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# 24

MENTAL-HEALTH GAMECHANGERS



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05/23  
70

## RETURN OF THE MAC

»»» — For *Sunrise* weatherman **SAMMAC**, a hectic job and escalating family responsibilities were taking a toll on his fitness, to the point where he could see a storm front on the horizon. His response: embrace an eight-week challenge to sharpen mind and body.

*Armed And Dangerous:*  
After life derailed his  
approach to fitness,  
Mac knew it was time  
to get serious again.





# 46

## Ham, Cheese & Muscle

Yes, these two flavoursome protein sources can be meal-prepped into mouth-watering and convenient post-workout refuels. And what's more, you can do it on a shoestring.



# 100

## The Future of Fitness

The at-home tech revolution is making it harder and harder to come up with a decent excuse for not getting a regular sweat on – and for not having a blast while you're at it.



# 48

## Worn To Be Wild

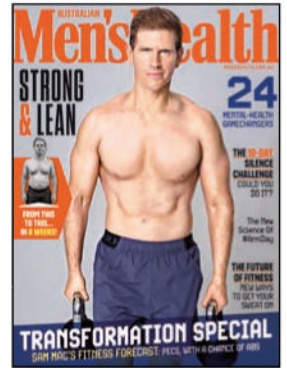
Planning on taking your running off-road? Those worn-out pavement-bashers at your front door aren't going to cut it. Here are the wheels you need to conquer nature's trickier terrains.



# 117

## The Old Man And The Sea

Now 58, famed big-wave surfer Laird Hamilton is showing no signs of backing off. As bold, focused and conscientious as ever, he's an inspirational lesson in refusing to go quietly.



COVER BUY:  
SAM MAC

PHOTOGRAPHY BY:  
JASON LEE

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# Don't Call It A Comeback

»→ EARLY LAST YEAR I received a text from a friend telling me he'd started playing pick-up basketball again . . . at 6am on Saturday mornings. Initially I recoiled. For me, dawn on Saturdays is a sacred timeslot dedicated to slumber. A sleep-in, at least until 7, when my five-year-old daughter wakes up, is not something I give up lightly.

And yet . . . the seed had been planted. Maybe I could get up at 5.45 to make it to the court by 6? I hadn't played pick-up since before the pandemic. Now in my late 40s, if I didn't get back into it now another three to five years might disappear. Heck, I thought, it might be now or never! (Yes, my inner voice is a drama queen.)

So, I texted back my friend. "I'll be there," I said, still wondering if I would be. But now, at least, I'd made a commitment. The next stage of my comeback (yes, I'm calling it that!) was as inevitable as it is crucial: doubt and insecurity. What if the other players are better than me? What if I'm not the player I used to be?

Saturday came. It was still dark at 6am, but as I parked near the court, I heard the familiar sound of a ball bouncing. I felt a possibly hormonal ripple in the pit of my stomach. It was a feeling I hadn't felt in a while. One I hadn't realised I'd missed. It signalled a step into the unknown, the call of competition.

Fast forward a year and I've barely missed a Saturday morning hoops session. Sure, for the first few weeks my game was rusty. But I soon found my footing. Many Saturdays, I've returned home basking in the glow of endorphins, before washing away the greasy sheen of sweat and achievement in the shower, as I replay the morning's highlights in my mind's eye. (Just me who does this? Oh. What do you do in the shower?)

I bring all this up, of course, because due to circumstance, lack of time or shifting priorities, many of us stop doing things we love or enjoy. For this month's cover star, *Sunrise* weatherman Sam Mac (Return Of The Mac, p70), it was exercise. He hadn't had a committed routine for years. And now, with a newborn baby, he barely had any leftover time to prioritise his health and fitness. Understandably, he had doubts about how he'd cope with his first session with trainer Jono Castano. He would wonder why he was doing it. But, sure enough, he soon found himself enjoying it, striving to knock out more steps and punch out more reps. Who knows, he may even have found himself in the shower, replaying personal highlights of his sessions in his mind's eye – I certainly hope so.

The road back was even more anxiety-inducing for *Men's Health* deputy editor Dan Williams, who details his return to the tennis court (A Broken Life, p.38) after a freak training mishap. His worries weren't psychological gargoyles conjured by an overly active mind. They were real. What if he reinjured himself? What if he could never play half-decently again?

Whatever the reason for your lay-off, the return to exercise, sport or a hobby is always likely to come with fears. That just shows you how important these things are to you. The real pity is if you don't give it a try. The workout not done, or the shot not taken, is what will ultimately haunt you. And if you're still wavering, here's the tip: you won't realise how much you missed it until you get back out there. ■

*Comeback Kings: Jhoty and Sam Mac both made returns to activities they enjoy.*



*Ben*

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## THE BIG QUESTION

# Q Do any of those 'hydration' supplements actually work? -TC

»»→ Technically, yes, but you need to know how to use them. Makers of powdered products in this space claim their concoctions rehydrate the body faster than water alone by providing a balance of electrolytes such as sodium and potassium, sometimes along with glucose. These products can be effective for rapidly rehydrating the body, but they are not a substitute for drinking water.

"Being hydrated means having enough water to function correctly," says dietitian Dezi Abeyta. "Although it varies, your daily water intake should be a minimum of eight standard glasses of water. But this can also include water in food, such as fruits and vegetables."

Feeling thirsty or tired or having a dry mouth, dark-yellow urine or dry skin signifies that you should drink more. Your key takeout: keep drinking water – the powdered stuff should supplement rather than replace your daily water goals. You'll save a few pennies that way, as well. ■



Your body runs on water, not powdered drinks.

## Ancient Solution To A Modern Problem

Q. I'm WFH now. Am I within my rights to put the kids in bunks and convert one of their rooms into a gym? - HG

A. That which isn't good for the hive, isn't good for the bee.

Marcus Aurelius; b. 121AD

## TEXT A NUTRITIONIST

Do I need to go to failure to build big muscle? - AS

Today: 6:30am

I'm prepared to go hard to add brawn to my spaghetti arms. And I am going hard. But it's not working. 🍷

Define "hard".

I've been going to failure on most sets for months.

Okay, there's an issue right there. Going to failure is super-taxing on your muscles and CNS. Keep it up for more than a few weeks and you'll start going backwards.

I'm just trying to be fair dinkum!

And good for you. But sometimes we can be victims of our own enthusiasm.

Here's my prescription. Take a week off weight training. During your first week back, stop your sets four reps pre failure. In week 2, make that 3 reps pre failure . . . and so on until you do one week of going all the way.

After that, de-load, halving your weights and reps to recuperate before lining up for another training block.

So less is more?

Exactly. Be your own best friend, AS. 🍷

Ben Williams, manager and PT at North Shore Gym, Sydney.

Ask the MH girls the questions you can't ask anyone else. They're three women who speak their mind, so don't expect sugar-coated answers

## ASK THE GIRLS IN THE OFFICE

**Q** This girl is more into me than I'm into her. How can I break things off smoothly without ghosting her? - MU

**Becky:** Well, firstly, I'm happy to hear that you don't want to ghost her. That's a tick.

**Jess:** Straight up: be honest about how you feel. And nowish. The best way not to ghost is not to ghost.

**Becky:** I think how you do it depends on how long you've been seeing her, too. A few weeks? A nice text or phone call is fine. A few months? Definitely in person.

**Jess:** I think technology makes it easy for people to be dickheads. The easy option is just to block someone - to avoid the awkwardness. But I think you owe this person a conversation.

**Becky:** And give her a reason, even a vague one, so she's not left wondering why: "I've had a great time, but I'm just feeling like this isn't right for me anymore".

**Jess:** Be kind but remember, you don't get to choose how this goes. I've broken up with people hoping to stay friends, but often that doesn't happen, and you have to respect that.

**Nik:** The sooner the better, MU. There's no point leading someone on if you're not feeling it. You may think you're being nice continuing to see someone you don't really like because you don't want to hurt their feelings, but you're not.

**Becky:** Yup. I'd much rather hear you're

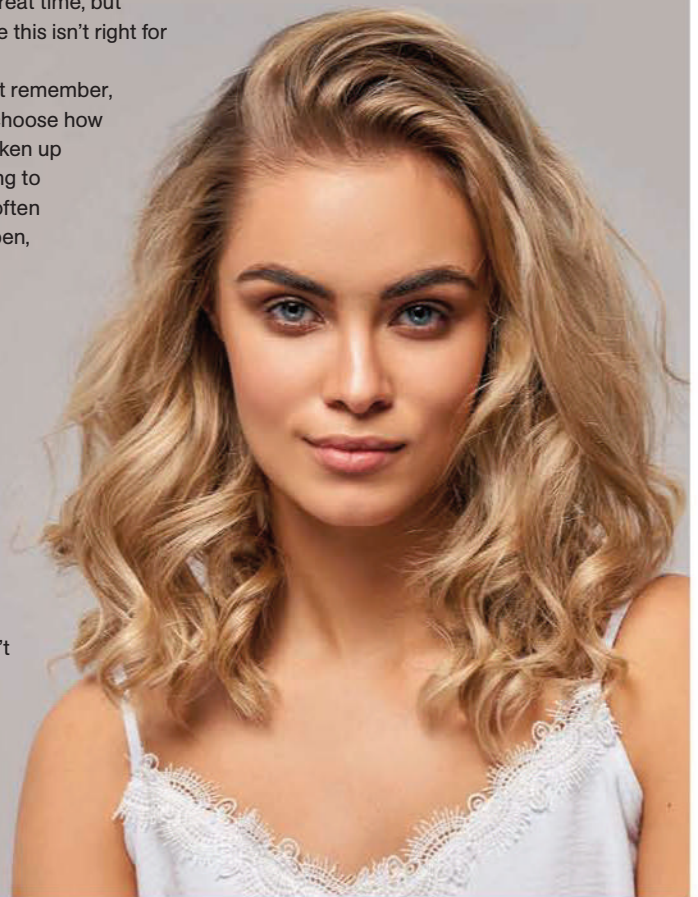
not that keen anymore than keep dating someone half-interested in me.

**Nik:** Speak the truth kindly. That's my best advice.

**Becky:** Also, women are very perceptive. If you've been off, she probably senses something's up.

**Jess:** But let's be real: is there ever a good way to break up with someone? If someone's really into you, delivering a breakup via carrier pigeon or written out in chocolate frosting on a giant cookie isn't going to make it better.

**Becky:** Hmm, I wouldn't say no to that cookie . . . ■



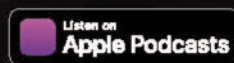
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# THE FEED

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## MAKE LONG DAYS A LITTLE SWEETER

IGNORE THE LATEST FOOD FADS: THE QUICKEST, MOST AFFORDABLE WAY TO TAKE A BITE OUT OF THE OFFICE BLUES CAN BE FOUND IN YOUR FRUIT BOWL

A CUPPA DOES IT ALL. The staple of cheap and cheerful cafes and upmarket tea rooms alike is a pick-me-up that can also calm us down. That might go some way to explaining why the average Australian drinks 9.5 cups of the stuff each week. George Orwell certainly knew its value: he called tea “one of

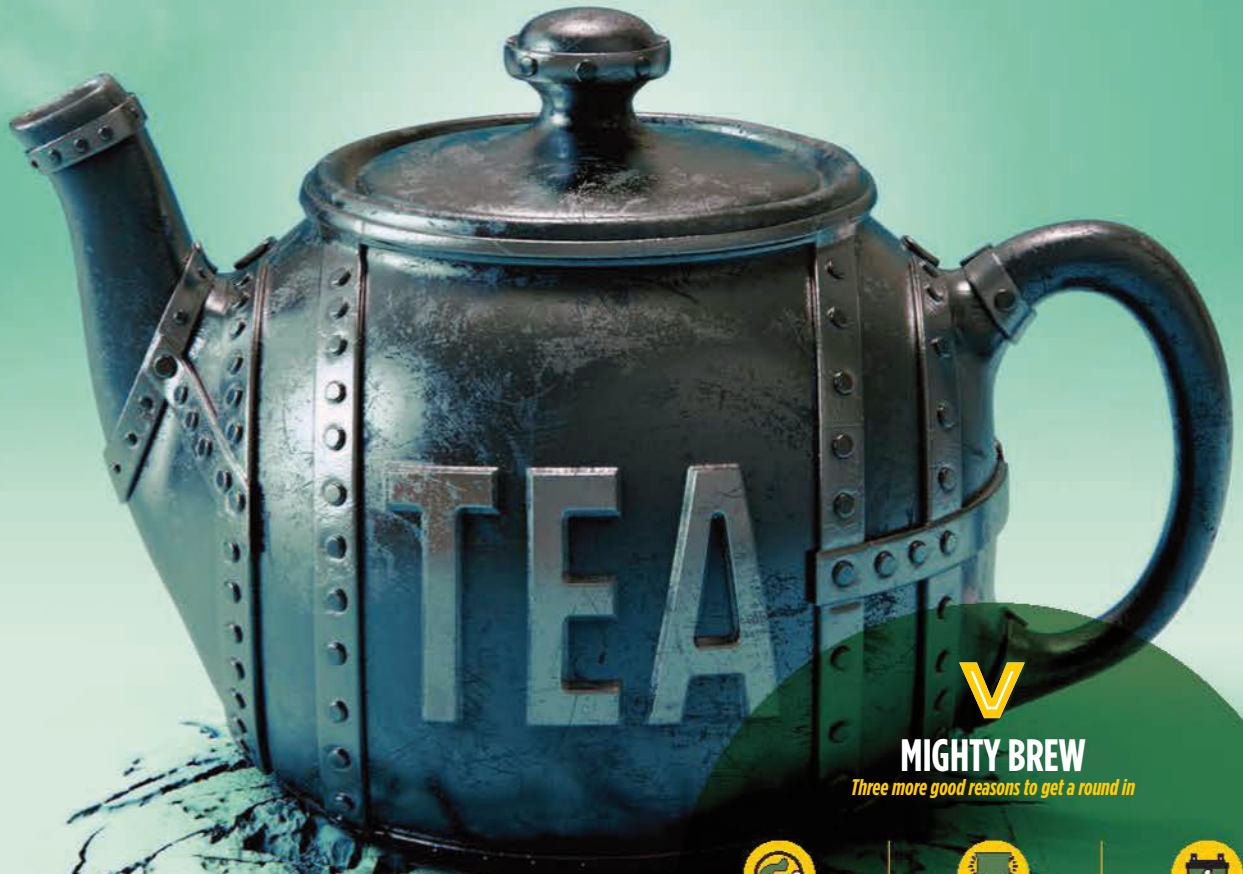
the mainstays of civilisation”.

It's also good for you. Matcha, yerba maté et al might be hot property in health shops, but studies have shown that normal breakfast tea can benefit the immune system, lower inflammation and reduce your risk of developing heart disease. Now, a Chinese

meta-analysis of research, involving more than one million people from eight countries suggests frequent tea breaks could also help to tackle type-2 diabetes.

It's a timely finding. The world is seeing an alarming rise in obesity rates, which have contributed to an increase in type-2 diabetes.

The chemical relationship between tea consumption and diabetes is unclear, but the study correlated drinking at least four cups a day with a 17 per cent lower chance of being diagnosed with the illness over 10 years. So, while the scientists leaf through the details, pop the kettle on and drink in the benefits. ■



If you're making a tea, make it strong.



### MIGHTY BREW

Three more good reasons to get a round in



**1/ In The Blood**  
Black tea is rich in chemicals called flavonoids that can help to lower high cholesterol levels\*.



**2/ Lean Machine**  
One study\* found tea's antioxidant catechins contribute to reductions in excess body fat.



**3/ Power Cell**  
Consumed regularly, tea's phytochemicals reduce cell damage and improve glucose metabolism\*.

## A FITNESS HACK THAT WILL TAKE YOUR BREATH AWAY

TRAINING YOUR BODY TO DO MORE WITH LESS OXYGEN IS SIMPLER THAN YOU THINK - NO KIT REQUIRED. MASTER IT FOR GREATER REWARDS WITH EVERY BREATH YOU TAKE

OXYGEN IS SO ESSENTIAL to human life that just four minutes without it can result in irreparable brain damage - and a further four can kill you. So what madness is the growing trend of intermittent hypoxic training (IHT), a form of exercise that involves deliberately denying yourself the amount of oxygen you need?

Sometimes, less really is more. Many top-flight athletes subject themselves to environmental stress to earn a competitive

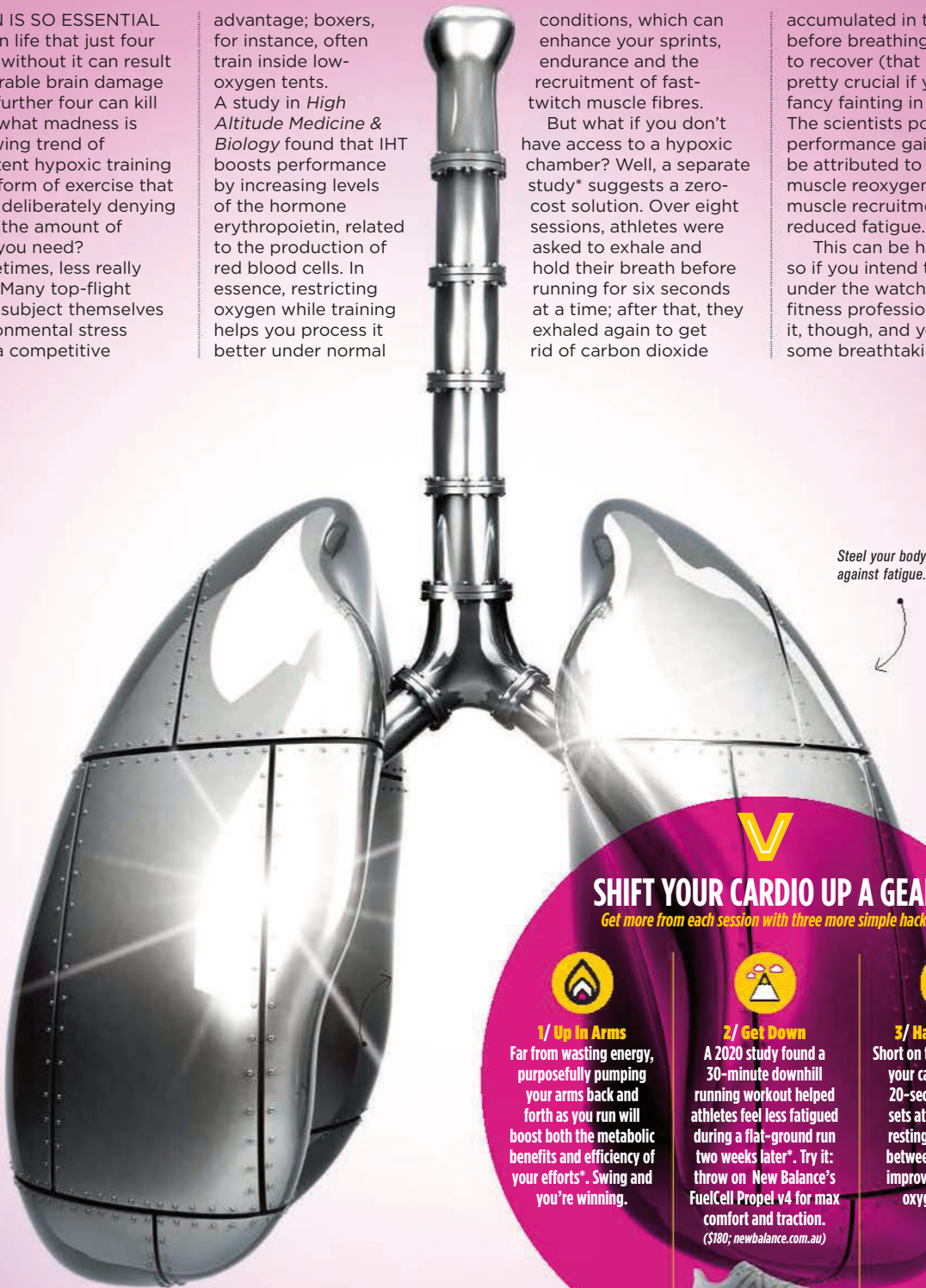
advantage; boxers, for instance, often train inside low-oxygen tents. A study in *High Altitude Medicine & Biology* found that IHT boosts performance by increasing levels of the hormone erythropoietin, related to the production of red blood cells. In essence, restricting oxygen while training helps you process it better under normal

conditions, which can enhance your sprints, endurance and the recruitment of fast-twitch muscle fibres.

But what if you don't have access to a hypoxic chamber? Well, a separate study\* suggests a zero-cost solution. Over eight sessions, athletes were asked to exhale and hold their breath before running for six seconds at a time; after that, they exhaled again to get rid of carbon dioxide

accumulated in their lungs, before breathing normally to recover (that last bit's pretty crucial if you don't fancy fainting in the park). The scientists posit that performance gains could be attributed to improved muscle reoxygenation, better muscle recruitment and reduced fatigue.

This can be hard going, so if you intend to try, do so under the watchful gaze of a fitness professional. Master it, though, and you could see some breathtaking results. ■



Steel your body against fatigue.



### SHIFT YOUR CARDIO UP A GEAR

Get more from each session with three more simple hacks



#### 1/ Up In Arms

Far from wasting energy, purposefully pumping your arms back and forth as you run will boost both the metabolic benefits and efficiency of your efforts\*. Swing and you're winning.



