, not much of anything. The advice Betty had given me was surprisingly useful: just follow everyone. There were hundreds of people, black bobbing heads everywhere, marching down the platform into the hot sweaty night. We got to a border checkpoint, and after scribbling a few details on the customs card, and handing over my new Chinese visa, they let me in. I smelled awful, my skin was beet red with sweat, and my clothes were drenched. The customs guard, a portly 30-something with a boys haircut and dark green garb, was about to hand me my passport when she noted the date.

“Oh....dui’le...Sheng’ri Kuai’le..” She wanted to wish me a happy birthday. I too found it amusing, that fate would present me with this delightful gift on my special day. I mumbled a thank you, collected my passport and trudged on.

Twenty minutes later, my body ached. I wondered what the rush was. The end of the line was the Shenzhen Train station opening into the black. It was dark, and hot, and there were no flashing lights, or any indication of a 15 million plus city pumping to life on a Friday night. Just heat and the sting of sweat in my eyes. I guess we were here.

“Hey! Mike, right?”

A brawny looking Westerner hollered at me, waving his arms and charging towards me in long strides. He grabbed my bags, and barked something at the Chinese guy had been helping me carry them. He wasn’t helping me free of charge of course. Here in China, cash is king, and people will do anything for money. Apparently, I’d paid about five times too much money for the use of his dolly-cart. The old guy was making a living taking advantage of tired and weak passengers bringing their life possessions into China. I figured it was worth it. It’s only Chinese money after all. The Canadian man doing the barking would be my colleague and roommate in Shenzhen. His Chinese was pretty good. I’d barely said three words of Mandarin since getting on the plane back in Vancouver. I guess I’d have to at some point.

“I’m Steve.”

“Oh yeah. I heard about you. Working in the same office?”

“Yeah, but we’re not working together. It’s alright, I’ll explain everything.”

We hopped in a van with the driver, Mr. Zhang. Steve didn’t shut up the whole trip. A few years younger than me, he was obviously overwhelmed with love (or should I say, lust) for this country. After studying Chinese for 5 years and taking Asian Studies in Grad School, I was getting a crash course on Chinese culture from a white guy from Ontario. Every so often, he popped his head out the window and called out to a girl on the street “*Wo ai ni!!*” The women would spin around, mouth agape at seeing a foreigner, often for the first time. We were like ghosts. No one took our words seriously, they were too stunned that we could form even the most rudimentary Chinese. As such, I was told, we could say pretty much anything we want, to whomever we wanted.

We got to the apartment building where the company had a dormitory. It was a minimalist two bedroom place with a huge living area, and big windows that looked down on the plaza. Our view was partly covered by the thick fronds of palm trees. My mind immediately went back to a trip to Orlando when I was a young boy. The air feels the same. I wondered if the climate shaped personalities the same. Were Shenzhenese like Floridians? Outside the locals walked and biked everywhere. Cars were everywhere too, but they seemed like a chaotic waste of money and time. Roads seemed to twist and wind in a complex labyrinth that confused everyone. You often saw the locals pulling U-turns and crossing wide angled

intersections dangerously trying to switch lanes at the last second. They also tried to beat the red light and jump the greens. Some locals thought red meant go and green meant stop, especially when the pedestrian lights were up. It was pure chaos. I'd had a long day and my head was spinning.

“Are you hungry man?” Steve opened the fridge and pulled out a bottle of Gatorade.

“Yeah, I'm starving.”

My first meal in Mainland China was a feast of barbecue meats and eggplant, with a few tall bottles of *Qing'dao* beer to wash it all down. It was delicious, and, I later learned, incredibly bad for you. I would have to figure out a better system for food than two dollar street meat.

Believe it or not, control over your body is the easiest way to feel great, and feel powerful. Lots of people find various ways to 'feel good' most of which are vices to distract ourselves, like drinking, overeating, various 'fun' addictions that we know are bad for us.

But actually the first place to start is not a bag of Doritos, but by doing some pushups. The best and easiest way to get a natural 'high'. There are chemicals in your body called endorphins that are released when we go jogging, or play an intense game of basketball. Your heart is pounding, your reflexes are firing, and you're pumped and full of energy. You feel powerful and alive. This is a natural high, you are confident and ready to go another game (or 10!).

Unless you're one of the rare few who have healthy habits, and eat right (its pretty much runs counter to all other instincts to feel good), you're probably less than satisfied with your body. How do you feel when you get up in the morning? Listless? How's work? Do you feel like you didn't get any sleep at all? Are you gazing at the clock all day, looking forward to hitting the couch and a cold one?