#### 2/ Get Down

A 2020 study found a 30-minute downhill running workout helped athletes feel less fatigued during a flat-ground run two weeks later\*. Try it: throw on New Balance's FuelCell Propel v4 for max comfort and traction. (\$180; [newbalance.com.au](http://newbalance.com.au))



#### 3/ Hard And Fast

Short on time? Concentrate your cardio into eight 20-second bite-sized sets at high intensity, resting for 10 seconds between each, for fast improvements to your oxygen uptake\*.



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## CUT GYM TIME DOWN TO SIZE

**YOUR FITNESS REGIMEN DOESN'T HAVE TO MUSCLE OUT FREE TIME. A FEW MINUTES OF EFFORT A DAY CAN BENEFIT SIZE AND STRENGTH**

WITH THAT flurry of new-year motivation long diminished – and a busy work schedule to contend with – we wouldn't blame you if you're struggling to fit in regular strength-training sessions. Yes, you could brave the morning chill and hit the gym every day in the hour you have between the office, school run, meal prep and household admin – but do you really need to?

A team of Australian and Japanese scientists might have discovered a time-efficient workaround. Their study asked subjects to perform 30 eccentric biceps contractions – ie, lowering a heavy dumbbell – every week for a month. One group divided this task into five bite-sized sessions of six reps, while the other charged through all 30 reps in a single day each week.

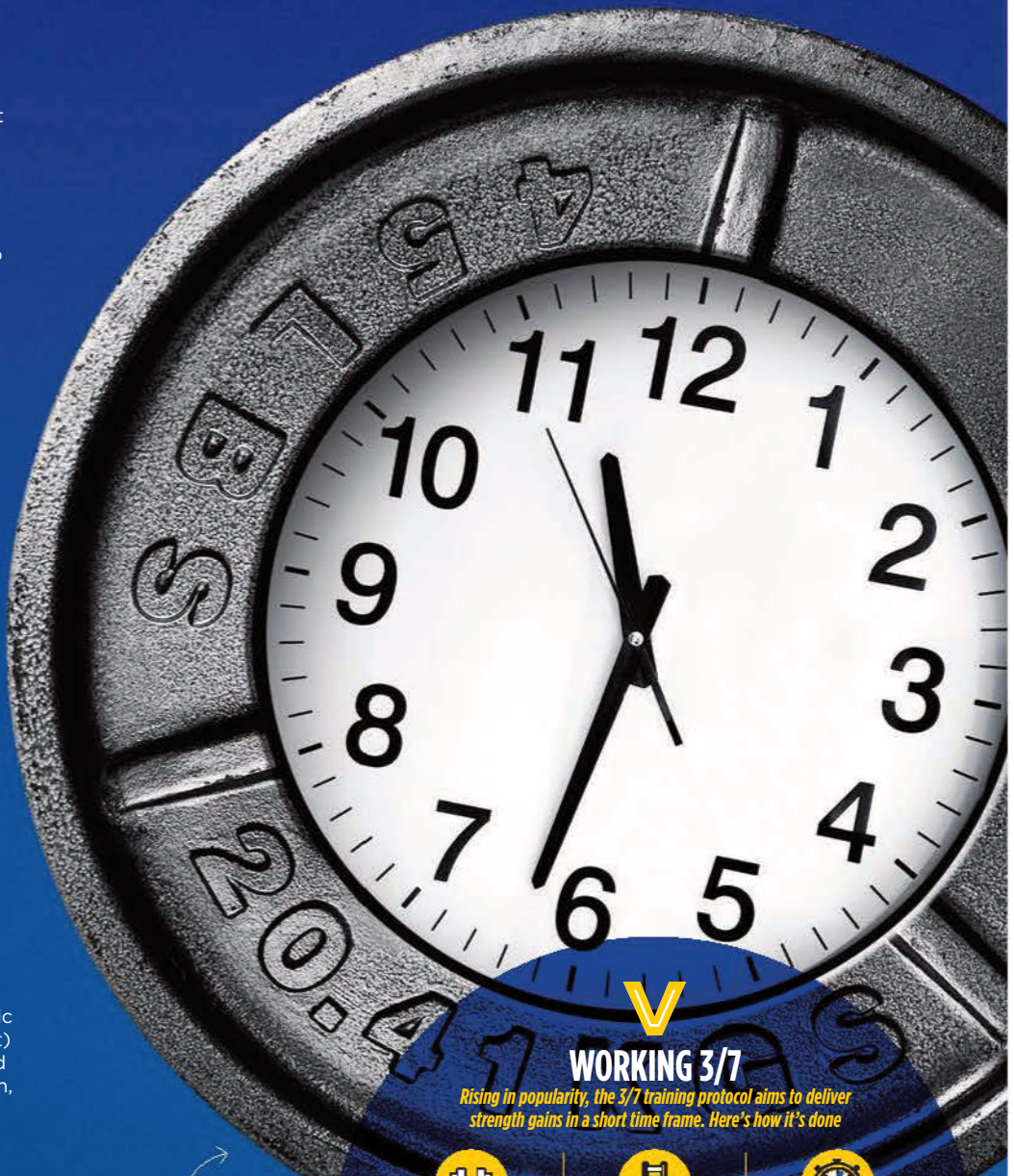
Unexpectedly, the exercise snackers matched the latter group in terms of building muscle thickness but saw superior improvements in muscle strength. This suggests that small, regular amounts of exercise can prove more effective than sweating through an occasional monster session.

Further research from Edith Cowan University into the effectiveness of eccentric exercises (lowering a weight) found that one three-second eccentric muscle contraction, performed five days each week, can boost strength.

Of course, that's not to say your big weekend workouts have no benefit. But if you have only five minutes between meetings for a quick arms pump, don't dismiss it.

Make exercise a daily habit and you needn't worry about skipping the odd gym session. A lot of a little, it turns out, can be more beneficial than a little of a lot. ■

*Find time for micro workouts and strength gains will be your reward.*



### WORKING 3/7

*Rising in popularity, the 3/7 training protocol aims to deliver strength gains in a short time frame. Here's how it's done*



**1/ Take Your Pick**  
Choose a lift (squat, deadlift, bench press, dumbbell row, etc), then select a weight that's roughly 70 per cent of your one-rep max.



**2/ Build It Up**  
In the first set, do 3 slow reps, then 4, then 5, 6 and 7. Take a 15-second break between sets to recover.



**3/ Keep It Going**  
The entire lifting session should take no more than 2 minutes. Repeat for a different, complementary move on your next break.



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ADVANTAGE  
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# A CERTAIN NOBILITY

Actor **STEPHEN PEACOCKE** is proof that thriving in the reel world doesn't require you to become a self-absorbed, thin-skinned applause-seeker. Instead, you can stay true to the man you were raised to be >

BY **DANIEL WILLIAMS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **CAMERON GRAYSON** STYLING BY **MILANA DE MINA**





*SITTING PRETTY:  
THROUGH DILIGENCE  
AND TALENT,  
PEACOCKE HAS  
LANDED SOUGHT-  
AFTER ROLES.*

ON THIS OVERCAST autumn morning, Stephen Peacocke has woken up at his parents' place in his hometown of Dubbo, 400 kilometres northwest of Sydney. He's in good spirits, not only because he's back where it all began, but because an overnight downpour and a midmorning sun shower have moistened the land and filled the air with the smell of rain. "I love it," he says. "And the central west – the earth, the grasses and the trees . . . it has a distinct smell, which I miss."

Lately, Peacocke has been working a lot in Melbourne, on the sets of *Five Bedrooms* (returning later this year for its fourth season, on Paramount+) and *The Newsreader* (ditto, second season, ABC), and these trips to Dubbo to reunite with family have been harder to pull off than usual. But he's here now and doing the things he always does when he's home – checking out the main street and the Macquarie River, cruising past his old primary school, whacking balls at the local tennis courts. "The place is the same," he says. "Just bigger."

Which happens to be an apt metaphor for Peacocke himself, who's managed to build a strong career on the notoriously wobbly foundations of acting talent. The sport-loving kid from the bush who used to rent films from the local Video Ezy so he could study the methods of giants like De Niro, Brando and Pacino is these days a someone himself – but, oh man, talk about staying the same. Now 41, he's no different to the guy *Men's Health* sat down with a veritable lifetime ago, when his five-year stint as Darryl Braxton on *Home and Away* was the centrepiece of his résumé. High-profile television roles, feature-film appearances (*Me Before You*, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot*, *Danger Close: The Battle of Long Tan*), popularity awards, giddy female attention and critical acclaim have bounced off him like he's the Man of Steel. Does he exude the barest trace of a sense that he reckons he's King Shit these days? Categorically, no.

We speak on the morning after the Academy Awards, where *Everything Everywhere All at Once* cleaned up and a legion of Australian nominees bombed out. What did he think?

"I actually completely forgot it was on," he says.

I laugh. And we could leave the subject there, but Peacocke doesn't want to give the impression he thinks the Oscars are tosh, because that's not how he feels about them. Not at all. When he was a kid, he says, he used

to watch all the best-movie contenders in advance of the ceremony, and then the entire interminable telecast.

"I forgot about it this time, but that awards-don't-matter [line] . . . I don't think there'd be many actors or directors or producers who haven't practised an acceptance speech for an Academy Award."

Is it something he sees in his future? "Oh look, you've gotta set your sights high in acting. It's a competitive thing," he says. "Can you be in something that's good enough to be recognised at that level?"

"I've been in TV these last few years because I landed some really good jobs. And TV . . . its landscape has changed so much in the last decade, when it's become the hot thing to do."

He envies the extra time actors enjoy in filmmaking, though, how you can spend three months nailing scenes for a two-hour film, rather than the same period churning out 10 episodes of a TV series. "Film's something I'd love to do more of down the track. But you've got to be realistic. If you happen to be working [in TV] with really good people on really good scripts – which I've been lucky enough to do for the last five or six years – then you should be happy with that, too."

## ORIGIN STORY

There's at least a couple of reasons why Peacocke has never grown too fond of himself. The first is his bush upbringing by his accountant father and schoolteacher mother, along with a brother, Frank, and a sister, Gen, who were both about 10 years his senior. It seems like everyone in the house set a great example of humility for the baby of the family. Frank, for instance, was a crack rugby player, a superb flanker who collected best-and-fairest awards like dollar coins, but you'd never hear about any of that from Frank, who was utterly focused on training like a demon so he'd be the fittest bloke in the team. You simply didn't boast in the Peacocke household. And if you did, you'd be shot down in flames.

The second reason Peacocke has avoided being swept up in his own success is that this acting caper has been such an improbable outcome for him. He's never kid himself that the success he's had has been a case of fulfilling his destiny or living up to his vast potential or anything so highfalutin. The fact is he had no idea where he was going in life, what the hell he was going to do, until a seminal moment that occurred one winter's night in his mid-teens when Frank was on a visit

home from university. Peacocke has spoken previously in these pages about what happened that night, and it's worth revisiting that account.

"We hired out *Braveheart* on video. That film moved me so much. It just really spoke to me as a young boy. Afterwards, my brother and I were doing the washing up and talking about how cool Mel Gibson had been in the role of William Wallace. Suddenly, my brother said, 'Steve, why don't you do that? Why don't you become an actor?' Until that point, I didn't know what I wanted to do. But I remember walking out of the room and thinking, *That's it – that's what I'm going to be*. And from that moment on, it was all I thought about doing."

In the years after *Braveheart*, other films transfixed the young Peacocke – *Forrest Gump*, *In the Name of the Father*, *The Godfather* trilogy. He studied the great actors and devoured books on the craft but stopped short of putting his hand up for any school performances. He was in the sporty crowd, after all, and wasn't sure how popping up on stage in a Rock Eisteddfod would be received by his mates.

It was when he went to the University of Newcastle to do a degree in arts/communications that things started hotting up. Peacocke says he took a drama subject that put him in a class fronted by the "awesome actor" Glenn Hazeldine, who'd been through NIDA and was always treading the boards in some production or another in Sydney or Melbourne. I gather Hazeldine set an assignment that involved his students delivering a monologue. Most of them chose something Shakespearean, with mixed results, but Peacocke went with Teddy Roosevelt's famous "The Man in the Arena" speech, which he liked because it was inspirational but also quite short. You've probably heard snippets of it:

"It is not the critic who counts . . . not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles . . . the credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood . . ."

Anyway, Peacocke delivered it in the guise of a boxer readying himself for a fight and managed to impress the teacher.

"Ever thought of getting into acting?" Hazeldine asked him.

"Yeah, I wanna do that."

"Well, you should give it a shot. You might just have something there."

Which was all the encouragement Peacocke needed to start auditioning for university plays, and his performances in those caused other senior figures who knew what they were talking about to offer Peacocke more go-get-'em-kid words. Even some of his footy mates from whom he'd wanted to conceal this artistic side of himself showed up one night to a performance in 2002 and told him afterwards, "Get into it, Stevie – you're not bad". Then he won a "little award" for his performance in *The Property of the Clan* by Nick Enright. "I thought, *Oh well, I can't be that terrible*."

## HIGH FIVE

Peacocke landed the gig on *Home and Away*, which he wrapped in 2016 before heading to Los Angeles to try his luck there. He scored a few roles, went close to getting some others ("All actors will tell you those near-miss stories"), before returning to Australia and auditioning for a lead role as larrikin tradie Ben Chigwell in a show that would become *Five Bedrooms*, which is about five disparate souls who meet at the singles table at a wedding and end up pooling their resources to buy a house.

The audition happened at Fox Studios in Sydney, and as he walked to the car afterwards with his wife, Peacocke was convinced he'd botched it.

"I said to her, 'If I can't go in there and do a good audition as an Australian tradie [then there's no hope for me]'. Not that I've ever been one, but I've known lots of them, and I've mixed in that crowd, so what the hell was I doing? Anyway, I guess I hadn't been



**Favourite strength exercise?**  
Push-ups

**Favourite sport?**  
Rugby, but I haven't played since I was 28.

**Favourite time of year**  
Christmas

**Childhood hero?**  
My brother, Frank

**Movie that changed your life?**  
*Braveheart*

**All-time favourite film or TV show?**  
*The Office*  
(UK version)

**Approach to work**  
Show up prepared and be good to everyone around you.

as terrible as I thought I'd been, because I got the part."

*Five Bedrooms* has been a boon for him, says Peacocke, who lavishes praise on his fellow cast mates as well as the writers and directors. The thing about working on a high-quality program, he says, is that it creates opportunities to work on other good stuff, because "it can help people who make the decisions [in the industry] see you in a different light. And that's what's happened to me over the last couple of years. A few more doors opened a little bit wider. And I never take that for granted. You've got to be bloody good every time you show up. I work very hard at it because I really love it, and I know how lucky I am to be doing it."

His work on *Five Bedrooms* may have helped Peacocke land the role of Rob Rickards in *The Newsreader*, the first series of which aired in 2021. It was fine television, set in a 1980s Australian newsroom, and Peacocke won praise for his nuanced portrayal of a somewhat self-absorbed, boof-headed sports reporter who develops over the course of the series into a wiser, more sensitive young man.

I ask him whether the process of learning from other actors ever stops. Just as he studied De Niro and Daniel Day Lewis as a teenager, does he seek to absorb the mastery of Australian veterans while working as a fortysomething on a show like *The Newsreader*?

For sure, he says. "I was in a scene with William McInnes and Robert Taylor in the first season. Robert's character walks in and fires into William's character, and I got to sit there, and it was just like watching two heavyweights go at it. It was so cool. Talk about getting a masterclass and having a front-row seat to it."

Acting requires you to let go, Peacocke explains, to throw off all self-consciousness and vanity and let the character you occupy take over. This gets easier the more you do it, he says, which is one reason why the steady work he's enjoyed lately has been so important. He likens acting to playing sport: both are best done in a state of confidence. You can practise for both as much as you like, but nothing beats the real thing. "Unless you're out playing you don't really improve and your confidence won't stay at that level it needs to be at," he says. "The good thing

about having steady work is that you always feel like you're match fit. You can try some things out and you do get better."

*The Newsreader* was an awards magnet and garnered excellent reviews, as did Peacocke's performance. Did he feel like it took his work to a new level? Perhaps, he says. Who knows? Only the audience can tell you that because, unlike sport, there are no stats in this acting game – no objective evidence of impact.

"It's all about the audience and sometimes that audience includes critics, and when you get a good word, it's nice. I remember coming home from work to my wife, and I said, 'It just feels like we're doing something that could be pretty good here'. Everyone had that feeling. Just the energy on set and the way it was all coming together. I was happy. I was coming home feeling happy with what I'd done. It did feel like I grew a little, I guess. I took what I was given and really ran with it."

Given his character's development over the first series, you wonder whether Peacocke has ever had an eye-opening experience to mirror Rob Rickards' – an epiphany in the genre of seeing a person or a group of people through a different lens.

This gets Peacocke thinking about how he might have viewed people from the arts scene while he was playing rugby in Dubbo. "It was a different crowd at school who did the Rock Eisteddfod and the like. Look, I didn't have any massive preconceptions, or at least I didn't act on them. I was raised to take everyone as they come. But I was this bloke who grew up a certain way and then got into this sort of arts community and it's very different. It was a new world that I walked into. In our family, if you ever skited about anything, you'd just get taken to pieces. As an actor, you love the applause and like people saying 'Well done!' and stuff, but I've tried never to let that stuff go to my head." (Good luck finding posts by Peacocke on social media where he's congratulating himself on finishing a workout, say.)

## AND . . . ACTION!

The man does work out, though – every day, without fail. He's done more or less the same routine since he was in Year 10. He rolls out of bed, pumps out somewhere between 100-200 push-ups (lately he's been slowing them down, making each rep more intense, and so doing fewer). He'll also do a heap of sit-ups (the guy's old school) before tackling an eight-kay run. On weekends, he'll do a fast-



paced walk of 30-35 kays that takes six hours plus. Sometimes he'll use that time to learn lines or listen to music, but if he's walking in, say, the Blue Mountains, west of Sydney, "I'll just daydream about stuff; it's as close as I'll ever get to meditation, I reckon". Yep, they're long walks, he agrees, but as someone who grew up running and running hard, walking feels easy, almost like cheating.

None of what he does physically is motivated by any aging-related concerns; he brushed off turning 40 in late 2021. "I'm one of those blokes who doesn't care too much," he says. "I just don't." As a matter of fact, he walked around for three years in his mid-thirties thinking he was a year older than he was. His wife set him straight, and he said, "Crikey, I've got another three years till I hit the big 4-0".

"Then it rolled around and it just didn't bother me. Everyone says you're only as old as you feel, and I feel like I did when I was 28. I can still clock my eight kays. I can still do all my push-ups and sit-ups. I don't think I'd want to be running out for a game of footy, though, because I'd probably break in half.

"I read a lot of modern history and I did that film about the Vietnam War (*Danger Close*). And you think, *Those poor blokes got knocked over when they were 17, 18!* Or, in the First and Second World Wars, younger than that. What would they think? They'd think, *Crikey, I'd have given anything to get to 40* – especially if you can go and have a smack of tennis with your mates on a Tuesday night or whatever. The more you can relate back to how tough other people do it, the more you'll realise, Gee, I'm pretty lucky."

One of Peacocke's sideline activities is a measure of the man. He's an ambassador for RUN DIPG, a charity dedicated to improving the outcomes for patients and their families affected by the deadliest form of childhood cancer – diffuse intrinsic pontine glioma (DIPG), a devilish natural shock that originates in the brain stem and typically causes death within a year of diagnosis.

The background to Peacocke's involvement is that he played rugby at Newcastle Uni with a student named Matt Dun, now Associate Professor Dun, who made a career pivot several years ago

after losing his daughter, Josephine, to DIPG. Dun's focus has been on expanding our knowledge of DIPG with a view to finding better treatments.

"I thought, *Crikey, I turn up and play dress-ups by day, and here's this bloke I played footy with, a very clever man, and he's pivoted his career into doing something that's going to improve the lives of all these kids and their families. I rang him up and said, 'Let me know in what capacity I can help.'*"

Peacocke is similarly aligned with LeaderLife – founded by another friend from uni days, Joh Leader – which seeks to improve the lives and prospects of Dubbo's disadvantaged youth – kids who, unlike him, didn't have a nice home to return to after school each day.

"Again," says Peacocke, "I thought, *This is just a bloody worthwhile thing. It's such an important time in your life to have good role models, and Joh's providing those.*"

My response is to tell Peacocke that he's a good fellow, rooted in reality, devoid of pretentiousness.

Thank you, he says. Then later: "My view is that you have a shot at something, you give it your all, but don't think too much of it if you have some success. Better just to realise how lucky you are." ■

AN EXPERT'S GUIDE TO

# ... AFL GAME-DAY NUTRITION

**AFL players rely on an eclectic fuel supply. Find out what powers the game's best on match day**

THE MODERN AFL is akin to a supercharged HIIT session. Players cover up to 14km a game and expend enormous amounts of energy. Fuelling this colossal load requires careful preparation and calibrated kilojoule and fluid intake, says April Cox, an Accredited Sports Dietitian with Swisse Wellness, who's previously worked at Hawthorn Football Club. The key to success? "Practise during training what you're going to do on game day," says Cox. Here, she breaks down game-day nutrition at the elite level. Apply the same principles to your weekend hit-outs to win the one percenters.

GET AN EDGE ON THE FIELD WITH A TARGETED NUTRITIONAL STRATEGY.