By the end of this chapter, I'm going to put you on a plan for pure natural fitness, one that won't freak you out. The result is the most amazing Natural high there is: being Healthy.

But diet plans have existed forever. They're boring. No one wants to swap one form of jail (sloth) for another (fitness freak). So we're going to dodge both of those bad plans.

Hitting the Gym?

It doesn't actually sound that wild to me either. And I don't want to just point you towards the nearest Gym as the way to get this part of your life handled. You already know about the gym and you don't like it. In fact, you may have done it for years and felt it was just too hard to get motivated. To be honest, many of the hard bodies you see at the YMCA have been going there for years, and go more for the social place it has their life than for any big health changes.

Here's the truth. The bench press is a hard core exercise, but if you're not putting the right food in your body at 6PM, it doesn't matter what you can do in that stinky sweaty room at 7PM. In other words, you can get a leg up on most of the guys in the Gym who are fighting against their own bad habits by ignoring their diet and emphasizing the pump and burn of sweating in the Gym.

And can you blame them? We've learned from an early age that basically anything that doesn't kill you makes you stronger. And that is a great saying, its inspirational, but we make a mistake when we reverse rationalize that "if I'm hurting myself, it must be good for me." When you eat Cauliflower and Brussel Sprouts, it tastes bland, and it's healthy for you. So when my whole body shakes and my muscles burn and I can barely breathe, it must be great for me, right? Of course not.

For me hitting the gym was not convenient, I had other things I wanted to do than subway, taxi, or walk to the gym. And for reasons I'll explain later, the Gym was just overkill for me. I've set up these exercises so you can do all this in your home or apartment or your bedroom (I know, you're living in a shoebox. I've been there). You don't need \$50,000 of equipment to feel terrific. In fact, the fitness you really need to leave the house to do (unless you get a treadmill) is running.

Running is a lifelong pursuit and hobby which you'll learn to adore. It exercises the whole body, while naturally making you better looking, happier and most of all, exercising that little thing that keeps this whole adorable little life going: your heart.

When I was in High School, I played Rugby, Tennis, Basketball and Squash. I also had a brief stint on the Rowing team, and did Cross Country Running. I was the furthest thing from 'jock' you could imagine. Not fat, I was just too skinny.

In 11th Grade I was about 6'1 and 150 pounds. Every night I would go to the cafeteria and shovel food in my face, then at night I would

chug water and hit the Gym. The highlight of my day was seeing how much I could 'game' the scales (if I drank enough water, I might get it up to 160 or 165 and feel like a tough guy!). After the workout I'd make a batch of Macaroni and Cheese to replenish my 'cheese and cardboard' levels. I wouldn't crack 170 pounds for another 5 years.

Most people don't have this problem (a fact which did not elude me; I felt totally alone and clueless in my quest for 170), so I had to scour Health Magazines and try every 'trick' and 'exercise' to get 'buff.'

What did I really want? I wanted to feel good about my body. I didn't want to be Stallone, I wanted to be Secure. And whether it was immaturity or vanity, this one thing seemed to block me from every other part of my life.

Once you get your diet right, with just a few principles, you'll see how you (like me) were working against yourself in the past, and how we're going to totally change your body in just a few weeks.

Getting Ripped is Hard. Getting Healthy is a Joy.

If you can accept that you don't need (or want) to look like a professional wrestler, or NFL linebacker, then this is going to real easy. Those guys have to do amazing shocking things and consume vast amounts of vitamins, meats, wheys, proteins to achieve their superhero bodies. They're doing amazing unnatural things to achieve amazing and unnatural results. What's wrong with that? When young men and women actually pick up and read these 'routines' to fix their 'incredibly average' health problems. Dangerous.

From Brad Pitt to Jean Claude Van Damme, and Stallone to Christian Bale, celebrities have been sharing their 'crazy routines' for packing on muscle (or in some cases, dropping 20-30 pounds through starvation!) for decades. They have very different goals than you: they want to reach an athletic and aesthetic peak for a few months so they can shoot a movie. They are not a long term plan for feeling and looking great.

And then there's Models (male and female): they have a standard and it's perfection. They want to be symmetrical and perfectly beautiful to the point of being placid, plastic and boring. The combination of diet and regiment and lifestyle and (oh yeah) genetics that will get them there requires more than a bit of alchemy.

For actual normal people, the goal is to get Healthy and get up every day feeling like a million bucks. We want to be able to look in the mirror (clothing optional) and love what we see. Once you get on the right track, vanity is going to be a bit of problem, but we'll cross that bridge when we get to it! Because an amazing thing happens when you stop trying to look like a movie star...you stop wanting to be someone else, and fall madly in love with yourself. Now lets look at the components that are leading to your current health level.