## BONUS HANDPASS

"If you've got everything else right, supplements are a cherry on top," says Cox. They can be useful for players whose preseason blood screening reveals nutrient deficits. "Vitamin D isn't typically thought of as a sports supplement, but deficiency is common among athletes who primarily train indoors," she says. Adequate D levels are important for bone and muscle health, to support a healthy immune system and to assist calcium absorption.



## BEFORE THE BOUNCE

Pre-game fuelling starts up to 24 hours out, says Cox, with players beginning to ramp up their kilojoule/carb intake. On match-day morning the priority is slow-release carbs, a dose of protein and healthy fats – poached eggs on sourdough with a side of avocado or a bowl of oats with yoghurt or milk, topped with nuts and seeds. Closer to kick-off, players switch to fast-release carbs, low protein, fat and fibre to power impending energy surges. The spread includes fruit, pikelets with jam, rice crackers, dried fruit straps, muesli bars and popcorn.



## QUARTER/HALF TIME

Any break in play is an opportunity to top up muscle glycogen stores with sports drinks containing carbohydrates and electrolytes, Cox says. Training at home? Swisse Active Perform (\$14.99, [swisse.com.au](http://swisse.com.au)) can help restore electrolyte balance and boost onfield performance. During longer breaks players revert to '80s school lunch fare for a lightning glucose hit: honey on white bread, pretzels, snakes, watermelon!



## AFTER THE SIREN

Nutrition is a crucial element of recovery with the initial focus on fluids and protein to repair muscle damage, says Cox. But don't neglect carbs, which calm spiking cortisol levels, reducing the chance of picking up post-game viruses. No appetite? Guzzle chocolate milk, a sports nutrition triple treat offering hydration, protein and carbohydrates, says Cox. Within two hours aim to have a proper meal – burritos and burgers are popular in the AFL – to further hasten the recovery process. ■



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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN

# ...I SWITCH TO E-CIGARETTES?

Vaping continues to rise in popularity, but is it really the safe way to puff? Or does no smoke actually mean fire?

IS VAPING ANOTHER HABIT YOU SHOULD STUB OUT FOR GOOD?

## 01

### FIRE WITH LESS ALARM

Regular smoking releases nicotine and other chemicals that we suck down into our lungs by burning tobacco. Vapes mimic the sensation but bypass the harmful combustion. E-cigs heat liquids containing nicotine, which still triggers the release of dopamine, only with fewer nasty chemicals. "In the short and medium term, vaping poses a small fraction of the health risks of smoking," says Erikas Simonavičius, research associate at the Nicotine Research group, King's College London.

## 02

### CHEMICAL BOTHERS

Vaping exposes you to as many as 2000 chemicals, including propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerine. But that's far fewer toxicants than found among the 7000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, at least 250 of which are known carcinogens, such as tar, benzene, arsenic and formaldehyde. "Vaping includes some of the same stuff [as cigarettes], but at substantially lower levels," says Simonavičius.

## 03

### CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

The hit of nicotine varies between different vaping models. Heavy smokers trying to quit might find the larger tank-type devices better as they deliver nicotine faster, in higher doses to more effectively feed cravings. For non-addicted

vapers, however, the opposite is true. "How quickly nicotine hooks people is closely linked to the speed at which it is delivered to the brain," says Ann McNeill, professor of tobacco addiction at King's College London.

## 04

### CHEW IT OVER

Isn't nicotine still bad? Well, its reputation is getting a bit of rehab. There's some evidence it might even improve performance. "Nicotine in general is similar to caffeine," says Simonavičius. "Some studies show that nicotine use might improve cognitive function and movement." That includes one small study that found chewing a low-dose (2mg) gum 20 minutes prior to exercise significantly improved leg-extensor torque – aka muscle strength.

## 05

### DON'T START

As for the risks of vaping? Long-term evidence is lacking simply because vaping is still relatively new, says Simonavičius. "Plus most vapers are past smokers, so it's difficult to disentangle the health effects of past smoking from vaping." Most reports of vape-related lung injury are linked to use of psychoactive THC or vit-E additives. For now, the facts remain hazy. ■



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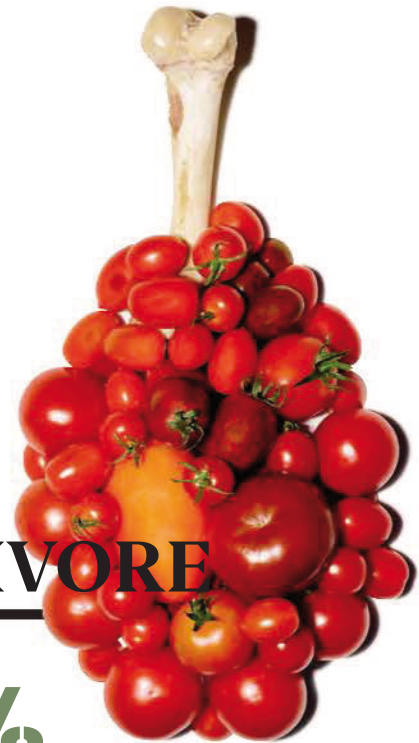
Loaded with antioxidants to protect and restore a fresh, luminous complexion, whilst shielding your skin from the signs of premature ageing.





# HUNT OR GATHER?

Millions of people will dabble in vegetarianism for the first time this year. But is cutting meat or carbs the surer path to health?



## CARNIVORE

**VS**

## HERBIVORE

**7%**

**46%**

The proportion of men who've tried to stick to a low-carb diet, with weight loss as the main goal.

The percentage of people who've bought meat alternatives in an attempt to improve their health.

Diets high in beef, lamb, pork and processed meats are thought to increase the risk of bowel cancer. Stick to 500g a week and pair with fibrous vegetables.



### RISK FACTORS



Vegans are more prone to bone fractures, according to University of Oxford researchers. Fuel up with calcium-rich leafy greens, plant milks and tofu.

The grams of protein in 100g of 20 per cent fat minced beef. This compares to the 9g of protein in a similarly sized portion of a common mince sub-in, lentils.

**18.5g**

### PROTEIN POWER



**\$1**

The cost of a 420g tin of lentils from Coles, compared to \$7 for 500g of regular beef mince. Done smartly, some studies suggest veganism can reduce food bills by a third.



Omega-3 injection



Provides vitamin D



Useful B vitamins



Top source of iron

### POWER PLAYERS



Plenty of minerals



Packed with fibre



Easy protein top-up



Full of good fats

Amount lost in two weeks by overweight men on a high-protein, meat-based plan, Scottish scientists found. However, those who subbed it for soya lost 140g more.

**2.3kg**

### WEIGHT WATCHER



**7.5%**

The average body weight lost by a group of vegans in six months, according to a *Nutrition* journal study. Other diet groups studied slimmed at a slower rate.

In one *Nutrients* journal study of 19 people, those on a high-fat, low-carb diet reduced their body fat but struggled to put on muscle mass compared with higher-carb eaters.



### MUSCLE MATHS



It's total grams, not protein source, that impacts strength and mass, says a University of São Paulo study, which found vegan and meat diets deliver similar gains.

## THE MH VERDICT: VEGAN WINS!

Both meaty and plant-based eating styles can deliver benefits, but veganism just edges it for health boons. But whichever plan you pick, whole foods remain the order of the day.



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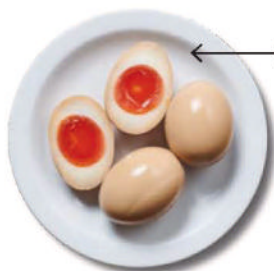
[www.thepushupchallenge.com.au](http://www.thepushupchallenge.com.au)

# RAMEN

Pleasingly simple yet invitingly complex, ramen is the definition of healthy autumn food. Here's how to use your noodles

## 1 SLURP'S UP

One of the world's best-loved Japanese dishes, ramen has been popular for more than a century. And it's endlessly customisable, too, says Tom Moxon, executive group chef at Bone Daddies, which opened its first ramen joint in London's Soho 10 years ago. Here are the ingredients to know.



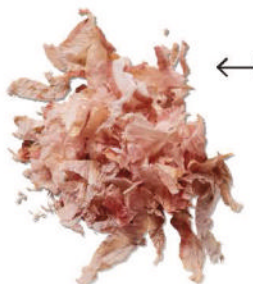
**A Soya Egg**  
Boiled and marinated in soya sauce, water and sugar (see right for instructions), these eggs – like any – are a great source of protein and fat-soluble vitamins. They also add a tangy-salty note to the finished dish. Make a batch and add them to stir-fries, too.



**B Dried Shiitake**  
These aromatics provide a concentrated mushroom flavour – and a little goes a long way. Hydrate in boiling water to release their potent umami note. Shiitake also have impressive anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits, even in small doses.



**C Ramen Noodles**  
"Traditionally, there are rules about which noodles go with which broth, but it really comes down to your own preference," says Moxon. Ramen noodles are made with kansui, an alkaline solution that gives them a sort of mineral taste and chewiness.



**D Bonito Flakes**  
These are tissue-thin shavings of fish that have been fermented and smoked. Bonito flakes pack a rich savouriness, and taste somewhere between anchovy and bacon. They're also a source of selenium and B vits. Best sprinkled on your broth once it's off the heat.



## 2 STOCK ANSWERS

The key to a great broth, according to Moxon, is bones, roasted in an oven to bring out maximum flavour. The collagen and connective tissue will make the stock thick and gelatinous, as well as adding useful nutrients. Add 800g of roasted bones, wings or even a chicken carcass to a pot with 1.5L of water. Moxon also adds three dried shiitake mushrooms, 10g of sliced ginger and 25g of onion, spring onions or leeks. Simmer for at least six hours, topping up with water as necessary.

For a veggie version, Moxon replaces the chicken with 50g of dried shiitake and simmers for just one hour. "Some charred, fresh thyme will add a smoky depth of flavour, too," he adds. Another of Moxon's hero products is a spoonful of miso paste. Short on simmering time? Roast your aromatics in the oven before adding to the pot.





3

### SOUP-ER BOWLS

With your broth prepped, now it's time for the fun part. Moxon likes to keep it simple (try seared chicken breast and baby corn), but here he shares four quick recipes with a little more complexity. Chopsticks at the ready ...and go!

#### CRACK ON WITH IT

Make a perfect soya egg with Moxon's tips



**1/** Lower six eggs into a pan of boiling water; leave them to cook for 7 mins. Drain and dunk them in a bowl of iced water to stop them cooking any further.



**2/** In a large bowl, mix 100ml of soya sauce, 100ml water and 10g of sugar.



**3/** Gently peel the eggs, then add them to the marinade and refrigerate. Moxon advises leaving them overnight or for a minimum of 3-4 hrs.



### A Jerk Ramen Salad

#### INGREDIENTS

##### Serves four

- 500g chicken breast
- 300g slaw mix
- 1 piece ripe plantain
- 400g cooked ramen

##### For the dressing

- 200ml soya sauce
- 120ml rice wine vinegar
- 100ml mirin
- 1 tsp sesame oil

#### METHOD

Mix the dressing ingredients together, then chill in the fridge. Season the chicken with extra jerk seasoning, then grill; rest for 10 mins before slicing into 1cm-thick strips. Finely slice your slaw veg, then peel the plantain and slice 1cm-thick. Fry until golden. Divide the cold noodles and chilled dressing between four bowls and mix well. Top with chicken, slaw and plantain, then garnish with pickled scotch bonnet.



### B Spicy Miso Mushroom Ramen

#### INGREDIENTS

##### Serves four

- Miso tare (right)
- 500g tofu, sliced
- 400g mixed mushrooms
- Thyme, to taste
- 1.25L mushroom broth
- 400g cooked ramen
- 200g beansprouts
- 2 spring onions
- 4 soya eggs

#### METHOD

For the tare, blitz 200g white miso, 50g gochujang paste, 1 tsp sesame oil, 3 tsp soya sauce, 3 tsp mirin, 20g ginger and 20g garlic in a blender until smooth. Marinate the tofu with 100g of the tare for 1 hr, then sear in a hot pan. Sauté the mushrooms in oil with thyme and salt. Divide the broth and remaining tare between bowls and whisk. Serve with noodles, tofu, beansprouts, sliced onions and eggs.



### C Yuzu-Soya Pork Ramen

#### INGREDIENTS

##### Serves four

- Yuzu tare (right)
- 500g pork fillet
- 100ml soya sauce
- 1.25L chicken broth
- 400g cooked ramen
- 200g beansprouts, blanched
- 200g Tenderstem broccoli, cooked

#### METHOD

Whisk the yuzu tare ingredients: 100ml soya sauce, 2 tsp mirin, 1 tsp yuzu juice and 12g yuzu kosho. Marinate the pork in 100ml soya sauce for 1 hr in the fridge, then fry for 6-7 mins each side. Let it rest 10 mins while you prep your veg, then slice the pork into 1cm pieces. Divide the tare and hot broth between four bowls, then drop in the noodles, beansprouts, broccoli and pork. Finish with the soya eggs and spring onion.



### D Thai Tuna Ramen

#### INGREDIENTS

##### Serves four

- Fish tare (right)
- 500g sushi-grade tuna fillet
- 2 corncobs
- 1.25L chicken or mushroom broth
- 400g cooked ramen
- ¼ bunch coriander, chopped
- 1 green chilli, sliced

#### METHOD

Start with the tare, as before: 5 tsp soya sauce, 4 tsp lime juice, 2 limes, 2 tsp fish sauce, 2 tsp mirin. Season the tuna, then sear in a hot pan for 5-10 mins each side. Rest it for 1 hr before slicing 1cm thick. Boil your cobs for 10 mins, pat dry, then char the outside with a blow torch or gas hob. Slice off the corn. Dish up your broth and tare, then add the noodles, tuna and corn. Garnish with coriander, chilli and onion. ■



AVOID DROWNING IN A  
SEA OF DUBIOUS,  
'EXPERT' INFO.





# SURVIVE IN THE AGE OF TOO MUCH ADVICE

**Between YouTube, TikTok and the 11 self-help books from wellness gurus that just came out, lots of people want to tell you what to do. Here's when to listen**

BY MILAN POLK ILLUSTRATIONS BY NEIL WEBB

LAST YEAR, I DECIDED I wanted to learn how to eat healthier. (Surprise! We're not all macro-tracking bodybuilders over here at *Men's Health*.) So I searched – Google, TikTok, Instagram, YouTube. And my research all seemed to lead me to the same kind of advice: one-size-fits-all directives, delivered by confident and attractive social-media stars and online influencers, all hawking video courses, e-books, YouTube channels, podcasts and specially formulated vitamins. Their collective pitch: they alone hold the secret knowledge that will propel me to achieve my goals – for a price, but hey, it works for hundreds of thousands of their followers. And there are so many of these advice givers.

“There's garbage out there because there's a demand,” says Katy Milkman, author of *How to Change*. “This is the thing about human

nature: we're always looking for ways to get better”. And we'll spend good time and money on that improvement. In the US, the personal-development industry (that's courses, coaching and workshops centred on self-improvement), already valued at a massive US\$11.5 billion, is expected to grow an additional 5.5 per cent over the next seven years, according to Grand View Research. The category that will see the most growth? Online-based personal development.

So in order to filter out the trusted experts (they do exist!) from the supplement-shilling, cherry-picking, “subscribe-to-my-podcast” influencers, I looked into the research behind giving advice and talked to authorities on the subject. What I found was that learning how to seek out and take advice about self-improvement is, like everything else in life, a skill. Which means you can improve it. ▶

STEP

1

# ASSESS THE ADVICE GIVER

## Did they earn their CREDIBILITY?

Instead of the person with the most followers, look for someone with a degree and experience in the field who shares aspects of your background. So if you want to eat healthier, is the person giving advice a registered dietitian who has a practice with clients (their website should tell you), and are they making recommendations that align with your income (or dietary restrictions, or access to healthy food)? Check the expert's social bio and LinkedIn for prior education and job history. This applies to all topics, and especially anyone claiming to be a money expert. "A rich person who's always been rich is probably not the best source of advice on how to manage your budget or your finances," says Ayelet Fishbach, a social psychologist at the University of Chicago.

## Do they have an ULTERIOR MOTIVE?

Did an influencer receive the product they're reviewing for free? Because that could tip the review in that product's favour. Influencers don't have to disclose gifts, so you have to do some snooping. If they post videos about a lot of products, they're probably not buying them or trying them for long enough to even get a decent understanding of what they're recommending. No one can swear by a new supplement, for example, if

they've only used it for a week. "Most influencers I'd take with a grain of salt," says Saoud Khalifah, the founder and CEO of Fakespot, an AI tool consumers can use to spot phoney reviews. "There's an inherent bias." And it's not always about swag or money. When people give advice, they feel powerful, according to a study published in the journal *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. So if that YouTuber is constantly telling you to "smash that 'like' button" or "subscribe, subscribe, subscribe", it might be an ego thing.

## Would you actually FOLLOW THE ADVICE?

This is particularly important for "hustle culture" influencers. They may portray that they live The Life and swear that they're making bank, but if you look beyond their slick video editing and sheer charisma, does their advice make sense? "When someone tells you to 'work hard' or 'work less', I find it amusing," Fishbach says. "It's not always good to work harder or work less." Think about it: if your friend told you that you just need to work harder, bro – would you?

STEP

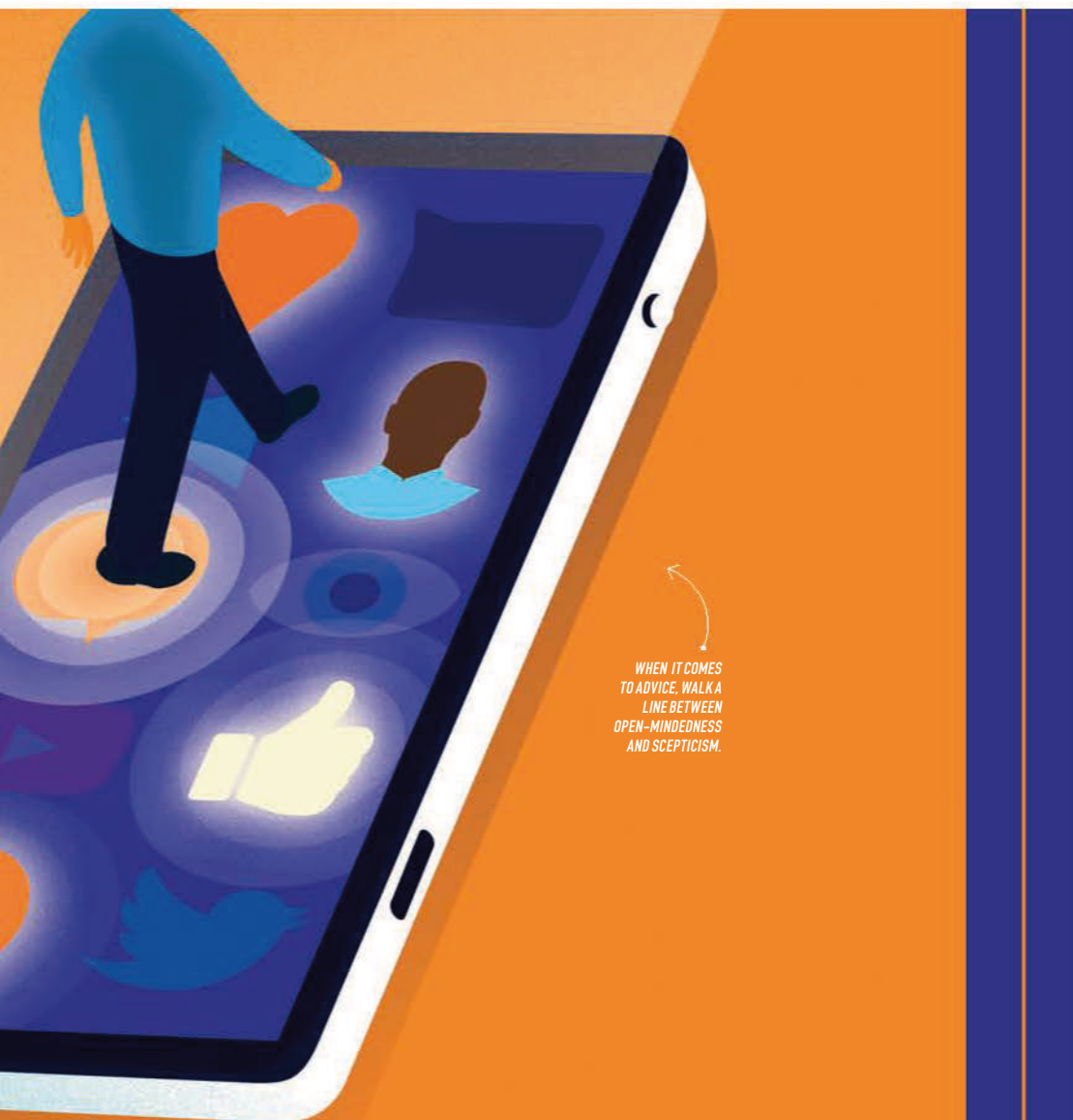
2

# CROSS

## Is this EVEN REAL?

Product reviews can be manufactured and 'like' totals inflated. About 42 per cent of Amazon reviews in 2020 were found to be fake, according to Fakespot. When you're considering product reviews, Khalifah says, don't just look at the number of them. He says bogus reviews may talk about how great the company is rather than discuss the product itself. Fakers may also have a large number of reviews published within a short period of time, and the words in





WHEN IT COMES TO ADVICE, WALK A LINE BETWEEN OPEN-MINDEDNESS AND SCEPTICISM.

# S-REFERENCE

some of them may sound similar, as if a robot wrote them. (It's likely one did.) And anyone can buy likes on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube. This is problematic because people often overrate advice from others deemed "successful" – especially when there's a lot of it, according to a series of 2022 studies. Khalifah recommends looking for publications with expert reviews and advice, as well as review-forward nonprofits like Consumer Reports, which have no inherent incentive to give positive reviews.

## What do OTHER EXPERTS THINK?

Watch a bunch of videos on the topic from various sources. That way, you'll "learn about the pros and cons of something—and the more diverse opinions you get, the more insight you get," says Michael Schaerer, an associate professor of organisational behaviour and human resources at Singapore Management University. What you'll often find is that the best advice isn't from just one person on an extreme – but where they all meet in the middle. ■

## Real Experts Worth a Follow



### NUTRITION

**Abby Langer**  
(@langernutrition)

The author of *Good Food, Bad Diet* dishes out bullshit-busting takedowns of so-called nutritionists – and recipes for lemon chicken.



### FITNESS

**Brad Schoenfeld**  
(@bradschoenfeldphd)

Natural bodybuilding champion. Body composition researcher. Looongtime fitness expert.



### FINANCE

**Chris Browning**  
(@popcornfinance-podcast)

Helpful, direct money advice from a practising financial analyst specialising in revenue – with the occasional Michael Scott meme.

# STUCK IN A MOMENT

Ever used the same old failed strategy over and over in the face of a problem? *MH* columnist OSHER GÜNSBERG says enough already

IN A TIME BEFORE GPS, men would usually be the ones driving the family car on the weekend adventure.

With a bulky atlas open on a sweaty knee and his exasperated partner in the passenger seat, he'd be grinding his teeth to the sounds of her angry sighing while the screaming children are playing an increasingly violent game of slaps in the back, the seconds between now and when the game turns into an actual fight quickly ticking away.

And every two minutes, that family car passes the same landmark on a corner, driving around in an endless loop searching for a place that is supposed to be on that corner – but isn't.

Stopping the car and admitting he's lost is the last thing this man will do. Instead, he'll keep repeating what he knows – just keep going with the open map on the knee, the escalating situation in the back and the rapidly deteriorating emotional connection with his partner as they continue not to locate the birthday party/barbecue/funeral which they're now so late for they've probably missed the candles/steak/burial.

At some point, the partner winds down the window and asks a passerby for directions, at which point the helpful stranger will say, "Down there, second left", and in mere moments they're free from their vehicular prison and getting stuck into cake/sausages/cucumber sandwich fingers.

Since the advent of GPS, this scenario has mostly been avoided by the chief navigator and captain of the family transport vehicle. However, it serves still as an excellent reminder that very often we get stuck in the trap of believing that what we think is the right thing to do in a situation is *the only thing that's possible* – even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

We can become glued to a certain course of action, and to see ditching it as some kind of humiliation or personal failure.

There are a few books I revisit every year, mostly cautionary tales like *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *The Machine Stops* by E.M. Forster, to remind me to contribute more to the world than I take from it.

Another is Laurence Gonzales' absolute masterpiece, *Deep Survival*.

Chapter by chapter, Gonzales breaks down what it is that determines who lives and who dies in survival situations. Spoiler alert: it mostly comes down to your ability to think clearly in high-stakes environments. Gonzales brilliantly describes one phenomenon, familiar to wilderness search-and-rescue teams, known as "Bending The Map".

Our brains are remarkable in how they hate uncertainty and love to order and label what they perceive as chaos so as to bring an end to that uncertainty.

When we're somewhere unfamiliar, to bring a chaotic situation to order we create a mental map of our surroundings and then try to orient ourselves within that map. But the problem compounds because once we've done this, our brains don't like to edit or amend that map, even in the face of conflicting evidence.

For example, despite there clearly being no river in the gully he's in, a hiker may continue pushing forward through increasingly rugged terrain, in fading light and plunging temperatures, convinced he's on the right path and refusing to accept he's lost. As Gonzales points out, this has led to tragic consequences for even the most experienced of outdoorsmen.

While dying from hypothermia alone on a mountainside isn't usually a risk in our daily lives, we can certainly get stuck in the trap of believing that the way we're doing something is the correct way and never deviating from that despite there being no sign of progress, or worse, clear damage being caused.

An example of this is to reflect on how you are in a quarrel with a long-term partner. Do you consider each situation for what it is or do you bend the map to hear their grievance as something else entirely?

When we find ourselves unable to get where we want to go – whether it's on a journey, in our careers or even in a relationship – if we're using our full arsenal of ideas and we're still not achieving the results we were hoping for, we have a problem. And if we don't stop what we're doing and seek out other ideas, then it's absolute insanity to expect any other outcome besides the one we're repeating to our own detriment (and probably to the

detriment of those around us, as well).

More often than not when I fall into this trap, it's like I'm trying to use a hammer to remove a splinter from my foot. I use it because it's the tool I reach for when things hurt, and I feel powerful and in control when I feel its weight in my hand and when I swing it. Never mind that it's entirely the wrong tool for the job and just makes things a whole lot worse, I'll just keep swinging it because it's been so useful at other times and if I only swing it again (but harder this time) it might just work. Alas, it never does.

But how do we know when we're stuck? It's tough for me because I can get super-focused on things and can get stuck doing exactly the same thing unsuccessfully eight or 10 times in a row, so in recent years I've learned to keep count.

Be it repairing a toilet-roll holder or trying to apologise to my wife in a way that sounds like I mean it (which I'm not great at) I find it helpful to say to myself, "Okay, one more time . . . and then you just have to try something different".

I also try to notice clues like a rising sense of agitation in my body.

If I feel my throat constricting or hear my voice changing, if I notice my breath quicken and a tense feeling in my stomach, those are all signs that whatever tool I'm using (physical or metaphorical) isn't working and it's time to explore something else.

It's not the result of a flaw that this happens to us; it's just a bug in our programming that can sometimes help us solve problems in unfamiliar situations. The certainty it provides gives us the confidence required to take decisive action – which is super-handy when you're operating in the unknown. The key is to learn when it's not helpful, and to have a deep understanding that being stuck and out of ideas is a failure only if you refuse to recognise you're stuck and to seek out new ideas.

Nobody cares that you pulled the car over to ask for directions to the birthday party. You're not being tested on your intimate knowledge of a city's back roads, the family just wants you to get them there in time to eat some cake.

If you asked for help to get them that mouthful of spongy gluten and icing, all the better. ■



**“It’s like using a hammer  
to remove a splinter”**

CHOOSING RIGHT MAY  
MEAN ASKING FOR  
HELP. THERE’S NO  
SHAME IN IT.

*For more of  
Osher’s insights  
into self-  
acceptance,  
fulfilling your  
dreams and  
getting the most  
out of life, listen  
to his bi-weekly  
(every Monday  
and Friday)  
podcast, Better  
Than Yesterday*



WHEN PART OF YOU  
SNAPS, YOUR SELF-  
IMAGE CAN START  
FRAYING AT THE EDGES.



# A BROKEN LIFE

When veteran *MH* writer **DANIEL WILLIAMS** suffered the worst injury of his life in a training mishap, he felt the pillars of his identity crumble beneath him. In order to rebuild his body, he first had to retune his mind

IT WAS AN ordinary Friday around dawn when I limbered up for what I thought would be just another garage workout. Figuring I'd start with bench press, I loaded a barbell with 50kg, lay down and pressed it off the rack.

CRASH!

The back of my head hit the floor. I was looking at the ceiling. My feet were still planted, my calves perpendicular to the floor. The damn bench had collapsed! The pin that was supposed to have locked it at a slight incline had given way.

Pain and a sense of weirdness engulfed my right shoulder. *Okay, I thought, I need to get this barbell the hell off me.* I must have used my left side and a surge of adrenaline to free myself.

Back in the house, I swallowed some painkillers and pressed an icepack against my shoulder and chest. Deep down, I knew this was no garden-variety strain, so I woke my wife.

"Do I need to take you to hospital?"

"No."

"Sit down and I'll make you a cup of tea."

Tea. If only it did fix everything.

I should have said "yes" to hospital, but I wanted to believe this injury would be a

memory inside a week. I even told my tennis partner that I was a chance of playing on the weekend. (Tennis is my favourite pastime even though it often drives me crazy.)

Later that morning, I used my right hand to pull a tub of yoghurt out of the fridge. Extended out in front of me, my arm shook uncontrollably. By the afternoon, a colossal bruise covered my right biceps. Over the weekend, I noticed that when I lay on my back and imagined holding a barbell at my chest, I couldn't push my right arm upwards. I went online and booked in to see a physiotherapist on the Monday morning.

"Lie down. Now, push against my arm," he instructed.

I tried. Nothing.

"You've torn your pec," he said.

Oh, f\*ck.

## THE DIE IS CAST

By "pec", the physio meant pectoralis major tendon, which is what connects your pectoral muscle to your upper arm. Rupturing it creates a calamitous disconnect between chest and shoulder, robbing you of strength and range of motion. Pec tears are caused by a sudden eccentric force, such as

when a bench press goes haywire. I needed an MRI to confirm the diagnosis. The physio called me on the Wednesday.

"Sorry, mate," he said, before reading from the imaging report: "Full-thickness tear of the pectoralis major tendon from its humeral insertion". From Googling, I already knew I was staring down the barrel of surgery and months on the sidelines.

That same morning, a colleague said she could fast-track an appointment for me with one of Sydney's top sports physicians. Forty-eight hours later, I was in his office. He told me, in effect, that I didn't absolutely need surgery – so long as I was content to spend the rest of my days reading, typing and knitting. If, on the other hand, I aspired to play tennis again at a respectable standard and to lift moderately heavy objects, then my only option was to go under the knife.

Two hours later, I sat opposite an orthopaedic surgeon who was in no mood to dally and booked me in for surgery under general anaesthetic on the Monday morning. When the time came, he cut me at the shoulder just above the armpit and reattached my pec tendon to the bone with non-dissolvable stitches. Analgesics got me through a rough night in hospital before I was sent home the next morning in a sling.

## HALF A MAN

Chances are, you and I share certain traits. We like – or need – to exercise. We don't do well sitting around. We don't like being dependent on anyone. We have a competitive itch that needs scratching. We



worry about gaining fat and losing muscle. We fret about physical decline and some future time when our bodies fail us.

This injury and the rehab road stretching out before me were pressing every anxiety-related button I have. Against doctor's orders, I started taking walks immediately, just so I was doing *something*. I vowed not to consume a single sugary treat for the duration of my recovery.

I felt useless. For dressing, bathing and food prep, I required my wife's help. At night, my shoulder ached like a broken heart. I should have been helping with the packing up of my late mother's house, but I could barely lift anything. Or anyone: not being able to pick up my toddler granddaughters felt like cruel and unusual punishment. I fell into a funk.

The turning point? It came in the shape of a book. That's right – not an Insta post or a podcast or a Netflix series but a three-year-old paperback called *Rebound: Train your mind to bounce back stronger from sports injuries*, by Carrie Jackson Cheadle and Cindy Kuzma. I devoured it, then every day thereafter revisited what I saw as its four most powerful messages.

**You're not alone.** Of course, no sane man should need reminding that he isn't the first joker to have hurt himself in a way that seems to have wrecked his life. And yet, that's how I felt for weeks. There was comfort in realising that countless others had recovered from injuries far more debilitating and complicated than mine – injuries involving the spine or the brain or multiple body parts. These poor saps had made it back and so, surely, would I because, relatively speaking, I'd collided with a parked car, not a runaway Mack truck.

**Have faith.** Faith in what? In lots of things. Stirred, my imagination can run amok. I worried that my surgeon would operate on the wrong shoulder. I worried about postsurgical wound infection. I worried that my wife would get jack of playing nurse. I worried about slipping and falling and re-tearing my pec. I had to learn to let go of these fears and replace them with faith. This went beyond trusting that nothing dire would happen. It meant believing in the efficacy of certain practices outside the scope of science, such as visualising the process of physiological healing and upping my intake of protein and vitamin C with the aim of accelerating it. Nonsense? Maybe. But a lot of smart people would disagree. And for me, it trumped doing nothing.

**Recovery is a sport.** Okay, I couldn't slam forehands. But I could work at maintaining my aerobic fitness so I'd return to the court in half-decent shape when the time came. For six weeks, walking was it for me. But gradually, I introduced grip-strengthening exercises, core and leg work, and hill sprints. Each was as important psychologically as it was physically. Twelve weeks post-surgery, I started rehabbing an impossibly stiff shoulder with pulley exercises. The trick here was to put aside what my shoulder could do before I mangled it, and to remember instead how little it could do a week ago or a month ago. Hints of progress, in other words, were gold nuggets.

**Don't just get by – grow.** As the months passed, I realised I'd established new ways of doing things that I'd retain even when fit again. For example, the dawn walk, which I came to see as not merely the sanity-saving compromise it started out as but as the ideal start to every day, a chance to breathe and

relax, to summon gratitude and engage the senses. Previously, I'd viewed the early morning as the only time suitable for working out, but my period of downtime showed me that exercise could be scattered throughout the day. More than that, it showed me that you won't lose all worth as a human being if you skip it entirely some days; that you can take the odd break and the sky won't fall in. More important still, I realised that your loved ones (especially your two-year-old granddaughters) simply couldn't care less if you're looking slightly less buff than you did a few months ago.

## THE WAY FORWARD

Shortly after the op, the surgeon had said I could try returning to the court four months post-surgery, whack a few balls and see how the shoulder felt.

And that's what I did – and my shoulder felt odd, like it was nailed on, but I could hit passable groundstrokes. For weeks, I served only underarm. When I first tried serving properly, the results were laughable, except I couldn't appreciate the joke.

As I write this, I'm six months post-op and coming along. An exercise physiologist helped me to reintroduce light weights to my regimen, even though, in the aftermath of my accident, I'd sworn I'd do only bodyweight training for the rest of my days. My serve is about 70 per cent of what it was. I'm still practising a form of faith, trusting that my body will continue to heal, believing that patience will be rewarded. I can't undo my accident or its effects. Acceptance, with a heightened appreciation for all that I have, is my new guiding light. ■

# THE HEARTBURN TRAP

**It's one thing to go on omeprazole to tame heartburn and GERD. It's an entirely different thing to try to get off it**

BY SEAN O'NEAL

FOR ME, THERE WAS life before omeprazole – and I wasn't sure there would ever be life after.

I had my first taste of acid reflux at age 12, after some particularly greasy school-cafeteria fries. It was hot and sour, like someone squirted soap at the back of my throat. My mum gave me an antacid from her personal stash. By uni, I was chugging [Gaviscon], stacking the empty bottles along my dorm-room windowsill like beer cans. It was funny to me, but my doctor had a more sobering take: I had all the telltale signs of gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, and I'd need to get it under control before it led to something even more serious, like ulcers or oesophageal cancer. He prescribed me omeprazole.

It was as though a light switched on – or, more accurately, like a tap shut off.

Omeprazole is a proton pump inhibitor, or PPI, which blocks the enzymes in the stomach that produce acid. For someone like me, whose gut churns out acid like Nicolas Cage makes movies, PPIs can be a life changer. In 2003, when omeprazole went over the counter in the US as Prilosec OTC, I started taking it daily.

PPIs, which include Nexium, are prescribed as 14-day treatments – OTC versions say so right on the box. But the convenience of PPIs, along with their unparalleled ability to relieve heartburn, is enough to keep users like me coming back for years. Maybe even for life.

Unfortunately, that long-term usage might also lead to serious problems. In the US, the Food and Drug Administration warns that long-term PPI users have an increased risk of bone fractures and low

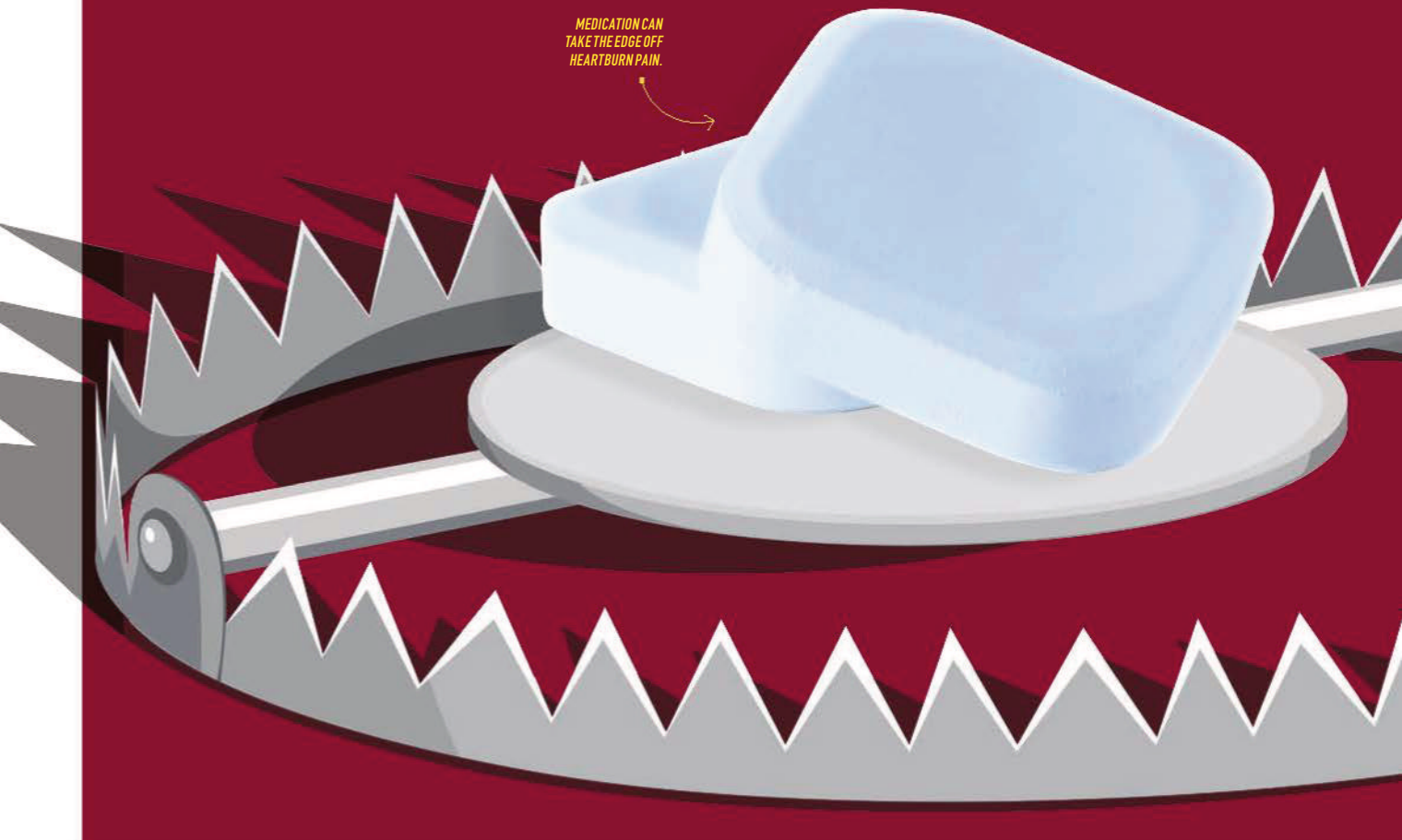
magnesium levels, which can cause muscle spasms, seizures and irregular heartbeat. Studies have linked PPIs to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, infections like *C. difficile*, depression and dementia. Thousands of pending lawsuits accuse PPI makers of contributing to kidney disease, kidney failure and wrongful death.

Despite all this, it's worth noting that almost none of these side effects have ever been proven definitively, with the exception of certain intestinal infections. "In general, we believe that their well-established benefits far outweigh any theoretical risk," says Dr Felice Schnoll-Sussman, director of the Jay Monahan Center for Gastrointestinal Health at Weill Cornell Medicine.

Along with these benefits comes the issue that PPIs are so effective at suppressing symptoms that they essentially offer absolution for a multitude of sins. Most experts recommend that GERD sufferers adopt the same tenets: don't eat close to bedtime; lose weight; stop smoking; cut out alcohol and caffeine; eliminate foods that trigger your symptoms. But PPIs can free you to disregard most or all of that.

Of course, there's another reason that some people become lifelong PPI users: once you've started, it can be incredibly hard to stop.

MEDICATION CAN TAKE THE EDGE OFF HEARTBURN PAIN.







## PUTTING THE LID ON

I'm 44, so I've been an everyday user of PPIs for nearly two decades. I've been scoped and probed and now know that my GERD is largely due to my lifestyle. During the first year of the pandemic – a period I spent gorging on takeout and cocktails – I awoke one night choking on my own acid, struggling to breathe. I knew it was time for a change.

I adopted a low-carb diet along with a regular exercise routine. Within a year, I'd lost 20 kilograms. I decided I'd never be in a better position to try kicking this drug that had covered up so many bad habits. Maybe by following a healthier lifestyle – or at least no longer living like it was the last days of Rome – I'd find that I didn't need it anymore.

In the early months of the pandemic, people started panic-buying heartburn meds after it was rumoured they could fight COVID. Empty shelves forced me to reckon with the fact that I'd been dependent on omeprazole for most of my adult life. Even if those adverse effects never materialised, it just didn't seem sustainable to rely on an OTC medication to feel normal. But I was also terrified of what might happen if I stopped.