The Love of Food

I love food. I love greasy french fries. I love the Big Mac sauce. I love spicy chicken wings, and club sandwiches. Hell, I even love those boxes of Macaroni and Cheese I used to eat in high school! I love Red Wine, and I love Tortellini. I love Seafood, Chicken, Barbecue Ribs, and even the occasional Caesar salad. I have been known, on

occasion, to dip every piece of food on my plate...in spinach dip. I think I've made my point.

From being a human skeleton in my teens, to even a little pudgy in my twenties, I seriously believe the biggest difference between a skinny guy and a fat guy (besides metabolism) is the skinny guy hasn't yet discovered and cultivated his love of food.

When we eat food, not just salty, sugary, fatty foods, but all foods, our brain releases dopamine to signal that we are enjoying consuming the right things, the right amount of energy, the right nutrients. That's right, the dopamine that get's released when we're around friends and lovers, and having great natural fun (ahem) is the same drug we feel when we take a bite of a hot juicy Bacon Cheese and Mushroom Burger. It feels great.

Conversely, if you've ever had a drink of spoiled milk, or accidentally taken a bite into some moldy bread, you know that the human body is hardwired to expect certain tastes associated with clean healthy food, and violently repulsed by anything which is may be spoiled, poison, or not suitable for digestion. We have millions of years of evolution on our side here.

As others have explored (Mean Genes: From Sex to Money to Food: Taming Our Primal Instincts¹) the body has evolved over hundreds of thousands of years, long before 7-11 and Drive-through Dunkin' Donuts. So we are pre-programmed to want to get fat. I repeat, we are pre-programmed to want to get fat and eat greasy fatty salty sugary foods. You're genetically wired to want to pack a ton of

¹ Phelan, Jay. "Mean Genes: Taming Primal Instincts" Penguin. 2001.

calories as storage, for the coming winter (or a bad weekend of Mammoth hunting).

Have you heard of Dopamine? Dopamine is the pleasure chemical associated with eating good tasty food and having an earth shattering orgasm. If surrendered to, dopamine will lead you down a path towards listlessness, laziness, sloth and infidelity. Basically, we can actually learn to ignore this chemical need. We do so with principles.

Aeons ago, in India, the Buddha preached people to rein in their sense desires (they were considered delusional distractions from our own true inner beauty, Nirvana). When we consider what to have for dinner, we are wise enough to not fill up on greasy cheese fries as if we're about to embark on a 2 week trek over the Andes. That wisdom will get you the body you want. Why do we love eating so much? The same reason the wayward and the lost get into drug addiction and porn collections. Boredom.

If you're bored right now, having a cheese dog will feel so incredibly good. It's not a hunger problem is a boredom problem. Also, we think back to happy memories of eating (other people, great dinners and events you've been to, great sporting events or movies you watched while eating). Recognizing your own motivations for eating make overeating a childish pastime. Are you bored? Pick up a book, call up your friends, get a hobby, but distracting yourself with dopamine hits is never going to make you happy.

The Diet

This is the most important thing. Actually the notion of building big muscles, that burn energy super fast, is really to get rid of excess

energy. If you don't have a ton of excess energy, the need for big huge muscles (which look great) is lessened. Big muscles for the sake of vanity, should by this point, be lessened anyway. Do you need me to tell you what to eat? Not really. Most people already know what's bad for them. But what's bad for them isn't the problem. The problem is how we relate to food.

Knowing that the body doesn't actually need as much food as it thinks it does, what are you going to eat? Are you going to eat food that gives you bad hair, yellow teeth? Are you going to eat Potato Chips all day and go to bed with a stomach ache? Are you going to have the same plate of Meat and Potatoes every day for the next 10 years?

So here's a few guidelines (not rules), most of which are pretty simple, and surprisingly easy to stick to:

- *No beer.*

Have water, have unsweetened juice, have milk. Beer will stay in your system long after you drink it, and actually cause your body to stop burning fat, for a few hours. Combine that with the high caloric intake of the drink (and the fact that beers are often drunk in large quantities), and before you know it, you have a spare tire. If you drink a few cans of beer per week (I used to pound one back nightly), this one aspect alone will change the way you look and feel within just a few weeks. A keeper. Cold Turkey. Thank me later.

- *No food after 7PM.*

Look, if you're hungry, eat. But little snacks that stay in your body when you're horizontal for 6-8 hours will go straight to your butt. As

an ex-skinny guy, I loved the idea that a peanut butter sandwich would keep my stomach full during the night. But if you think you could stand to lose 10-20 pounds, this stuff is easy. Note: if your body is digesting food while you're trying to sleep, what kind of great night sleep do you think you're going to get? Exactly.