Seek advice on quitting PPIs and you'll find horror stories of "omeprazole withdrawal" – getting clean can mean enduring nausea, fatigue, depression, insomnia and uncontrollable flatulence. The most daunting side effect, however, is the phenomenon known as rebound acid

## "Pinning down exactly what makes your gut angry requires patience"

hypersecretion. When PPIs stop the production of stomach acid, it's theorised, your body responds by making more of the hormone gastrin. The extra gastrin can cause acid secretion to increase. The pain can be so unbearable that many people end up getting right back on PPIs.

To offset acid rebound, my doctor recommended that I taper off omeprazole over the course of six weeks. Even going slowly, my reflux returned with a vengeance and remains a daily nuisance. And, it turns out, tapering may not have mattered.

When Dr Lynne Goebel, at Marshall University, looked at people on PPIs who tapered or stopped cold turkey, she found it didn't make a difference in their rate of successfully quitting. Most of those who were able to get off PPIs simply switched to a different medication – usually an H2 blocker. "H2 blockers haven't been associated with any of those bad things," Goebel says. Their biggest disadvantage, however, is exactly what got me on PPIs in the first place: they're just not as effective.



## NOT A DONE DEAL

I'm now six weeks sober from PPIs, and I'm still learning to manage my reflux without them. I've been popping an H2

blocker daily, supplemented with fistfuls of antacids. I could probably renounce more things, like garlic, bacon and red onions. And yes, fine, I could give up coffee and whiskey. Pinning down exactly what makes your gut angry requires patience, trial and error, and a whole lot of personal investment. It's no wonder so many sufferers simply opt for the path of least resistance, choosing a drug that cures the symptoms rather than the cause.

Even my own doctor tells me that ultimately it's up to me whether I want to stay off omeprazole for good. He says we all make compromises for our comforts.

Luckily, all the experts I spoke with – including the sceptics – say they're not terribly worried about me using PPIs infrequently for bad flare-ups. "I think it's important to note that people can get off of PPIs," Goebel says. But if someone has persistent symptoms: "I let them take one now and then."

Right now, I'm not sure whether the concerns about PPIs will win out over my desire to be reflux-free or to not always be scraping the powder of crumbled antacid tablets out of my pants pockets. For the moment, however, it's enough to know that I can quit. My life doesn't have to revolve around a little pill. That's huge. ■

## NEXT-STEP BURN TAMERS

IF LIFESTYLE CHANGES OR MEDS DON'T WORK, "THERE ARE SO MANY NOVEL THERAPIES THAT NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO LIVE WITH HEARTBURN," SCHNOLL-SUSSMAN SAYS

▶ **The Classic FUNDOPPLICATION:** Using traditional surgery or laparoscopy, surgeons fold the top part of the stomach (the fundus) around the lower oesophageal sphincter and secure it there to tamp down on regurgitation.

▶ **Most Inventive LINX:** The oesophageal sphincter can be strengthened by surgically binding it with a LINX device, a flexible band of titanium beads with a magnetic core.

▶ **Least Invasive STRETTA:** A device resembling a small fishing pole is inserted down your throat to send radio-frequency pulses to the oesophageal sphincter. This remodels the muscle tissue without harming it, so acid can't come back up the oesophagus.

▶ **Newest on the Block ENDOSTIM:** Not yet approved outside of Europe, the surgically implanted EndoStim, controlled by a handheld wireless

device, delivers a mild electric signal to the oesophageal sphincter. It's sort of like a pacemaker for your gut.

▶ **Next-Gen POTASSIUM-COMPETITIVE ACID BLOCKERS:** P-CABs, the possible next wave of heartburn meds, are a way off too. In studies, they've provided relief much faster than PPIs, and they've worked in cases where PPIs haven't. The jury's still out on their long-term effects. ■



# THE NEW EXERCISE RX

Strength and fitness have an even greater impact on your health and life span than doctors realised. But how hard do you have to exercise to get those benefits?

BY BEN COURT ILLUSTRATION BY PETER CROWTHER



EVERYONE – DOCTORS, SCIENTISTS, Big Pharma, me, you – is looking for a longevity hack, a drug or supplement or superfood that will help us live healthier, longer lives. It turns out we already have one. “Exercise is by far the most potent longevity ‘drug,’” says Dr Peter Attia, a surgeon turned physician who focuses on extending health span – stretching the portion of life when you’re able to do what you want to do versus being frail and weak. “The data are unambiguous: exercise not only delays actual death but also prevents both cognitive and physical decline better than any other intervention. It is the single most potent tool we have in the health-span-enhancing toolkit – and that includes nutrition, sleep and meds.”

Attia presents his approach in a new 496-page book called *Outlive: The Science & Art of Longevity*. The 50-year-old is a former boxer, long-distance swimmer and endurance cyclist; ate keto before it was a thing; and followed Formula 1 in the 1990s. Now he’s all about rucking (hiking with a weighted backpack), archery, rowing and strength training – and he’s still into cycling and F1. The Austin-based doctor practises what he calls medicine 3.0, aggressively treating the causes of diseases early and emphasising prevention rather than waiting for symptoms to manifest. In *Outlive*, he goes deep on the four primary causes of slow death: heart disease/stroke, metabolic dysfunction, neurodegenerative disease and cancer.

But he goes deepest on exercise, specifically what strength and fitness levels are associated with longer, happier lives. Spoiler alert: he recommends way more exercise than the government guidelines, ideally 10-12 hours a week. We adapted the fitness chapters in *Outlive* and interviewed Attia to give you a concise version of his life-extending exercise prescription.

## FORGE TRUE FUNCTIONAL FITNESS

Peak aerobic cardiorespiratory fitness, measured in terms of your VO<sub>2</sub> max (the maximum amount of oxygen your body



USE EXERCISE TO  
REVERSE AGE-  
RELATED DECLINE.

can utilise during intense exercise), is perhaps the most powerful marker for longevity, says Attia. A 2018 study in *JAMA* that followed more than 120,000 people found that higher VO<sub>2</sub> max was associated with significantly lower mortality. The study also determined that someone of below-average VO<sub>2</sub> max for their age and sex (that is, between the 25th and 50th percentiles) is at double the risk of all-cause mortality compared with someone in the top quartile.

Attia says your VO<sub>2</sub> max is a good proxy measure of physical capability: it indicates what you can – and cannot – do. Studies suggest that VO<sub>2</sub> max will decline by roughly 10 per cent per decade after your 20s and up to 15 per

cent per decade after age 50. Increasing your VO<sub>2</sub> max makes you functionally younger. So having average or even above-average VO<sub>2</sub> max has long-term ramifications. Attia's goal for his patients is to be at an excellent level for the decade (or two) below their age. Many smartwatches can estimate VO<sub>2</sub> max, but a real test (the Cooper 12-Minute Run) is better and VO<sub>2</sub>-max charts are easy to find online.

The good news? You can improve VO<sub>2</sub> max by as much as 17 per cent per year. But you need to put in the work. Attia advises that patients do at least three 60-minute cardio sessions per week in zone 2 of their heart rate (70-85 per cent of max heart rate, a gentle intensity during which you can say a

complete sentence). They can involve running, cycling, rowing, even rucking. This is optimal for the health and efficiency of your mitochondria, the factories that burn fat and glucose to power your muscles and that decline as you age.

Along with cruising in zone 2, Attia recommends that patients do a weekly 30-minute VO<sub>2</sub>-max effort, such as high-intensity intervals of three to eight minutes. (Rest for the length of the interval.) For instance, you can run or ride uphill for four rounds of four minutes, with four minutes of rest in between. "This is a much higher level of intensity," he says. By testing your VO<sub>2</sub> max and committing to cardio, you can win in the long run. ►

## BUILD YOUR NEST EGG OF MUSCLE

Age-related muscle loss – which starts insidiously in your 40s and picks up pace in your 50s – is called sarcopenia, from the Greek words for “poverty of the flesh”, says Attia. Think of strength training as a form of retirement saving, he says. Just as you want to retire with enough money saved up to sustain you for the rest of your life, you want to reach an older age with enough of a “reserve” of muscle to protect you from injury and allow you to continue to pursue the activities that you enjoy – in addition to acting as a buffer against the natural age-related decline in muscle mass. The larger the reserve you build up early on, the better off you will be over the long term. Attia structures his patients’ training around three 45- to 60-minute weekly total-body strength sessions, which emphasise the following key tenets.



**GRIP STRENGTH:** New research reveals that adults have far weaker grip strength – and thus less muscle mass – than they did even a generation ago.

In 1985, men ages 20-24 had an average right-handed grip strength of 55 kilograms, while in 2015, men of the same age averaged just 46 kilos. Attia notes that many studies suggest that grip strength predicts how long you are likely to live. In these studies, it’s acting as a proxy for overall strength, but it’s also a broader indicator of general robustness and your ability to protect yourself if you slip.

**BEST MOVES:** Weighted carries, dead hangs and plate pinches. Your goal: do a farmer’s carry with half your bodyweight in each hand for one minute.



## CONCENTRIC AND ECCENTRIC LOADING:

You need strength when your muscles are shortening (concentric) and lengthening (eccentric). In other words, you must be able to lift the weight up and put it back down, slowly and with control. In life, especially as you age, eccentric strength is where many people falter.

Eccentric strength in the quads is what gives us the brakes required when we are moving down an incline or walking down a set of stairs. It’s really important to keep us safe from falling.

**BEST MOVES:** Focus on the “down” phase of lifts, whether rucking downhill or doing pull-ups, curls or deadlifts. Practise slow stepdowns – can you step off an 45cm box in three seconds or more?



## PULLING MOTIONS:

Attia says these anchor movements are how you exert your will on the world, whether you’re hoisting groceries or climbing El Cap.

**BEST MOVES:** Practise pulling at all angles. Start with rows and deadlifts and progress to overhead moves like pull-ups.



## HIP HINGING:

You bend at the hips – not the spine – to harness your body’s largest muscles, the glutei maximi and the hamstrings. It is a very powerful move that is essential to life. If you are jumping, picking up a penny off the sidewalk or simply getting out of a chair, you are hip hinging.

**BEST MOVES:** Deadlifts, hip thrusters and countless single-leg variations.



LONGEVITY GURU ATTIA WORKING OUT AT HIS HOME GYM IN AUSTIN.

ATTIA (RIGHT) HAS HIS OWN PODCAST, THE DRIVE, AND RECENTLY TALKED WITH ANDREW HUBERMAN, HOST OF THE HUBERMAN LAB PODCAST.



# HEALTH-SPAN ESSENTIALS

*Attia practises what he calls medicine 3.0, an aggressive approach to preventive health care versus the main man-killers*

**Metabolism:** An annual DEXA scan for body-fat percentage and bone density. It's critical because strong bones indicate robust health, and excess weight is a leading risk factor for cancer, second only to smoking, according to cancer experts. Attia also recommends an annual oral glucose tolerance test to assess insulin resistance.

**Heart:** An apolipoprotein B (apoB) blood test, the best indicator of heart-attack risk. He also tests Lipoprotein(a), or Lp(a), the most prevalent hereditary risk factor for heart disease.

**Cancer:** Early screening, including colonoscopies starting at 40.

**Brain:** A test for the APOE4 genotype, which can increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

## STRENGTHEN YOUR FOUNDATION

Stability is often conflated with core strength, but it's about more than just abs, says Attia. It is the foundation on which your twin pillars of cardiovascular fitness and strength must rest. His technical definition of stability: the subconscious ability to harness, decelerate or stop force. It lets you create the most force in the safest manner possible, connecting your body's muscle groups with much less risk of injury to your joints, your soft tissue and especially your vulnerable spine. The goal is to be strong, fluid, flexible and agile as you move through the world. Attia recommends that patients do one hour of dedicated stability work weekly and five to 10 minutes at the beginning of other workouts. He notes that there's no one-size-fits-all approach and it's about targeting your body's weak areas. Often he practises exercises endorsed by the Postural Restoration Institute, such as breathing drills and exercises that create symmetrical range of motion for different limbs, and what's called dynamic neuromuscular stabilisation – moves babies learn, like squatting and crawling. He also does standard core training and foot and balance exercises. He likens stability work to a software upgrade for any movement you're doing. Practices like yoga, tai chi and dynamic stretching can help, too.

Attia's exercise prescription may seem daunting, but it's that important, he says. The key is finding exercises that you enjoy doing: "This is a lifelong pursuit." ■



**OUTLIVE: THE SCIENCE & ART OF LONGEVITY**, by Dr Peter Attia, with Bill Gifford, is out now (HarmonyBooks).

## OTHER BEST PRACTICES



To prevent "social jet lag", which can be damaging to your overall health, try to wake up and go to bed at the same time each day, even on weekends.



Attia takes eight milligrams of rapamycin once per week for its potential antiaging benefits, including reducing inflammation and improving the body's cancer surveillance.



Limit alcohol to four to seven servings per week – never more than two per day.



When at an intersection while driving, look left, right, then left again before entering. The most common way to be killed as a driver is to be hit by another car from the left at an intersection.



# HAM, CHEESE & MUSCLE

Yes, you can meal-prep two of your favourite proteins into a week's worth of postworkout meals, and yes, you can do it on a budget

BY JENNIFER NICKLE PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHELSEA KYLE

## 1 PREP IT

*Get this stuff ready so you can then store your meals for the workweek*

### SPLIT-PEA SOUP

**1** In a large pot over medium, heat 1 Tbsp each butter and olive oil. Add 1 chopped onion, 1 chopped carrot, and 3 ribs chopped celery; saute till softened, about 5 minutes.

**2** Add 2 tsp dried thyme and 4 bay leaves; cook 5 minutes. Add 3 cups rinsed yellow split peas, 1 ham hock, 8 cups water, 4 cups low-sodium chicken stock, and 1 tsp salt. Cook the ham until tender, about 4 hours, then set aside to cool.

**3** Shred the ham; discard the skin and bones. Add half the ham back into the soup; store the rest. Add ¼ cup chopped parsley to the soup. Season and refrigerate.

### HAMMY FRITTATA

**1** Preheat the oven to 190°C. In a medium pan set over medium high, melt 1 Tbsp butter. Add 1 sliced onion and cook till softened, about 5 minutes. Add ½ tsp salt, ½ tsp dried thyme, and the cubed roasted sweet potatoes from "The Extras", below. Cook until the onion starts to caramelise, about 5 minutes.

**2** Meanwhile, grate 1 cup cheddar and beat 6 eggs. Pour the eggs evenly into the pan. Add ½ cup reserved shredded ham. Top with the cheddar and 1 generous Tbsp chopped parsley. Bake until the eggs are set, about 6 minutes.

### THE EXTRAS

**1** Preheat the oven to 190°C. Place 2 sweet potatoes on a baking sheet and roast until tender, 45 minutes. In the meantime, toss 1 bunch trimmed asparagus with a drizzle of oil and a generous sprinkling of salt and pepper. For the final 5 minutes of baking, add the asparagus to the sheet and cook. Remove the tray from the oven and cool. Divide the asparagus into 4 equal portions. Cut 1 of the sweet potatoes into 2-cm cubes and set aside. Halve the other lengthwise and set aside.

**2** Cook 1 cup penne per package instructions. Drain and set aside.



BAKED PENNE



LOADED SWEET POTATO





## 2 PACK IT

*All you do now is store your meals to heat and eat later*

### 1 BAKED PENNE

In a to-go container, mix the cooked penne, 1 cup split-pea soup,  $\frac{1}{4}$  the cooked asparagus (cut into 4-cm pieces), a heaping  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup shredded ham and 1 Tbsp chopped parsley. Season and top with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup grated cheddar. When reheating, stir occasionally.

**Nutrition per meal:** 4000 kilojoules, 56g protein, 96g carbs (14g fibre), 41g fat

### 2 SOUP AND SALAD

In a container, add about 2 cups of the soup. In another container, add a generous 2 handfuls of spring mix. Pack some dressing on the side.

**Nutrition per meal:** 2155 kilojoules, 35g protein, 57g carbs (22g fibre), 18g fat

### 3 LOADED SWEET POTATO

Score the 2 roasted sweet-potato halves and season with salt. Divide  $\frac{1}{4}$  the cooked asparagus and a heaping  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup shredded ham between the halves and top with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup shredded cheddar. Garnish with a generous 1 Tbsp chopped parsley, if you want.

**Nutrition per meal:** 2200 kilojoules, 31g protein, 26g carbs (5g fibre), 33g fat

### 4 HAM AND EGG WRAP

In a whole-wheat wrap, add  $\frac{1}{2}$  the frittata,  $\frac{1}{4}$  the roasted asparagus, and a handful of spring mix. Wrap to eat cold later, or reheat (unwrapped).

**Nutrition per meal:** 3270 kilojoules, 51g protein, 32g carbs (11g fibre), 52g fat

### 5 FRITTATA WITH GREENS

In a container, add  $\frac{1}{2}$  the frittata and the rest of the roasted asparagus to reheat later. In another container, add a generous 2 handfuls of spring mix. Pack some dressing on the side.

**Nutrition per meal:** 3310 kilojoules, 48g protein, 28g carbs (7g fibre), 55g fat ■

● SOUP AND SALAD

● HAM AND EGG WRAP

● FRITTATA WITH GREENS

# WORN TO BE WILD

TRIED ✓  
AND TESTED  
OFF ROAD  
RUNNERS

If you're looking to take your runs off-road, you'll need wheels designed to handle all terrains. These shoes will tick every box

LEAVE THE PAVEMENT to the pounders. Trail running brings a host of fresh benefits, from improved ankle strength and flexibility to a bigger kilojoule burn, greater core engagement and – crucially – the mental-health benefits of more time spent in nature.

But your trusty old gym shoes won't cut it. If you want to swerve a sprained ankle in the back of beyond, you need specialist footwear. From outsole grip engineered for traction on tricky terrain to midsole cushioning tuned for off-road action and added protection from rocks, roots and debris, trail shoes will ensure your outdoor adventures are safer and more enjoyable.

We recruited our friends at Runner's World, who put a range of the latest models to the test and selected the best to suit every type of trail runner, from the occasional path dabbler to the hardened mountain tamer.



## 1 THE GOAT HOKA SPEEDGOAT 5

PRICE: \$270  
WEIGHT: 271G  
HEEL-TOE DROP: 4MM

**QUICK AND NIMBLE** Named after US ultrarunner Karl "Speedgoat" Meltzer, these shoes provide bounce on roads and hard-packed trails, but truly come alive on more demanding routes. The foam midsole and grippy outsole combine to carry you over any terrain at speed with minimal energy wastage.

**EXPERT VERDICT** Our testers found these shoes to be snug and slipper-like, with the toe box delivering extra protection without feeling too solid. With great traction, as well as lightness, they made our testers feel "goat-like" on uphill, while descending was a "revelation". A top pick for marathons and ultras, too.

## 2 SPEED DEMON SALOMON S/LAB PULSAR

PRICE: \$290  
WEIGHT: 170G  
HEEL-TOE DROP: 6MM

**STRIPPED BACK** Designed in response to Kilian Jornet's request for a shoe to break records on the trail, the Pulsar is built for speed. All of the features you might expect to find on a trail shoe – a rigid toe guard, a thick midsole, a rock plate – have been jettisoned to reduce weight and make a shoe that's as minimalist as a racing flat.

**EXPERT VERDICT** The elasticated mesh offers a secure, sock-like fit, but our testers found them a little tricky to get on. Once on the move, though, they fly: the Energy Surge foam and rocker geometry offer noticeable spring. They're as good on roads as they are on trails, too.



## TRAIT ANALYSIS

Four of the criteria by which our panel assessed each shoe

**1/ COMFORT**  
We looked for a snug, secure fit that would help keep runners feeling good kay after kay.

**2/ TRACTION**  
When navigating slippery rocks and muddy hills, you need to feel safe and stable.

**3/ SPEED**  
Trainers that were lightweight with impressive energy return got a tick from our team.

**4/ SHIELD**  
We tested whether shoes were sufficiently solid to protect from rocks and roots.





**3**  
**MULTITASKER**  
**SAUCONY**  
**PEREGRINE 12**

**PRICE: \$219**  
**WEIGHT: 275G**  
**HEEL-TOE DROP: 4MM**

**SMART UPGRADE**

Peregrines have a rep as shoes that can answer all of your trail needs. Light without being minimalist; comfortable without being unresponsive. Sensibly, the 12 is an evolution not a revolution, with a rock plate for protection over tough ground and a reduction in weight, down from 310g.

**EXPERT VERDICT** The 12's stripped-back upper improved breathability, without making the shoe flimsy, while the PowerTrack outsole impressed testers across ascents and descents. But while these are versatile enough to handle some road sections, the shoe's 5mm lugs are too aggressive for lengthy periods on the road.

**4**  
**STABLE MATE**  
**ADIDAS TERREX**  
**AGRAVIC ULTRA**

**PRICE: \$205**  
**WEIGHT: 341G**  
**HEEL-TOE DROP: 8MM**

**BEAST THE TRAILS**

There's a lot of tech at play underfoot here. At the base of a three-layer midsole, Lightstrike foam builds the foundations of a stable platform, then comes a full-length plate for added stability. The top layer of the midsole adds Adidas's famous Boost foam for a hit of energy return, too.

**EXPERT VERDICT** Our testers found the mesh upper to be breathable, though a little stiff, and the ankle collar rigid. Grip is solid, with the Continental rubber outsole and its 4mm lugs taking design inspo from the tyres on gravel bikes. Overall, the Agravic Ultra is a beast – a little heavy, but protective.



**5**  
**ROAD RUNNER**  
**INOV-8 PARKCLAW**  
**G 280**

**PRICE: \$290**  
**WEIGHT: 309G**  
**HEEL-TOE DROP: 8MM**

**HERE AND THERE**

Unusually, the Parkclaw G 280 is marketed as a multi-terrain shoe, suitable for road and trail – handy if your trail running takes place in parks, with much of the route on tarmac. The graphene outsole adds durability and they're so comfortable you'll want to wear them every day.

**EXPERT VERDICT** Inov-8 shoes are grippier than a Greco-Roman wrestling match, but it's had to rein in the lugs to 4mm here, so they're not your go-to on boggy trails. For drier stuff, though, they perform brilliantly and transition from trail to road like a dream. ■





# 4185

The minimum number of kilojoules you can expect to burn in a two-hour muay Thai training session that incorporates punches, kicks and clinching.

**THE BEST GYMS IN THE WORLD**



## EARN YOUR STRIPES

The world's biggest martial arts training camp, Tiger Muay Thai in Phuket, coaches fighters of all abilities. And it hits a whole lot harder than your average beach holiday

TWENTY YEARS AGO, Soi Ta-iad was a sleepy rural street in the south of Thailand's Phuket island, fringed with rubber tree plantations and thatched-roof dwellings. Today, however, it's a booming fitness hub, home to martial arts gyms, health-orientated eateries and spa hotels that cater to tourists from across the globe. At the centre of this revolution was Tiger Muay Thai; from humble beginnings as one of the Soi's first fitness centres, it has grown into arguably the world's most famous muay Thai training camp.

International MMA fighters at the top of their game take advantage of Tiger's world-class training, but that's not to say it's just for the pros.

"It doesn't matter if you've never thrown a punch in your life," says Jonny Betts, an English muay Thai pro based at the camp. "We have classes for all skill levels, and people are amazed by how much they can progress."

Despite its fearsome reputation, there's more to Tiger than martial arts: on-site nutritionists, personal trainers, a bodybuilding coach and an extensive class program make this a one-stop shop for every fitness goal. It's easy to see why guests stay for a month or longer for what Betts calls a "holiday about health". If the results don't inspire you, the backdrop of Phuket's jungle-clad hills and golden beaches certainly will. ■

The number of different classes on the current Tiger Muay Thai schedule. Expect everything from sunrise yoga to cross-training fundamentals and a beach bodyweight bootcamp.

# 32





**GYM/**  
Tiger Muay Thai and  
MMA Training Camp

**LOCATION/**  
Chalong, Thailand

**WEBSITE/**  
[tigermuaythai.com](http://tigermuaythai.com)

**TIGER MUAY THAI**  
& MIXED MARTIAL ARTS



**100k**

Square feet, that is – the total  
area of the Tiger training camp.  
It's Thailand's biggest gym.



**5**

The number of full-size  
boxing rings at Tiger,  
as well as one mixed  
martial arts cage.



# MEDITATION, BUT FUNNY

A new crop of wellness practitioners snuffs the earnest vibe out of mindfulness, so you can finally find some peace

BY A.J. JACOBS

IMAGINE YOU OPEN the guided-meditation app on your phone and press play on the daily insight. You hear an electric piano and a female voice, smooth as butter. “Wherever you may be right now,” she says, “just take a moment to acknowledge that at least one of your exes has it way worse off than you.”

Feel better?

This delightfully petty insight is from a daily-meditation app called Gfulness. Think of it as Headspace meets *Funny or Die*. Stand-up comedy meets the seated-lotus position.

The idea behind the service – and a growing number of others – is that there’s no law that says meditation and mindfulness have to be sombre and serious. On the road to enlightenment, maybe it’s helpful to lighten the mood.

Beyond Gfulness, serenity seekers can now find dozens of videos, books, apps and seminars that try to combine humour and mindfulness. You can watch a YouTube video with 17 million views called *F\*ck That: An Honest Meditation*, which contains such wise advice as, “If your thoughts drift to the three-ring shit show of your life, bring your attention back to your breathing.” A popular life coach named Supreet gives guided YouTube meditations that take all sorts of wrong turns. “How does your scalp feel? Itchy? Then pause this meditation right now and go wash your hair.” ➤





**“THERE’S NO  
LAW THAT SAYS  
MEDITATION AND  
MINDFULNESS HAVE  
TO BE SOMBRE  
AND SERIOUS”**



FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN CARING AND REALISING YOU'RE '95 PER CENT A WORTHLESS PIECE OF SHIT'.

The Gfulness app is the brainchild of Collin Williams, a Colorado-based lawyer and tech-company founder. "It was 2019 and I was diagnosed with depression," he says. Williams' therapist suggested mindfulness to help his mood, so he clicked on a traditional guided-meditation app. "It was a miserable experience," he says with a sigh. "A guy with a British accent kept telling me that I needed to stop thinking about anything. And the moment I was about to successfully not think about something, the British guy would chime back in and be like, 'Now make sure you're not thinking about anything!' And I would be like, 'Dammit, if you would stop interrupting me, maybe I could stop thinking about anything!'"

As the old joke goes, his experience was less "om" and more "om... my God, that's so annoying".

But Williams says he did appreciate one aspect of the ritual: taking 10 minutes out of your day to devote yourself to improving your mindset. Around the same time, he read that humour is one of the best ways to instantly alter your mood. So what if he mixed those ideas? He reached out to his high school friend Andrew Ritter, a comedy writer and director who has taught and performed with the Second City in Chicago. Ritter hired a team of writers and came up with dozens of amusing, often weird meditations. In one, a man's deep, calming voice has us imagining we're looking at clouds: "That's an agouti right there. Heh, heh, heh, sure as I'm living, that's an agouti. An agouti has kind of a snout on it. It's kind of a sly, unassuming sort of animal. In cloud form, it's really not much to look at at all. Get outta here, you agouti!"

It's an unorthodox approach, but some experts say there might be validity to it. "Comedy and mindfulness have a lot in common," says psychologist Adam Dorsay, host of the *SuperPsyched* podcast. "When you laugh, you are fully present. You aren't thinking about anything except the joy. Same with meditation: it's about being fully present."

The science linking humour and meditation is still in its infancy, but there is some promising research. Certain studies of "laughter-inducing therapies" suggest they may reduce stress; one 2021 report in *Current Research in Physiology* found they could help lessen anxiety and depression.

Surprisingly, comedy and mindfulness have a long history. It could be argued that the Buddhist tradition, often thought of as one of the origins of meditation, is infused with laughter and joy.

Consider that guru Ram Dass, who helped popularise Eastern philosophy in the US, once said, "Cosmic humour, especially about your own predicament, is an important part of your journey". Even the Buddha himself used humour to shepherd his followers toward wisdom. Author Thanissaro Bhikkhu recounts an example in his book *The Buddha Smiles*: a Brahmin – a Vedic priest – challenged and insulted the Buddha, who replied, "If someone offers you a gift and

you refuse to accept it, does that make the gift yours or the one who offered it?"

"It belongs to the one who offered it," said the Brahmin.

"In the same way," replied the Buddha, "the words with which you have insulted me are all yours."

Okay, maybe it's not a gut buster to 21st-century ears. It's more like a sophisticated version of the schoolyard taunt, "I'm rubber, you're glue, whatever you say bounces off me and sticks to you". But it's still humour adjacent.

Modern-day meditation coach Chade-Meng Tan, a former Google engineer, is trying to spread this tradition via seminars and books such as *Joy on Demand*. Tan tells me about how humorous meditation helped him get through a particularly hard time in his life.

"I kept being interrupted by this inner voice that told me, 'You are a completely useless piece of shit,'" he says. "The worst part was I actually believed it. My mind was dominated by anguish, and I could not settle it."

So Tan took a breath and reminded himself that he has lived a life of purpose and helped others. He then responded to the voice: No! I am not a completely useless piece of shit – only 95 per cent useless.

"It was funny," he says. "I laughed to myself inside. With uplifting joy thus established, the mind settled."

Naughty language, by the way, seems to be a motif of many humorous meditations. On YouTube, there's *Zen Thug's Honest Meditation*, with such themes as "Fuck Coworkers". And in the same genre, the book *30 Days to Stop Being an Asshole: A*

*Mindfulness Program with a Touch of Humor* offers advice on how to ignore your inner douchebag.

But four-letter words are not a requirement. There are plenty of G-rated examples of funny mindfulness, including comedian Fred Armisen's guided meditation on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, which starts out harmlessly and gets increasingly weird and creepy. By the end, Armisen is encouraging us to visualise putting crinkled envelopes in waffle batter, making them, and pretending to serve them to somebody. Or else take Tammy Dawson, a recurring character on *Gffulness* whose visualisations of beautiful views and houses turn out to be real estate pitches. She's a broker in San Diego.

Another surprisingly wholesome bit can be found on the Headspace app. Comedian Kevin Hart narrates "Gentle Run with Kevin", meant to make your exercise more mindful. It's not intended to be flat-out funny, but it has some mild humour, such as his encouragement to "Celebrate it. Tootsie Roll."

As a fan of both comedy and meditation, I decided to spend a week road-testing the combination. I'm not an expert meditator, but I recently started focusing on my breath for two minutes a day on my own. Like Williams, I find most guides distracting, if not annoying. Even



the silences are stressful – I keep wondering when they will be broken.

So every morning for a week, I listened to five minutes of *Gffulness*. The scientific result: it improved my mood. It made me a good 17 per cent less cranky. Part of what I like is that it helps me take ideas lightly. In traditional meditation, when an intrusive thought pops into your head, you are supposed to acknowledge it, then let it go. You have to loosen your mental grip. Humour, to me, also loosens the mental grip. It's a way of pointing out that our ideas are often absurd and the opposite of useful. It allows me to usher out my intrusive thoughts more easily for the rest of the day.

And in the end . . . it really was pretty fucking calming. ■

## Move over, mindfulness

Three more ways to find peace without taking the whole thing too seriously



### CONFESS YOUR SINS

Dating way back to 2005 and still relevant today, *PostSecret* is the place to anonymously share your dark, burning secrets with the world. Send a postcard – writing down your source of anxiety can make you feel better, according to research – detailing your secret crush, weird kink or horrific crime, then disassociate by imagining that some other freak posted it online. It's the public's burden now!



### DO DIGITAL DRUGS

Aka binaural beats. Regular drugs are for philistines. The cognoscenti are getting lifted without smoking, injecting or snorting anything by using digital sounds that may reduce anxiety and increase focus and wellbeing. Search for *Digital Drugs* on Spotify and take your pick of LSD, DMT, cocaine, "maryhuana" or peyote tracks for major weekend chillaxing, or on workdays microdose with *Binaural Beats: Focus*.



### HIT THE VIRTUAL RAGE ROOM

With a VR game called *Rage Room*, you can pop your cork and release pent-up rage on animated crash-test dummies that totally deserve it. No need for the usual video-game intellectualising, moralising or garment rending.

THERE ARE MORE WAYS TO FIND PEACE THAN SITTING CROSS-LEGGED IN A TRANCE.

THE HYUNDAI SANTA FE HYBRID ROCKS BOTH BOLD PROPORTIONS AND STRONG LAZY-MAN APPEAL.



## RIDING THE BIG EASY

**Are you keen to do the right thing by the environment, yet struggle to summon the energy for tedious tasks? The new HYUNDAI SANTA FE HYBRID is worth checking out**

BY STEPHEN CORBY

IF YOU THINK about the history of technology, it's basically driven by laziness. From our earliest efforts to make tilling the fields quicker and easier right up to inventing phones that can think for us, we humans are constantly finding ways to give ourselves

more time to do nothing. (Perhaps no invention represents this better than the TV remote, which allowed man and couch to become one).

Car companies forget this at their peril. Yes, plugging in an EV sounds exciting until

you've actually had to do it a few times, and with the amount of range currently on offer from electric vehicles, you'll be doing it a lot. The same goes for PHEVs (Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles), which offer even shorter electric ranges – a maximum of about 85km. So you'll be plugging them in even more often.

Thankfully, there is a better, lazier way to drive and live – in a vehicle like the Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid. Yes, it's got that "hybrid" appellation, which means you're going to get excellent fuel economy (6.1 litres per 100km, which is mighty impressive for a large SUV with seven seats), but in this case there's no plugging in, nor even any of that annoying thinking to do.

The Santa Fe is a seamless experience as it's powered by a 1.6-litre turbocharged





MUSCULAR WITH A PREMIUM INTERIOR, THE HYUNDAI SANTA FE HYBRID IS ONE TO WATCH.

engine that drives all four wheels, mated to an electric motor and a battery pack located under the driver's seat.

Ingeniously, you never need to plug this battery in as the Santa Fe's electric brain decides for you whether to use the electric motor (for zero-emission commuting), or the petrol engine, or both at once if you're in a hurry and need Max Power. (You get 132kW and 265Nm from the engine, but with both working together, that rises to 169kW and 350Nm.)

It's best described as a set-and-forget hybrid because the battery sorts out its own recharging, using either the engine's power or the energy generated when you slow down or hit the brakes (known, in technical terms, as "regenerative braking").

In practice, it all just feels entirely seamless and wondrously easy (or lazy), as

## ***"It's set and forget : the battery sorts out its own recharging"***

you watch the screen in front of you telling you which power source is being used, and marvel as your electric-only range goes up, rather than down, as you drive. Honestly, it's like a self-saucing pudding on wheels.

The Santa Fe Hybrid also looks quite tasty, with a muscular front end, bold proportions and a surprisingly premium interior. You can also choose between having the usual three-seat back row with another two seats behind that, or two "Captain's Chairs" in the rear, allowing walk-through access to the third row. If six seats is going to be enough for you,

this is definitely the preferable option.

After a few days of driving the Santa Fe we were most impressed by how close it got to its claimed fuel-economy figure and how relaxing it was never having to worry about making an extra effort to save on petrol.

It's also effortless to drive with ample power on tap and light steering.

Until now, Toyota has had this kind of easy-does-it hybrid market to itself. But in the shape of the Hyundai Santa Fe Hybrid, it's now got some serious competition – with prices starting at \$63,000. ■

# The Adventurist

Men's Health

ONE IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGE. NO WAY TO TRAIN. GO

BY ANDREW TRACEY

Andrew Tracey  
swaps EMOMs  
for omms.



## A QUIET PLACE

HOW DO YOU CHALLENGE THE MAN WHO'S UP FOR ANYTHING? YOU TASK HIM TO DO NOTHING. *MH*'S UK-BASED FITNESS EDITOR SIGNED UP FOR A 10-DAY SILENT BUDDHIST RETREAT. IT TURNED OUT TO BE THE MOST GRUELLING EVENT HE'S EVER ATTEMPTED



For my first outing as *Men's Health's* Adventurist, I was tasked with tackling an ultra-distance duathlon. The country was in the grip of its first pandemic lockdown at the time, so I had to rack up the obscene kilometre count using a stationary bike coupled with 200m laps around the house. I'm not waxing lyrical when I say it was dizzying.

In my own spare time, I've also completed ultramarathons, DIY triathlons and a 10K walk holding the equivalent weight of my own body in each hand. I've climbed 10 mountains in a weekend and have carried a squat rack to the top of the highest point in England and, more wearily, down again.

My life is a story of movement; even my work has seen me travel around the country, rarely spending more than a few nights in the same bed. At this point, another physical challenge scarcely seems like an adventure. My comfort zone is physical discomfort.

What does make me uncomfortable, however, is stopping. And so I signed up for one of the most daunting adventures of my life: sitting in silence for 10 days, devoid of the distractions of the outside world, and simply being. In our culture of constant stimuli, instant gratification and dopamine on tap, I wanted to know what a man of perpetual motion could learn from imposed stillness.

### THE SILENT TREATMENT

This isn't my first draft of this article. It's not even the tenth. I probably went through at least three versions before I'd left for home on the final day of the retreat. During 10 days of meditation, you have a lot of time to think.

I had little idea what to expect as I pulled off a country lane an hour or so from the M4 and crawled along the long gravel driveway. I knew the retreat had

its roots in a practice established hundreds of years ago, which itself could trace its lineage back to the Theravada tradition – and the OG Buddha himself – some 2500 years ago. But I also knew I was in the English countryside – not the place you'd expect to find an archetypal Buddhist temple.

As I rounded the final corner, I was confronted with a large country house, flanked by rows of small outhouses set in a quaint country garden. There, in the centre of the green, was a gold-domed temple, which looked as though it had been airdropped directly from India.

The 10-day experience I'd signed up for is designed to teach laypeople – those unable to devote themselves to a monastic life – the principles of vipassana meditation (literal translation: super-seeing), better understood as mindfulness in the west. Undistracted by the demands of the outside world, the hope is that students come

away with fundamental insights into their minds, as well as a solid meditation practice that they can integrate into their lives.

The daily schedule was deceptively simple. After handing in our phones, we were shown to our shared accommodation, where we had a brief chance to become acquainted with our roommates for the next week. Within an hour or two of arriving, a loud ceremonial bell rang to signify the beginning of the Noble Silence; we were to refrain from speaking unless directly addressed by the head of the course, which occurred during brief, minutes-long daily interviews.

The same bell would be rung at 4am each morning – our wake-up call. Each day began with a few hours of meditation in the Dharma hall, a wooden-floored room filled with mats, facing a raised platform from which our teacher would deliver instructions or talk about Buddhist philosophy. After breakfast, we would return to the hall for two to three more hours of meditation, then stop for lunch and a short break, during which students could silently wander the grounds. This process would repeat before an early evening meal and a final few hours of discourse and meditation ahead of a 9pm bedtime.

### FOLLOW YOUR BREATH

The practices themselves were simple, but certainly not easy. We began with three days of anapana – or “mindfulness of the breath”, one of the oldest and most fundamental teachings. The idea here is to place every bit of your attention on the act of breathing. The emphasis is on the sensations at the tip of your nose as you inhale and exhale. Nothing more, nothing less. We were told that we could make a light mental note of in and out as a sort of crutch, but any other thought or feeling was to be overcome.

Just do the maths with me ➤



**“STUDENTS  
COME AWAY WITH  
FUNDAMENTAL  
INSIGHTS INTO  
THEIR MINDS”**





here: that's a potential 21 hours spent trying to keep your focus solely on one very specific sensation. Not only was this an unprecedented period of continuous practice, even for a regular meditator, but my usual object of attention up until this point was the feeling of the breath in my torso – a subtle but noticeable difference. I felt as though I'd rocked up to a handwriting competition, just to be told it was left-handed only. After the first day, I applied Vicks to the tip of my nose to make the sensation more palpable. Luckily there's no testing for doping in mindfulness retreats.

After three days of shepherding my focus to the edges of my nostrils, we moved on to the real meat and potatoes of the vipassana practice. Here, the aim was to take the extreme levels of focus that we had cultivated and open up our awareness to every sensation that might occur in the body. The main goal was to respond with neutrality to each experience. To notice a "weird feeling in your leg" is too much detail; the idea is not to focus on any physical location, nor assign judgement to the feeling beyond noticing its presence and that it passes. The end goal is to develop a real, embodied insight into how all of life is simply a sensation that comes and goes. Ultimately, the aim is to see that any sense we have of a self separate from our experiences is an illusion. (A heavy concept, I know.)

## EVERYTHING, EVERYWHERE

I'm tempted here to tell a Huxley-esque psychedelic story about the experiences that I had during my 30-plus hours of sitting. There were undoubtedly many such moments. On the third day, after hours of concentration, I attempted the wild-card manoeuvre of using a Tibetan Buddhism technique where you "turn attention back on itself" and try to "look for who's looking". I shook uncontrollably and was left floating in an

Our writer confronts his tech attachment.



experience that I can only describe as two mirrors facing one another, reflecting everything that is. Pretty cool story, right?

More than once, I developed a sense of samadhi, a deep meditative consciousness in which I experienced an uncentred connectedness with the entire world. Experiences such as these are nearly impossible to write about; they simply must be felt.

In one such state I was reduced to tears by the intense, indescribable experience of eating baba ganoush. I then dared myself to try a mouthful of butterscotch mousse (a favourite dessert), after which the entire universe collapsed in on itself until there was nothing but the raw sensation on my tongue. Butterscotch stretching into infinity. The notes in my diary from that particular evening read, "It's as if I'd never eaten a single

**"I INVESTIGATED THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SELF IS NOT AS REAL AS WE THINK IT IS"**

thing before in my life. Every meal could be this way. There's an entire book in this."

I'm truncating these experiences because they're not wholly indicative of my full 10 days. On paper, a vipassana retreat has all the hallmarks of a holiday camp, albeit with a Buddhist twist. The reality, however, was no week by the seaside.

As a meditator for nearly a decade, and someone who has





Mindful movement is good for more than just muscle.

to what he conceded would have been a “messy” festival. I’m taken with the narrative that he chose self-improvement over self-destruction, but I’m not sure that 10 days of intense, inward reflection is the right environment for anyone who has experienced recent trauma. Things may come up that require the compassionate voice of a trusted friend, or even a professional. I know life-long zen practitioners who are happy to say that, at least for beginners, meditation is no substitute for therapy.

I wanted to finish this piece by imploring that each of us turn the lamp of attention inwards for a period of quiet reflection each day. And I’ll still rally behind that. But I’d also like to offer the less esoteric, more practical advice of paying attention to what you’re paying attention to. I want to suggest that we all build in deliberate periods of time where we’re undistracted by external goings on. Perhaps a social-media sabbath, where we avoid doomscrolling for 24 hours.