- *No Fast Food.*

Wow. I think I just felt the tension hit up a notch. No Fast Food. I know what you're thinking, "are there really people out there that live without Chicken Nuggets and Krispy Kreme Donuts?" Yes. Yes, there are. And they're pretty good looking too!

You know who else doesn't eat fast food? My Dad. No he's not a Vegan, but he is a Physician. And his decision to not eat Quarter Pounders doesn't really have anything to do with a strict regiment, or his not wanting to be spotted by his patients in the Drive Thru. Its just a matter of knowing what goes into those burgers, and that was it for him to not eat there. Ever again. Let me give you a hint: if you're running to the bathroom within 30 minutes of having a Big Mac meal, that's not normal. It's not, as it turns out, Rock and Roll, either. ;)

- *Drinking Lots of Water.*

This one's obvious. If you don't drink enough water your skin will get very dry, and itch like crazy. Doubtful you can hold out for very long without running to the fridge for some H2O, but guess what, most people are totally bored by the ho hum taste and aesthetic of fresh water. As a result, exotic drinks, cocktails, juices, sodas, wines and (again) beer take over.

And you know what? The part of your brain that thinks its going on a 3 month journey to throw some jewelry into the mouth of a volcano wants you to load up on thick, pulpy, sweet, fattening drinks. Oh yea, Chocolate Milkshakes too. A quick rundown of some over the top fattening drinks, from Coca Cola to Triple Thick Milkshakes to Bubble tea is very revealing: Calories per Oz goes through the roof on these drinks. Calories and Sugar.

Sugar is Evil. Carbs are naughty.

Ok, so sugar is the problem? What? Where is the outrage? Where is Michael Moore movie slamming Hershey Inc and the Chupa Chups lollypop company?

So here's the deal. Sugar is basically a carbohydrate, which the body loves, because it wants to pack on weight, again, in case of a cold winter, etc. The human body evolved this way.

There's two kinds of Sugar you can get: Organic and Refined. Organic is real. That's the actual part of the Sugar cane with great quality sugar. Refined is the junk.

Refined Sugar is what we taste when eat Donuts, Cakes, Chocolate Bars, etc. The Story of Refined Sugar is much like the Combustion Engine in Cars. Something a little less efficient (good for us) ended up prevailing in the marketplace due to economics.

The Sugar that was originally squeezed and dried from Sugar Canes was great, and 'healthy' but couldn't be stored for very long, and was a pain to transport and ship. The actual nutrient-dense molasses was fed to animals.

The molasses which was originally the 'junk' was quickly adopted because it made better business sense. Storage, pricing, shipment. The only loser is the consumer. From the Nourished Magazine article²:

Unfortunately white sugar - any refined sugar - creates havoc within our bodies and like anything refined, it is highly addictive. Once refined, sugar is no longer a food, it is a drug. And today, most of the western world is addicted. (One wonders if the supermarket chains would stay in business without pushing it.)

So basically the trendiness and business dollars behind promoting refined White Sugar, made it the no-brainer choice. It tastes similar, but the brain has been fooled here: by mimicking Sugar, but being highly addictive, modern day Sugar is just a drug. Nothing good in there.

Is it any wonder that its used on everything? Fried Chicken, French Fries, Ketchup (ok, so I just described my lunch everyday during college), tons of restaurants use it liberally to make just about everything taste a little bit better. The term empty calories, is this: all the calories and taste of sugar with none of the nutrients that were in the original Sugar Cane. Your tongue just hasn't evolved enough since....a couple hundred years ago... to tell the difference. And that is why... your instincts lead you astray. ;)

² Nourished Magazine. "Sugar Addiction and Rapadura: Have your Cake and Eat it". December 2008. <http://nourishedmagazine.com.au/blog/articles/sugar-addiction-and-rapadura-have-your-cake-and-eat-it>

Ok, so Sugar, a Carbohydrate, is the problem. We've been hearing that Carbs (Carbohydrates) are evil for a while now, but still Italian food just keeps on going!

Okay okay, first, what is meant when people talk about Carbohydrates. It's the filler. It's the breads we love, pizzas, the rice, the noodles, mashed potatoes, even chickpeas and bananas. I know what you're thinking: "between bread, noodles and rice, you've just called out 90% of the world's popular diet." The point here is not that Carbohydrates are to be avoided completely, but they are to be minimized. Carbohydrates are the body's primary source of energy, so of course someone who's looking to lose weight is going to want to cut down on these. Instead, go for veggies, salads and delicious meats. A chicken Caesar salad is a perfect choice here.