Perhaps full abstinence, as often as you can muster it – including books, podcasts, perhaps even conversation. Even if we don’t deliberately engineer these occasions, I’d like to posit that we should be on guard against reaching for a distraction the second we’re alone with the contents of our consciousness. As my time on retreat wound to a close, somewhere between packing my bags and making my way back to the car, I brokered a deal with myself to make it to the motorway before I switched my phone on.

If we can let the dust settle more often and see what’s really here – even if it’s initially painful – we can begin to live more deliberately. I’m almost tempted to quote *The Matrix* here, but I hope that by this point you’re already buying what I’m selling. Yes, meditate every day – but more importantly, stop curating the soundtrack to your life. Start living it. ■

taken his practice very seriously, I went into this with the agenda of writing an article extolling the virtues of meditation to an audience who are more familiar with my musings on biceps curls and squats. But, for the majority of the time I spent outside the meditation hall, I felt a deep sense of anguish. On my mat, I was investigating the possibility that life is nothing but a series of responses to stimuli. That our individual conditioned responses are all that make us ‘us’; that the self is not as real as we think it is.

Off the mat, however, I was greeted with a loud, orchestral rendition of “Everything You Fundamentally Fear, Desire And Regret”, and other such hits. After each sit, my sense of self was reasserting itself with a vengeful fury. Years of training to see thoughts as thoughts and let them pass paled into insignificance in the face of my wrathful inner monologue. I was

having a very bad trip. On such occasions, in an attempt to ease my suffering, I paced around a closed-off corner of the garden and, in floods of tears, confessed my sincerest apologies for any wrongs I’d ever done to imaginary avatars of the people closest to me.

Over the course of these episodes, I came to a sober realisation: I have no idea how to just be. At all times in my life, I’m doing. Even during passive acts such as sitting on the sofa, the television is on and I’m scrolling through social media, or otherwise communicating with another person. I can barely walk a few metres without pulling my phone out of my jeans and checking Instagram. (I noticed early on in the retreat that each time I left a room, my hand would reflexively search my pocket.)

I was learning in real time how all the distractions of daily life that I had been perpetually plugged

into were acting as a technicolour morphine drip. In lieu of anything to consume, and with the door to the inner workings of my mind blown wide open, I was feeling everything that I had been numbing, all at once.

Philosopher Blaise Pascal quipped that, “All men’s miseries derive from not being able to sit in a quiet room alone”. I wholeheartedly agree, and my meditation practice has long been my active rebuttal. But now I was seeing that I wasn’t properly integrating what I was learning into my life. Not even close.

### TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

All of which is to say that Buddhist retreats are not necessarily for everyone. One of my roommates shared that he’d recently split up with his long-term girlfriend and that, just the day before, he’d given himself the choice between embarking on 10 days of silence or heading

# Looking Fresh

THE COOLER MONTHS CAN BE HARSH ON YOUR BODY. THESE SIX EASY GROOMING RESOLUTIONS – AND USEFUL PRODUCTS – WILL HELP YOU MEET THE CHILL WITH YOUR BEST FOOT, AND FACE, FORWARD

BY GARRETT MUNCE

## WEAR SUNSCREEN – EVERY DAY

You'll reduce your skin-cancer risk, says dermatologist Dr Dendy Engelman. "Small amounts of skin damage accumulate in the winter from exposure to UV rays," she says.



**Try this:**

**CeraVe Facial Moisturising Lotion with Sunscreen SPF 15, \$20**

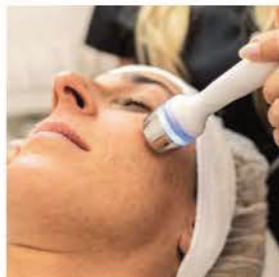
This oil-free formula will give your skin broad-spectrum protection against UVA and UVB light, and it doubles as your moisturiser.

## SPRING FOR A FACIAL

Facials deep-clean, brighten and exfoliate. But the treatment can also help troubleshoot wintery issues like breakouts and dry skin, says aesthetician Toska Husted.

**Try This: Hydrafacial**

This fast facial cleans pores, exfoliates and moisturises. It's available at doctors' offices and spas.



## HELP YOUR HEAD

Exfoliate your scalp once a week to fend off sweat build-up, flaking and irritation made worse by warm hats, says Shab Reslan, an NYC-based stylist.



**Try this:**

**The INKEY List Glycolic Acid Exfoliating Scalp Scrub; \$24**

Apply this gentle serum before your shower. The acid leaves your scalp feeling rejuvenated.

## GET INTO CONDITION(ING)

Cleansing agents can raise the pH of your hair. Conditioner brings it down, which restores shine and strength, says Reslan. Condition after every wash to prevent static.



**Try this:**

**Dove Men+Care 2 in 1 Shampoo + Conditioner, Revitalising; \$13**

For better-looking and healthier hair, put this stuff on your head for only one minute to moisturise and smooth out crispy strands.

## EMBRACE THE POWER BATH

Post-workout showers are fine, but "a bath helps relieve tension and decrease inflammation and soreness," says Brooke Mitchell, founder of Maven Physical Therapy & Performance. Try **Epsom Salt** from [thesaltbox.com.au](http://thesaltbox.com.au) (Pure Epsom Soak, 3kg, \$24.95). This 100 per cent pure magnesium sulphate, sustainably sourced in Germany, will soothe aching muscles and joints in the wake of intense exercise.

## EXFOLIATE EVERYTHING

Dead skin-cell build-up can lead to flaking and clogged pores. Dermatologist Dr Robert Finney recommends using a chemical exfoliant on your face about once a week. A gentle body scrub works below the neck.



**Try this:**

**Paula's Choice Skin Perfecting 2% BHA Liquid Exfoliant, \$38**

This pore-cleansing, skin-smoothing exfoliant clears away dead skin cells and is gentle enough for sensitive skin.



**And this:**

**Differin Acne Clearing Body Scrub, \$28**

Differin's body scrub not only has beads for sloughing off dead-skin cells, but it also contains salicylic acid to help control breakouts. ■

# POLITIX

A man with short brown hair and a light beard is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a light blue shirt and a dark blue vest. He is holding a dark red tie with a subtle pattern, which is draped over his shoulder. He has a gold chain bracelet on his right wrist. The background is a plain, light beige color.

The Man  
**GENTLE**

[POLITIX.COM.AU](http://POLITIX.COM.AU)

# Style **MH**

## Leading Man

AUSSIE STAR DACRE MONTGOMERY  
COMBINES CHARACTER-ACTOR  
INTENSITY WITH MATINEE IDOL LOOKS.  
IT'S A COMBINATION THAT NOT ONLY  
MAKES HIM A COMMANDING  
SCREEN PRESENCE,  
BUT ONE TO  
WATCH IN THE  
STYLE STAKES

BY BEN JHOTY





DACRE MONTGOMERY is huddled up in his house in Silver Lake, LA, watching the rain bucket down outside. A cold snap that's brought snow and single-digit temps to normally mild LA has locals shaking their heads and digging out their winter woolies.

For Montgomery, who grew up in Perth and has always liked to wear his shirts unbuttoned to his sternum, the chill is bracing. But you get the feeling it might not be enough for the burgeoning Hollywood superstar to abandon his signature look. Montgomery's the type of guy who always does his own thing.

"Growing up in Australia, I always used to have a couple of buttons undone on a college shirt," says the 28-year-old, who got his first role as a Power Ranger before breaking out as big brother-gone-bad, Billy, in era-defining, pop-cultural megahit *Stranger Things*. "And when I came to the States, people used to say, 'Oh, why do you have so many buttons undone?' And I was like, 'I don't care. It's just the way I wear it.'"

He might find the weather in New Orleans, where he's headed next to shoot a film with Sony, more to his liking . . . and better suited to his sartorial peccadillos. After that he'll be in New Zealand for *Went Up The Hill*, which he describes as "a psychological thriller" and "one of the best scripts I've ever read".

Coming off the back of a big 2022 that saw the actor make a brief return as Billy in *Stranger Things: Season 4*, as well as land a supporting role in Baz Luhrmann's acclaimed *Elvis*, it's clear Montgomery's career has returned to a trajectory that appeared headed for orbit, pre-pandemic.

To wit, his new role as ambassador for local menswear brand POLITIX. A self-professed loner who struggled to fit in during high school and adolescence, Montgomery is a refreshing and deliberately bold pick for the brand's 'The Gentle Man' campaign, launching alongside its new autumn/winter collection. Highlighting themes such as vulnerability and empathy, the campaign seeks to interrogate and challenge traditional notions of masculinity.

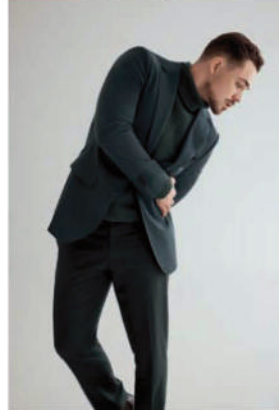
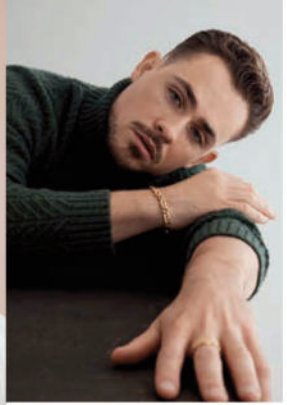
"I myself have suffered from trying to find my place, especially as a young man in uni, in high school, in the world, wondering what my masculinity is?" says Montgomery. "And I think POLITIX has done a really good job with positioning that message throughout their campaign and positioning me as someone who is saying, 'Let's challenge our masculinity. How can we re-envision masculinity for the modern man?'"

As for the collection, Montgomery points to a neutral yet rich colour palette as an example of the way the new range manages to be distinctive in a modern way. "It's monochromatic in that if you are working with blue, for example, there's a whole set of blues in one suit," he says. On a more practical level he also likes the thoughtful detail in some of the collection's key pieces: an adjustable strap in the suit pants and padded insole in the shoes, a godsend during marathon father-of-the-bride speeches.

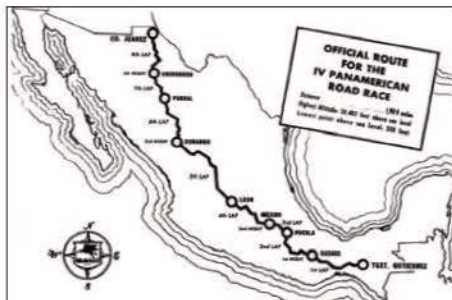
With a focus on premium fabrics, including the introduction of Australian wool suiting and a broader range of fits and layering for the colder months ahead, the collection represents an enticing chocolate box of possibilities to fill out your winter wardrobe.

POLITIX's new direction is indicative of a bold, open-road attitude enlivening contemporary men's fashion, says Montgomery, making it a great time to spread your sartorial wings. "Take the risk, embrace who you are," he urges. "The great thing about where the world is going at the moment is that sense of conformity is being broken up a bit and people are going, 'Well, we don't have to fit into whatever that mould is'. I think that's really interesting and really inspiring. And I definitely want to be a part of that movement because it is authentic to me. I'm someone who lives my life the way I want to live it. I've never been someone that's tried to fit into a box."

Or button up a shirt if he doesn't want to. ■



► All outfits are available in POLITIX's new AW23 collection: [politix.com.au](http://politix.com.au).



# Drive Time

**THE TAG HEUER CARRERA MAY BE CELEBRATING ITS 60TH BIRTHDAY, BUT IT HASN'T LOST ITS ALL-ACTION PANACHE**

BY LUKE BENEDICTUS

IN THE 1950s, the Carrera Panamericana earned the reputation as the most dangerous race in the world. Hurling along the newly opened Mexican section of the Pan-American Highway, the route spanned 3507 kilometres from Juarez in the north of the country down to Chiapas on the border with Guatemala. Drivers from across the motorsports world from Formula One to NASCAR signed up to tackle the stretch of untamed road that took in drastic changes in terrain and elevation. But this was a race with a body count. Despite only running for five years, 27 people died in the Panamericana, giving it one of the highest mortality rates per race in motorsports history.

The reason the Panamericana was so perilous – only a third of entrants typically finished the race – was that the track was a standard highway never designed for

high-speed racing. Four people – three competitors and one spectator – were killed during the first event, flagging the level of jeopardy right from the off. The following year, Mexican José Estrada made a bold announcement at the start of the race: “I will win or die trying,” he said. Tragically, it was to be the latter, after his car plummeted 190m into a ravine.

Over the Panamericana's five-year history, many more would fall victim to the snaking mountain roads or perish in high-speed collisions. To get an idea of the sort of incidental hazards that entrants faced, it's worth noting that the winner of the 1952 race triumphed despite his co-driver being knocked unconscious when a vulture flew through their Mercedes' windscreen.

The race was eventually cancelled in the aftermath of the

1955 Le Mans disaster that prompted a rethink on safety at motorsports events. Yet despite the Panamericana's brief lifespan, its mix of lethal speed, exoticism and danger ensured its mythical legacy would live on.

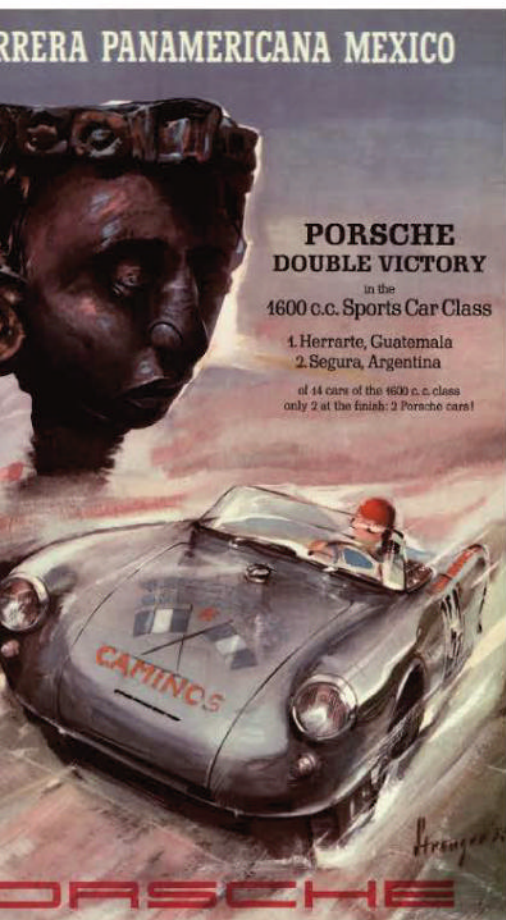
Tales of this daredevil race certainly lodged in the mind of Jack Heuer, who assumed leadership of the Heuer watch brand in 1962. Inspired by the Panamericana – it “made my imagination soar”, he once said - Heuer decided to make a watch for gentleman racers and, in 1963, his brand produced the Heuer Carrera ref. 2447. The 36mm chronograph was designed to prioritise clean legibility to enable drivers to track the chronograph function even while navigating high-speed bends.

Various iterations of the Heuer Carrera continued to be released through the years until 1984, when the Carrera collection was

discontinued. The next year, Heuer was sold to Techniques d'Avant Garde (which we now know as TAG) and the watch brand adopted its current moniker, TAG Heuer.

In 1996, the Carrera was relaunched to once again become a key range for the brand that still enjoys intimate ties with motorsports thanks to its relationship with Red Bull Racing. This year, to celebrate the Carrera's 60th birthday, TAG Heuer has unleashed a host of eye-catching new models.

This latest batch of watches certainly offers plenty of va-va-voom. The Carrera Chronograph, for example, is inspired by the classic design of the original 1963 Carrera, with vivid orange detailing that recalls classic racecar speedometers. The Carrera Chronograph 60th Anniversary is a real standout with a silver panda-dialled face



*Fast Times: TAG Heuer has a long association with motorsports. The Carrera was inspired by the famed Panamericana, while Steve McQueen would suit up at Le Mans wearing a Monaco.*



**The Carrera Chronograph (\$8300)**



**Carrera Chronograph 60th Anniversary (\$10,650)**

with aged-coloured SuperLuminova to reinforce the retro vibe. The Carrera Date, meanwhile, revives the 36mm dimensions of the first Heuer model in the series, but updates the look with a vibrant new colour palette that includes blue, pastel green and warm silver. Finally, the Carrera Chronograph Glassbox also commemorates its predecessors with a sapphire crystal shaped like the domed hesalite crystals found on Carrera models from the 1970s.

Whichever model you prefer, you're getting a watch that ticks a number of boxes. Steeped in the golden years of motor racing, it retains an elegant visage that brings a certain panache to its sporty vibe. But don't be fooled by its stylish looks. The Carrera is still a watch built to tackle hairpin bends and shock encounters with kamikaze vultures. ■



**The Carrera Date 36mm (\$4600)**



**Carrera Chronograph Glassbox (\$9350)**



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# RETURN OF THE MAC

Sunrise weatherman **Sam Mac** has a crazy job, a hectic travel schedule and a newborn baby. **Not surprisingly, he also had a dad bod.** Over eight weeks he hoped to lose his gut and add muscle to his upper body. For a man who makes meteorological prognostications on a daily basis, it was a bold forecast. **This time, though, the weatherman got it right** ➤

BY BEN JHOTY  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON LEE  
STYLING BY ALISON COTTON  
GROOMING BY KRISTYAN LOW



**Vest** by Calvin Klein;  
**track pants** by  
**Tommy**; **sneakers**  
by Reebok.

## JOCK TO JOKER

“I was a very sporty kid from the age of four when I started playing soccer. My dad was the coach of the team. I think I set a record for our club scoring 14 goals in a game. I was also a bit of a prankster and I was obsessed with video cameras. I was always making videos, making fake radio shows and a fake newsletter about the people at our soccer club called *The Fake Times*. I had my own publication at the age of 10, which was basically jokes about people’s parents and little in-jokes around the club.

In terms of my background physically, I generally don’t like to talk it up publicly, but I represented Australia at international level in schoolboy soccer. Yes, I’m an international footballer, thanks for asking! We played against powerhouses such as Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Tahiti, so all the heavy hitters [laughs]. I was very much committed to the sport, training every day, eating properly. After school I played in the Premier League in South Australia and I trained with A-League clubs. I was absolutely committed and dedicated to pursuing it. I didn’t quite get there, but I still love the sport. I made so many amazing friends. I travelled, I learned so many great principles that apply to work and fitness and diet. It was a big part of my life.

But after Manchester United surprisingly didn’t call, my career was pushed towards the logical next step: a TV weatherman. From then on, training took a backseat.

## THE GRATEFUL EIGHT

Doing the weather on *Sunrise* is an absolute beast of a job. It’s the best and worst job in the world. It’s the best job because you get paid to go to these incredible locations. You meet fascinating people who are doing really interesting things and you have the honour of sharing that with a national audience. Plus every day is different.

It’s the worst job when you have to leave your partner for a week or two weeks at a time. You have to leave your baby when she’s only two months old and you know that you’re going to miss things that week. That’s really tough. There’s a lot of time sitting at airports after flights have been cancelled, a lot of time on the road just driving through nothingness. Three am alarms. It’s a lot to take on, but the positives far outweigh the negatives.

I normally go to bed at around 8:30pm. In the morning it depends how far I have to travel. If we’ve got an hour commute, you’re up just after three. I do cut it fine with getting there minutes before the first cross. I would do over a hundred flights a year. My record was 137 flights. You’re looking at a couple of flights a week, minimum, and during this challenge it’s been two to three a week domestically, plus an international flight to South Africa.

Being on the road a lot means you find yourself in random country towns on a Monday night where the only option food-wise is to go to a service station to cobble together a meal. That’s happened so many times because we go very regional. It’s the type of job where there’s no rule book. You can’t really plan ahead.

Going into this challenge, I’d become a dad four months earlier to my daughter Margot. I think anyone who has entered the world of parenthood will understand that for

the first few months you don’t really know who you are, where you are, what day it is. Everything else becomes secondary. Your only priority is your newborn and your partner and that’s all consuming. I was very much lost in that fog, in the best possible way. I loved it. It’s magic and it still is.

Naturally, I hadn’t really done a lot of exercise over that time. You’d be eating whatever you could eat, when you could eat. When this challenge came along it was a really good time to go. All right, let’s apply myself now. Let’s see if I can get into a better physical shape, which will, in turn, help my mental shape.

Like a lot of guys around my age [42], I float in and out of exercise. There was always something going on. I’d run, do a gym session, play a bit of tennis. There was always some activity, but there would be periods, often leading into summer when you’re going to be wearing T-shirts, you’re going to be going to the beach, where you suddenly become like, Oh, I better fix this. And it’s almost like a break-glass-in-case-of-emergency situation. Suddenly you’re at the gym three or four times a week.

The last time I had a concentrated effort to get myself in shape would’ve been in 2017 when I was on *The Real Full Monty*, which was six weeks to get in shape to get our gear off to encourage men to get their prostate checked and go to the doctor. It’s been a long time. I applied myself to this challenge... I’m going to say 40 to 50 per cent more than I did to that one, which is crazy given I was getting completely nude on TV.

A lot of people do 12- or 14-week challenges. Due to my schedule, my work and travel I could only commit to eight. And I wanted to make it eight because I knew that I could commit to that wholeheartedly. I didn’t want to do 14 weeks and have cheat days and miss days of training here and there. I was more about, Let’s do it properly to the best of my ability over eight weeks.

## DAY OF RECKONING

On day one, I took my shirt off and Jono, my trainer, just said, “Dad bod”. So instantly I knew that not only was I going to be training with this man, I was going to be heckled, taunted, belittled and ridiculed by him on a daily basis. I don’t think they’re the core brand values of his gym, Acero, but that was our particular relationship.