Carbs tend to be the little things on the side, the bread rolls, the noodles that exist to basically sit under that delicious pesto sauce. Those Carbs are delicious, but you gotta cut it down.

Smoking and Drinking

This is not the part where I tell you new information. This is the part where I remind you that drinking any amount of beer will give you (man or woman) some extra layers during the winter, and smoking (anything) will destroy your lungs and make your teeth go brown.

In other words, do I really have to go further than that disgusting image to talk you out of it? Sadly, yes. Why? Because both feel so damn good.

Neither of these ugly habits is wildly pleasing to the senses. These are emotional and chemical addictions we're talking about.

Let me explain. Basically many years ago, in North and South American, Native tribes used Tobacco as a form of medicine. It would calm the body, relax the mind. At the time it was not intended for recreational use. But when they began trading with the European explorers, the recreational properties (even achieving hallucinations at high doses) were enjoyed by all³. It would be hundreds of years before the health effects of tobacco were even considered. Eventually companies began using tobacco and nicotine, and making the cigarettes more addictive, and sales of this 'plant' went through the roof.

But that's not the point. None of it would matter if cigarettes didn't make you feel good. And do they ever. Have you noticed committed smokers need to 'go for a smoke' whenever they're under stress? When they've just gotten mad at work, or are met with some form of tragedy or a difficult dilemma. Have a smoke. In fact bring a friend, its more social. Have a few. And that need for social contact is the one thing we can never get enough of, which is why we'll do almost anything to stay in the peer group. You could argue that the social aspect of smoking is almost as addictive as smoking itself.

Drinking is another one, that calms people down, and partially 'numbs' the logical brain, ideal for social situations where too much 'in your head' thinking can lead to stilted conversation (never mind being charming in the club).

3. Boston University Medical Center Online." History of Tobacco". 1999. <http://academic.udayton.edu/health/syllabi/tobacco/history.htm#newworld>

Health-wise it's fine as long as you're willing to accept two big drawbacks

- *beer is loaded with calories, about twice what you'd get from vodka, whiskey, etc.*
- *beer/alcohol will also delay the fat burning process in your body because of the way it's broken down⁴.*

My answer? Skip the beer, skip the headaches, sip a Gin Tonic or the like if you wish, but just try to have a good time without pounding beers. They work against your Health Program, and mess up your sleep cycle. Also, beers tend to be accompanied by other things that are just awful for your body (think back to your last Superbowl Party. What did you Eat? Exactly.)

Losing Weight. A View from the other side.

I actually had to consult with a dear friend from High School, who had a dramatic metamorphosis when she was in the 11th grade. She went from being a tomboy, to an absolute knockout, in about a year of hard training and discipline. I'd never asked her about such a sensitive time in her life, but for the purpose of this chapter, I had to ask.

It's actually incredibly simple. She was working a summer job in a public area where looks were important, and felt the pressure to shed the pounds, and decided to skip the bus and walk home everyday after work. Eventually walking was easy, and she tried jogging. By

⁴ Dr. Weil Online. "Can Alcohol Prevent Weight Loss." December 2005. <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/QAA360805>

the time she was back in school in September, she had totally changed, and joined me for the Cross Country running team (obviously very hard and very fun) which meant three grueling runs every week. Here's the key: How does she keep the weight off now? She says her body is her temple, and she's not going to put garbage in her temple ever again. She's had a profound inner change. She has principles and loves her body. That's very cool. And it's the same reason my Dad never eats McDonald's.

While I didn't need her as a skinny 9th grader, but several years after High School, I was on my 5-6 beers per week regiment, and indeed turned to friends for advice. I started running again, cut out the beers completely. Soon I was feeling great again.

A New Approach to Working Out

Ok, so you've got a new diet now, lots of water, lots of healthy food. Let's talk about building muscle. The reason you workout is because bigger muscles, and more muscle fiber will greatly increase your metabolism. We've already reduced the amount of calories and fat you're taking in daily, now we want to attack the other side of the equation: burning more fat faster.

The idea is basically you want to get to a manageable level of fat/energy in your body. If you're in your teens, you probably don't notice the food you eat. Your metabolism is sky high. If you're in your mid to late-twenties, you've probably noticed your metabolism going down over the last couple years (you won't feel different, but look a little chunkier than you did in your High School yearbook).

Again, we've got a huge advantage here because we're not trying to look like an NFL linebacker; what we want to do is look and feel great. Over the years I've tried everything, a lot of it was great, some of it was bad (going past the breaking point in the weight room, etc). The fundamental premise of this workout is that you are busy, and want to allocate an appropriate amount of time to your physical health. Not a life of sloth, but not 4 hours a day in the weight room either. I found out the long painful hard way: a life dedicated to looking great is empty and shallow, and you will run out of gas. Instead, make the workout just a small part of your overall routine, and you'll love the way it makes you feel.

Stretching

It's not fun to do stretching until you get injured for no good reason, and then you realize that being injured (sore back, sore shoulder, pulled hamstring etc) is even less fun than doing stretches. Also, while you're injured, all the work you've done starts to deteriorate: your arms start to turn to mush and your legs start to get wobbly. Let's do a quick stretch everyday before the workout.

Shake your ankles. Start at the bottom... hold up one foot and shake it, loosen up the joints. Do that for 8 seconds, then shake the other foot. Do it once more for each foot.

Stretch your calf muscles. Lean against a wall with your hands and put one foot further back than the other. Can you feel the calves tingling? Ok, now switch feet. Push your heel down on the stretching leg, and feel the burn a little more. Do each side once more, and really feel the burn by gradually getting your feet further back.

Stretch your groin/inner thigh. This is another one that gets hurt because, honestly, most people in day to day life never challenge this muscle. When you suddenly go on a 10 mile cross country run, watch

out. To stretch this area, stand with your legs slightly more than shoulder width apart and 'shift' to the right by bending the right leg and keeping the left leg straight. Not only are you warming up the right leg, you can really feel that left side stretching. Now 'shift' to the left, keeping the right leg straight. Do both a couple more times. Go easy. To mix it up, try alternatively touching your right and left feet with both hands.

Stretch your waist/core. This is fun. If you remember the Hula Hoop (I feel old. Google it!) kids would swing their hips around in a circular motion to keep the Hula Hoop going. With your hands on your waist and legs slightly more than shoulder width apart, swing your hips in circles 8 times clockwise, then 8 times counterclockwise. If you can feel your head swinging back and forth, you've got the right idea. Do one more set in each direction.

Stretch your core/back. The back is 'involved' in almost every movement you make. As a result, getting a tweak in your back, or a knot, will make almost everything you do, hurt. Here's an easy way to stretch: with your feet shoulder width apart, try turning your upper body right all the way till you're looking behind you, while your feet point straight ahead of you. This 'twist' will feel throughout your upper and lower back. It should feel great, not painful. Don't overdo it. Now turn left, to the same degree. One more time on each side and you're good.

Arms/Shoulders. Again, super easy to get sore, and so easy to stretch. Just rotate your arms in a big circular motion, forward for 8 big circles, then backwards 8 times. Not too fast. Now try holding your arms out to the side and doing smaller circles 8 times, now backwards 8 times. You should feel nice and loose after these.

Neck. You'll want to stretch the neck in a few different ways to ensure zero pain. The first is just turning your head 90 degrees and looking to the right. Hold it for 8 seconds, then do it to the left for 8 seconds. Repeat as you wish. Another one is to keep your head facing straight ahead and turning your head so your ear almost touches your right shoulder...8 seconds, then try the left side. The last one is my favorite, rotating your head in a circular motion, first clockwise 8 times, then counterclockwise 8 times. If you can hear some weird sounds coming out, you're doing it right. Go easy.

The Actual Workout

I do these exercises 6 days per week, rest on Sunday, before my shower in the morning, after a light breakfast. That means its important that you can get done in 30 minutes. Printable workout sheet in the appendix.

Mondays and Thursdays (Lower Body)

Stretch

Squats (Legs just greater than shoulder width apart, up and down, so your knees are near 90 degrees)

Lunges (with your legs at should width apart, step forward with one leg, so your stepping leg is almost at a 90 degree angle. You should feel not only a burn in your stepping leg, but the back leg as well, as it stretches. Now switch legs and do it again. Go slow.)

Calf Raises (When I was in High School i played basketball and always loved soaring to the basket. Stand on one foot and put your hand against the wall to steady your balance. On one foot go up on your tip toes, and come down. That's one rep. How ever many you do on one foot, you have to do again on the other foot after.)

I suggest running after you've been doing the above exercises for about a month. Start slow, a walk, a jog, but over time a 30 minute run, can replace your leg work. More important that just your leg work, Twice weekly runs will you a strong heart for life. Running on pavement/city streets is somewhat jarring for extended periods of time, so look for soft ground.

Tuesdays and Fridays (Upper Body)

Close Pushups (With your hands almost touching, back straight, feet together, do about 5 reps. This may feel very difficult at first, because there are tons of little 'stabilizer' muscles which are getting worked out in your arms and chest. If you don't want big arms, etc. Pick a number of reps and keep it the same every week.)

Standard Pushups (Same as above but shoulder width apart. Do 5 pushups the first week, and adjust as you get stronger. If you don't want big arms, just keep it at five to 'maintain' strength.)

Wide Pushups (From the Standard pushup position, move your hands 3-4 inches apart on each side. You will immediately feel the burn on your Chest muscles. As above, depending on your goals, adjust your reps each week.)

Wrist Grips (When I was a kid, I had such skinny arms, so I was self conscious about my wrists. Getting some wrist grips to incorporate into my Arm exercise is fun. Wrist grips might have different tension levels so be your own judge. If you want to start at 10 reps each hand and adjust up each week, that sounds great.)

Wednesdays and Saturday (Abdominals and Core)

Crunches (Lie on a soft surface (your bed, if necessary) looking straight up, with your knees at right angles and using your elbows, crunch across your body, hit your left knee with your right elbow, then hit both knees, then hit your right knee with your left elbow. That's 3 reps. Keep going until you feel the burn, and use that as your basis for planning your schedule.)

Leg Kicks (These are amazing. Again, lie on a soft bench, or your bed if you have to, lifting your left and right legs alternately. First the right goes up, then as it comes down, lift the left leg, then down again. That's one rep. Over time you will do 30, 40, 50 reps, and your abs will look great. Don't rush it.)

The temptation is to do everything fast and get done as soon as possible. Slow down. The 'negative resistance' will carve up your body much faster. The reps and sets are based on your own feeling. If you think you're overweight, you're pushing your own body weight so go easy with the reps. Overtime you can build resistance by adding reps and sets. Take note of your progress in a 'Notes' app on your phone/iPod, an Excel spreadsheet, or just write it down in an actual pocket diary, etc. Remember: the rule here is feeling the burn is good, feeling bored is bad, and feeling pain is the worst.

Example:

Week 1 (Monday/Thursday): 5 pushups

Week 3 (Monday/Thursday): 8 pushups

Week 5 (Monday/Thursday): 10 pushups

Week 7 (Monday/Thursday): 2 sets of 6 pushups...

Remember, when you do things for your own health, and not bragging rights, or ego, you can do things the right way. None of this stuff matters to other people, so the number of reps don't matter nearly as much. Telling people how much you bench press (or how many pushups you can do in a minute) is only important if you're doing it for them.

Sleep/Rest

Don't eat before bed, or you'll notice your weight hovering 10 pounds over your ideal goal. This is pure comfort food, and it goes straight to your love-handles.

Ideally you want to get to be around 11PM and be up the next morning around 6AM (I'm getting up at 530AM these days). These numbers will vary depending on your work/workout schedule of course. Ideally you can get to bed early and up early the next day for your workout. Some of the best advice I ever got was to 'wake up earlier' and get more packed into each day. If you're super busy and feel like you're running out of time, wake up an hour earlier. You'll love it.

Never Get Sick Again

Possibly the most annoying thing for any athlete is coming down with a flu, cough, sore muscles, etc that causes you to stop everything you're doing, and recuperate. You know that that time off, (often spent in bed) is turning your muscles to mush.

So why don't we do everything we can to never get sick. I found two fantastic articles online, one from WebMd.com⁵. From the WebMd article:

- *Exercise in general makes your body stronger, and helps fight bugs. It also relieves stress to get that holistic powerful workout, which can only help the immune system do its job. A boost in circulation (from a great workout) boosts the number of white blood cells, which means less likelihood of getting sick.*
- *Cutting back on the junk food, as we've already described above, will turn your life around if you're getting sick a lot.*
- *In addition to brushing flossing twice a day, take a shot of mouthwash. You'll have a great smile, and kill any bacteria that are living in there. It could mean the difference between a great date, and a weekend spent with the flu. You're also staving off any gum diseases, etc, when you do this.*

⁵ WebMD Online. "Cold and Flu Health Centre: The Secrets to Super Healthy People" December 2008. <http://www.webmd.com/cold-and-flu/features/secrets-super-healthy-people?page=1>

- *It's obvious why Vegetables are good for you; they provide vitamins you aren't getting from burritos, pizza and potato chips. If you have to, stock up on daily vitamins to get Vitamin C (oranges and citrus fruits) and Vitamin D (also found in salmon, eggs and milk)*
- *Positivity. Wow. Apparently positive thoughts can lead to higher levels of nitric oxide which helps balance your immune system, and leads to drastically lower levels of colds and flus. Anything you do that you enjoy, playing with your dog, going to the beach and taking in some sun, is going to help in this way.*
- *Meditation and Breathing. People have been doing this for centuries. Anything that will decrease your stress levels, like daily yoga or meditation, must help. Stress can only lead to more anxiety, restlessness, and agitation.*
- *Be more social. This one seems to be counter-intuitive. The more people you interact with, the more likely you are (e.g., at the office) to catch their cough. We're not saying that more extroverted people are immunized from the cold/flu, they just seem to be so much happier and positive, that it produces chemicals that support the immune system, while lonely people do not.*
- *Wash your hands. This is so simple, and so easy. And so few of us do it, multiple times per day.*
- *Get some sleep. I've included guidelines for 6 hours of sleep per night. We all hear stories about rockstar CEO's that sleep 3 hours a night. Put the pills away. Get 6 hours of natural sleep, and get up with the energy to take on the world!*

Eye Exercises

Have glasses? Seriously consider getting new frames if your current ones are looking a little bland/geeky. It would be fun to get a member of the fairer sex to help you out here.

Contacts are very easy to get nowadays, and ultimately you should be thinking about getting Lasik surgery once you hit 30-35 (by then, they say, your eyesight plateaus). The costs are always coming down, and it takes about 2 hours to do it.

Anyway, regardless of where you are, whether you have glasses or you just got LASIK surgery last month, it's a great idea to incorporate Eye Exercises into your daily routine. Why? Because it's part of your body, that's why. Your eyes, unless you are living the woods, hunting deer and living off the land, get abused and left to atrophy in modern day society, and that's the real reason everyone around you either has glasses, or contacts.

Remember, just like the Sugar example, our bodies evolved over millions of years, to what we now recognize as Homo Sapiens. For a long time we just lived off the land, hunting every day, and killing with spears. The reason our eyes are so incredibly advanced is because we had to have clear alert long-distance vision to find dinner. Over a long time we developed tools/weapons for hunting more easily, and even began farming, and raising Chicken, and Cows to eat. In the 21st century, the closest we get to 'scanning the horizon for dinner' is looking for the Golden Arches on the drive home from work. Staring at a computer screen all day is the exact opposite of what our ancestors did. They exercised their eyes everyday. We don't. In fact, what we do is pushing our eyes to get accustomed to close range vision. A few eye exercises you can try for fun. 30 mins a day is the standard. If you have to get up earlier to work this into your daily routine, do it.

6 minutes of Blinking. Quick. Normal Speed. And Extra Slow blinks. I know it sounds ridiculous, but after a while, your eyes will feel clean and refreshed.

6 minutes of Drawing a big clockwise circle with your eyes. See the 'limit' of your eyesight? Draw the biggest circle you can, with your eyes. Don't hurt yourself. Ok now go counterclockwise.

6 minutes of crossing your eyes, do it slowly with something about 20 ft away from you. When you cross your eyes, you see a right eye image and a left eye image. Practice joining them and separating them, at various distances from each other.

6 minutes of looking at your finger, then something behind it but 20ft away. Notice how your focus changes. That's what we're trying to strengthen.

6 minutes of gazing at blurry zones. Wherever your eyesight starts to get blurry (maybe its 10 ft away, maybe its 10 inches away), draw lines around those objects with your eyes. Practice 'sliding' your focus around the object. See how it very slowly gets clearer and clearer. It's working.

If you're ever working a long day on the computer, you can do one of these (say, blinking) for just two or three minutes, just for a quick stretch. You should notice immediate improvement in the alertness and comfort level of your eyes. Doing the full 30 mins workout daily (say, in the morning before you start work) is a terrific habit to keep you away from the Eye Doctor (and 3 inch glasses).

In no way am I classically trained as a Doctor, personal trainer or even a Coach. My approach to health and fitness is a collection of my own experiences with my own crazy metabolism, all people I've talked to who are much smarter than me, and all the research I've done. And that's okay, because only a few of us will actually go on to medical school but all of us need to know something about how to stay fit, strong and feel great.

Here's my approach: put your body and your 'fitness' in its rightful place.

This is not the most important thing in your life (unless you count 'not dying of overeating' as the meaning of life). This is about clearing out the junk, and getting on with what really matters. No matter how 'hot' you are, that is never going to make you happy or fulfilled. So don't freak out over it. This stuff should be easy.

A couple months after getting to China, I started to develop a routine. I started waking up earlier, and picking up some breakfast on the way to work. I started eating a little more fruit, and less of the standard 'rice with fish parts (with eyelashes)' fare that could be had on any street corner for about a dollar. Every morning, I'd do little workouts in my room, whether it was pushups or squats--just something incredibly basic to get the heart going. My day and commute involved a lot of walking, too (I had neither the time or the money for a gym membership). As a result, I got stronger, and felt more confident. My body was starting to acclimate to China. That was the easy part. My mind would have to acclimate also...



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