But it worked for me because one thing that I’ve tried to do is make sure there has been some fun in there each day as well. There’s a laugh, or a smile, or some banter, or some silliness. Because I think for some people, the big hurdle stopping them from getting into shape or improving their fitness is the fact that it is hard work and it’s stressful and it can play on your mind and people are scared of that pain. They know what that pain feels like and they only remember that part. And yes, it is all those things. But if you have a few laughs each session, then at least 10 per cent of it is good times where you’re catching up with someone and having a laugh. Then that’s the part you cling to and you do the work. It’s not a completely painful hour.

I couldn’t dispute what Jono said [dad bod], because the gut was hanging out there and my skin is the same







**On day one, Jono,  
my trainer, just  
said 'dad bod'"**

**< FINISH  
WEIGHT: 77 kg**



**Shorts by Under  
Armour; shoes  
by Ecco; socks  
by Nike; barbell  
by Technogym.**



**^  
START  
WEIGHT: 82 kg**



**I was in  
competition  
with myself"**

**Hoodie** by  
Under Armour.  
**Right: shorts**  
and **shoes** by  
Under Armour.



**IRON PARADISE**

complexion as Liquid Paper. It's not white. It's very, very white. It's hard to hide it when there's a bit of flab down there. I wasn't overweight, but I could see that there was flab there. There were too many naan breads. Naan breads are my weakness and hot chips in my kebabs. It was a little confronting even for me to see because I hadn't really looked down for a while.

I never wanted to be one of those big, bulky units. That just doesn't appeal to me. I don't have the desire or commitment for that, but I did want to look strong and fit. I like to be able to run, I like to be mobile and get moving. The best-case scenario for me was a strong-looking upper body and fit and toned and tucked in around the abdominals.

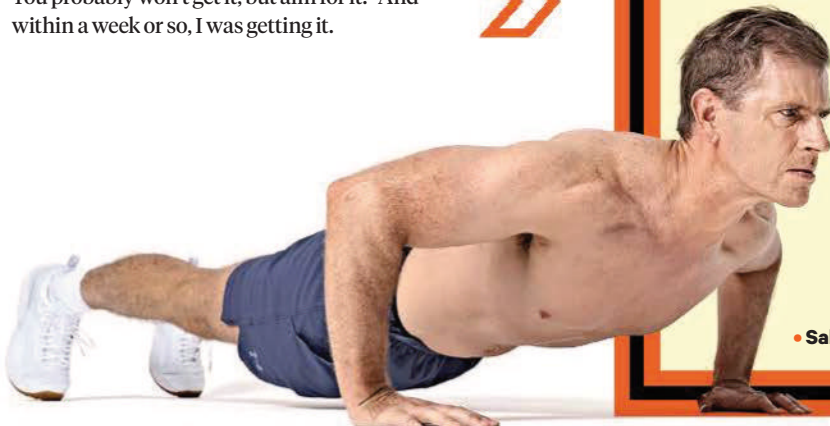
Reality hit pretty quick. The interesting thing about Acero is the music is seven times louder than any other gym or nightclub I've ever been to in my life. And I believe there's a strategy behind that: to drown out the screams. Because Jono just pushes you and then, when you think you can't go any further, he'll push you again. And when you think, *Oh gee, that was harsh, but thank goodness it's done*, he'll push you again. In my most recent session with him, out of nowhere he said, "Oh, so you know how we've been doing four sets of this circuit? Today, we're doing eight." He literally doubled the workload of something that was already extremely difficult. But that's what he felt I needed.

Those first few sessions were really tough. To be honest, every session was tough in a different way. And there was definitely some guilt throughout because I'd have moments where I'd know that I still had another 45 minutes at the gym, but I also knew that Bec, my partner, needs help at home. So, you're a little bit torn. I'm very lucky that Bec pushed me to do this and was on board and has been amazingly supportive throughout.

## HIGH-PRESSURE SYSTEM

As hard as Jono pushed me, I was in competition with myself a lot of the time. Getting an Apple Watch is one tip that I would give to people if they're looking at doing something like this, because it holds you accountable to the second, to the metre and to the step. It's all there and you can't trick it. I've tried.

Jono set a target early on. He said, "I want you to aim for 20,000 steps a day, 5000 kilojoules and 75 minutes of exercise". He said, "That's a lot, particularly, given your travel schedule and your home life as a new dad. You probably won't get it, but aim for it." And within a week or so, I was getting it.



## THUNDER AND PAIN

**TRAINER JONO CASTANO**  
(ACEROGYM.COM.AU)  
AIMED TO STRIP SAM OF FAT AROUND THE MIDSECTION WHILE ADDING MUSCLE TO HIS UPPER BODY. USE THIS CHEST BLAST TO BUILD POWERHOUSE PECS



- 1 Bench Press 4x12 tempo 4.1.1
- 2A Dumbbell Flat Flys 4x12 tempo 2.0.2
- 2B Dumbbell Low Flys 4x12 tempo 2.0.2
- 3 Cable Flys 4x12 tempo 2.0.2
- 4 Peck Deck 4x12 tempo 2.0.2
- 5 Push-ups to failure x 5 sets

## PLATE EXPECTATIONS

CASTANO HAD SAM AIM TO CONSUME AROUND 9200 KJ PER DAY, REDUCING INTAKE IN THE LEAD UP TO THE FINISH LINE. HERE IS SAM'S TYPICAL DAY ON A PLATE:

### PRE-BREAKFAST

- Shred Super Berry Neuro-Thermogenic drink with water

### BREAKFAST

- 3 poached eggs, sliced fresh tomato and half an avocado

### SNACK

- Carrot sticks and blueberries

### LUNCH

- Salad with chicken, onion, tomato, lettuce and hummus, with a small side of brown rice

### SNACK

- Banana
- Protein bar

### DINNER

- Salmon with broccoli and sweet potato

## WEATHER THE STORM

KEEN TO TAKE ON YOUR OWN CHALLENGE? HEED SAM'S 5 Ds TO CHANGE YOUR FITNESS FORECAST

**1/ DESIRE.** "There has to be a reason that you really want to do it. You can't just be doing it because you think you should. That's not enough. So, it has to be actual, genuine, legitimate desire.

**2/ DISCIPLINE.** That can be getting up that one hour earlier so that you can get your exercise done before work. It can be going home one hour earlier, so you don't kick on with your mates, because you know you'll be a write-off the next day.

**3/ DIET.** I think everyone knows that your diet has to change if you really want to make changes in your body and get in shape. One revelation for me from this experience and something that I'm excited to continue is we've found so many delicious, tasty options that are also healthy. It won't be sustainable if you just go, Copy paste, this is what I have to eat. We've had some glorious salads: chicken, olives, onions, lettuce, hummus. For breakfast I have a couple of poached eggs and a slice of avocado, and maybe some fresh tomato. Delicious.

**4/ DIG.** You've got to dig deeper than you might think. Getting up early on a Sunday morning when you'd much rather stay in bed. Being the first person at the gym on a Sunday morning at 7 am, on the treadmill doing your eight to 10Ks. Once it's done, you never feel bad afterwards. Then you have what I call PWS: post-workout smugness. And you're just like, How good am I?

**5/ DEPENDENCE.** For me, that was dependence on my partner, Bec. She helped in so many ways, just supporting and motivating me. Having someone in your corner to lift you up and push you over that finish line is invaluable."



And when I started to get it once, I wanted to get it twice. I didn't want to let the Apple Watch beat me. That gave me great joy because I was ticking things off. I was achieving and I knew that I was on track. But then, on the other hand, when I had international flights or just a particularly busy day and I'd get home at eight o'clock and be exhausted, knowing I still had 7ks to cover, I couldn't allow myself to go. Today was too big a day. I'll just let that one fly. That's just my competitive streak but it put me in some tough situations. In South Africa, when we were doing the show over there, we were on safari in the Kruger National Park. It's 40° and the only gym option they had was an outdoor gym. So, I'm training in 40° heat in a gym in the National Park where at any second, a leopard could walk past me on the treadmill. It was very bizarre, but I needed to do it. I needed to get those numbers up.


Then there would be times where I'd be in a hotel room, maybe we'd had a flight and a long drive that day and it's 10pm. I know that I've got two hours until the clock resets on my Apple Watch, but I'm still 4000 steps short of my target for that day. Obviously, I just want to go to bed, but then the other part of me is like, Well, I'm just going to keep walking up and down in my hotel room until I get those steps. I had times where I ran laps of the Bunnings' car park because I needed to get that 1500 steps to reach my tally for the day. Yesterday, I hit my record, which was 30,000 steps.

I'd be on air every half hour from 5:40 am, so between every single segment for the last month, I would walk at least a thousand steps. I'd do my segment, walk 1000-1500 steps, come back, chat with people, do the segment, and then repeat, repeat, repeat. By the time I got to 9am, I was already at 10,000 steps, which is half my daily tally.

## YOUR FORECAST, YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

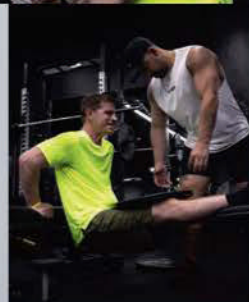
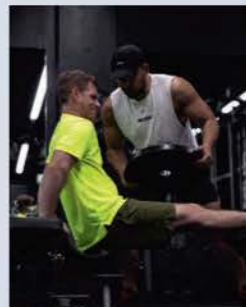
I feel like there's been a marked improvement in my physique, particularly in the last three to four weeks. Jono kind of said this to me. He said, "Don't expect to see too much in the first four or five weeks. Around week five, you'll start to notice differences." And it's absolutely true. I was getting leaner in the face, shirts weren't fitting, I was looking baggy in pants, which was great because that was confirmation for me that the hard work was getting somewhere.

I feel like I've been sharper in terms of my day-to-day mental headspace. I think that's a by-product of a few things. Physical exercise is obviously great for endorphins and for your whole body. Also, completely cutting out alcohol, cutting out sugars and a lot of the carbs that I would normally have and the heavy, bloaty meals, you feel lighter and you are lighter, physically and mentally. That's a great outcome and a great take-away from this challenge for me.

Ultimately, I feel like the success or failure of something like this is down to what you do when no one else is there pushing you, helping you, watching you. It's literally just you and a dirt track that you're running around, or a treadmill that you're on. They're the moments that are make or break." 



**There has to be a reason *that you really want to do it*"**



*Left: Mac Daddy – Sam and daughter Margot. Above: Trainer Jono Castano pushes Sam further than he thought possible.*

GYM SHOTS COURTESY OF ACERO

**Shorts by Bonds.**

**Through the 'gentle art' of jiu-jitsu, Reorg charity** has helped hundreds of veterans, military personnel and emergency services workers find purpose, brotherhood and unparalleled fitness, both physical and mental. As *MH* discovered, the lessons learned on the mat can be life-changing – **or even life-saving** >

BY JAMIE MILLAR PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHIE HOPSON



# Brothers In Arms





**T**he pineapple symbolises life, the skull underneath it death, which is just another part of life.

Reorg is a charity that supports the wellbeing of its beneficiaries through martial arts and functional fitness classes. But with rails of pineapple-skull apparel, Reorg's south-west London HQ could be that of a streetwear brand, were it not for the mats and workout equipment that dominate the space. The Reorg team breaks up the workday by 'rolling' – Brazilian jiu-jitsu speak for sparring – which must make for interesting organisational dynamics.

"It's all fun," says Reorg chairman Trent Scanlon, a rugged ex-rugby-playing Aussie, who is involved in the running of several operations, including his nearby gym, Elevate Martial Arts & Strength. He jokes that he's Reorg's 'fifth Beatle' – or should that be Ringo? – because people tend to be more interested in founder and frontman Sam Sheriff, a former Royal Marine who is also here to greet me today, or the other two trustees, notable not just by their absence on my visit.

One of them, Mark Ormrod, is also a former Marine, the first triple amputee to survive on the battlefield. The winner of 11 Invictus Games medals, he's raised more than £600,000 (AU\$1.91 million) for Reorg by running a 5K on prosthetic legs, cycling 999 miles (as in the emergency services number 999, also 160km) on a hand bike and swimming 1km with one arm. An award-winning author, he's also a jiu-jitsu purple belt. Which, to a white belt like me, makes him a ninja.



The other, Tom Hardy, is a Hollywood superstar and blue belt – one below purple and above white – who made headlines last August by winning two gold medals at the 2022 Reorg Open championship in Wolverhampton. A poster for one of Reorg's fundraising 24-hour 'Rollathons' features the charity's 'fab four' placed one behind the other in a human choke-tippede.

Part of the reason why jiu-jitsu forges strong bonds, says Sheriff, is that you have to trust your training partner to let go when you tap – because you're not trying to hurt them. A ground-based, striking-free grappling system, jiu-jitsu is all about control – of your opponent and yourself. While it might seem counterintuitive for a team-building

*Hitting the mats can help you grapple with personal issues and get a firmer hold on your mental health.*

*Jiu-jitsu gives Mark Ormrod a sense of purpose, showing him ways to find an advantage in any situation.*

exercise, never mind a friendly environment for, say, a veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder, jiu-jitsu has some powerful wellbeing juju.

While the sport itself is combative, the learning process is collaborative: you work in pairs to drill techniques as partners, not opponents. A form of active meditation – when your partner's trying to choke you, your mind can't be elsewhere – jiu-jitsu gets the juices flowing: blood, sweat, endorphins. You're surrounded by like-minded people with whom you share a common passion, an appreciation of new gis (kimonos) and rash guards, and may even share a coffee and a chat.

Jiu-jitsu, says Sheriff, "brings people together" – in today's instance, that's most of the wider Reorg team, with the charity HQ providing a safe space for newcomers to be gently introduced to the sport. Because as I know, having learned jiu-jitsu for an *MH* story in 2018, getting started is half the battle. A martial arts academy can be intimidating, even though, says Sheriff, it's one of the most welcoming environments you'll find.

These are the kinds of battles that Reorg has helped hundreds of its 'athletes' to win. If you don't





know where to train jiu-jitsu, Reorg can find the nearest vetted academy to you. If you don't know anyone there and are apprehensive about going, Reorg can inform the coach to expect you and give you their name and number. If you don't have any kit, Reorg can hook you up. If money is tight, Reorg can assist with your fees. And if jiu-jitsu isn't for you, Reorg now works with functional fitness facilities, too.

"We're problem-solvers, facilitators, fixers," says Sheriff, with the can-do attitude and aptitude that comes from having 22 years in the Marines under his black belt, and a no-nonsense Yorkshire accent. "Come to me with an excuse and I'll find a solution."

Those battles may sound trivial, but the victories are existential. Reorg has received messages of gratitude from wives and children saying they've got their husband or dad back. The spectrum of people that Reorg helps ranges from those who are simply "not feeling great", says Sheriff, to others who are "really not enjoying living any more".

Sheriff was in 2019 appointed an MBE for Reorg's work within the military changing – saving – lives. Initially established under the umbrella of the

Royal Marines Charity, Reorg became a civilian charity in November 2020 with the mission of "helping the people who help us", now including police officers, firefighters and paramedics, as well as the wider armed forces. The objective was 50 people in the first 18 months; such was the support that Reorg received, including Ormrod's fundraising, that the final total was 227.

My own excuse is that I haven't brought my gi, partly because I wanted to travel light on the train down from north-east England. And, if I'm honest, partly because I was apprehensive about dusting off my white belt after a break of more than two years owing to injury, a pandemic and an internal resistance. Yet I wanted to write this story partly for an excuse to get back into it.

Not so easily defeated, Sheriff hands me a black Reorg gi, a collaboration with jiu-jitsu mainstay Tatami, and a Reorg rash guard bearing the Royal Marines Commando dagger. I at least look the part: Reorg's merch is in itself a great excuse to get back into jiu-jitsu. The man responsible, Joe Kensett, Reorg's marketing director, graciously humours me as we roll and doesn't completely smash me. He and

Sheriff give me some pointers and offer encouragement. I'm not good, despite their protestations. But I feel good.

## Grappling With Trauma

At this point, I should declare an interest. Another reason for wanting to write this story was for an excuse to talk to my dad about his post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We don't talk enough.

Ever since I've known him, my dad's had a hair-trigger temper. The rest of my family trod carefully in the home I grew up in, before my parents divorced, because you never knew when he'd go off, although you could get early warning from the empty beer cans. Having served in Northern Ireland, he left the army in 1982, before I was born. He wasn't diagnosed until a couple of years ago, after an industrial accident that preceded a sharp increase in his usual frequency of overaggressive workplace incidents. The diagnosis explained a lot: he was always fighting because, in his head, he'd never stopped.

Someone with PTSD, says Neil Greenberg, a professor of defence mental health at King's College

London and a leading expert on psychological trauma, can exhibit changes across four domains: cognitive, emotional, behavioural and somatic, or bodily.

A PTSD sufferer may begin to think negatively: that things are never going to work out or that they're worthless. They may become angry or upset unreasonably, or emotionally numb. They may avoid socialising, talking about what happened and the precise situation or location where the trauma occurred. And they may experience physical symptoms: chest pains, bowel problems, feeling jumpy and nausea.

From the Greek word meaning "wound", trauma in terms of PTSD is, says Professor Greenberg, "real or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence". Between a third and a half of us will experience such a trauma: a car crash, a terrorist incident, a difficult birth. During the pandemic, one study of frontline healthcare staff by University of Oxford researchers found PTSD in 44 per cent; for 76 per cent of those, the trauma preceded the pandemic. PTSD can also be caused by chronic,

cumulative exposure to "type-two" trauma – the sort that for, say, a healthcare or child social worker is just another day at the office.

Brain scans of people who suffer with PTSD show an overactive amygdala, the alarm, which can cause hypervigilance. The hippocampus, the memory store, can link new input to a past trauma – say, a loud bang to a gunshot – and cause flashbacks. The prefrontal cortex, which with the hippocampus normally quells the amygdala and manages emotions and impulses, is dampened, leading to avoidance, coldness and irritability. The stress hormone cortisol is elevated, which can disturb sleep and digestion. The charity PTSD UK calls the disorder "a form of injury to the brain".

The rate of PTSD in serving and former military personnel in 2014 to 2016 was around six per cent, not a lot higher than that seen in the general population. In veterans specifically, however, it was 7.4 per cent. Drilling down further, for veterans with a history of deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, the rate was 9.4 per cent; if their last deployment was in a combat role, which like a younger age is

associated with a worse prognosis, it was around 17 per cent. Compared with the general population, a new study by the University of Manchester found that the suicide risk of veterans under the age of 25 is two to four times higher.

Some of the disparity in PTSD rates between serving military personnel and veterans is, says Greenberg, because those with a mental disorder are more likely to leave. PTSD vulnerability factors include time since leaving (the more recent, the more vulnerable), alcohol misuse, childhood adversity and antisocial behaviour. But there's also something, he says, about leaving. Some join the military to escape situations to which they may then be forced to return.

Outside of the chaos of combat, military life is ordered and regimented, with consequences for not following rules or paying attention to details that could cost lives. Whereas in civilian life, says Greenberg, people don't always do what they say and don't always get called out. Veterans have to find a new job where they may not be valued as much or paid as well. They may not be given the

***“Without the Reorg team’s support, I’m not sure I would’ve made it”***



same sense of pride or identity, the same leadership, training or support. And they may begin to dwell on things.

## Finding A Way Out

Discovering jiu-jitsu was, says Sheriff, “like discovering magic”, except he found that he wanted to reveal the secret to everyone.

Introduced to the sport on the close combat section of his physical instructor’s course, Sheriff immediately grasped the “operational effectiveness” of being able to subdue an opponent, even one much bigger and stronger, with skilful application of chokes and locks, and without resorting to fists. More than that, Sheriff recognised jiu-jitsu’s psychological benefit of confidence, especially for the guys who’d been hardened by months of the Marines’ infamous training program but may only be as tenderly aged as 16. And some of

them may not have ever been in a fight. Sheriff knew how great he felt when he was on the mat and when he came off it. His enthusiasm spread until the martial art became the Marines’ most popular sport and part of its culture, just another skill that recruits acquired, such as map-reading or marksmanship. Then he switched fire to what jiu-jitsu could do for former comrades. A military term, “reorg” is what Marines shout when the smoke clears: everyone comes together, checks one another off, moves forwards. Reorg aligns with Sheriff’s jiu-jitsu ideas: “reversal”, “switch”, going from a bad position to a better one.

Sheriff introduces me to a Reorg athlete called Dave, whose childhood was, as he describes it, “volatile”, with periods of physical, psychological and sexual abuse. He couldn’t talk to anyone, so he skipped school and roamed the streets. When he was old enough, he joined the fire brigade and



*Mastering jiu-jitsu is less about physical strength and more about control – of your opponent and yourself.*

spent his first callout looking for body parts. He joined the Navy to find an identity, to get away, but left after five years, experiences that compounded his already poor mental health.

Dave held down a few jobs but his “bubbling” anger made him difficult to be around and his marriage suffered for it. Drinking didn’t help. He fell into a three-year cycle of being arrested or detained under the Mental Health Act and dumped back at his camper van. On a couple of occasions, he attempted suicide. He’d already started jiu-jitsu training but because of his state of mind he was inconsistent. One day his coach, a friend, asked him if he’d ever heard of Reorg. “Without Reorg’s support, I’m not sure I’d have made it,” he says.

Jiu-jitsu’s role in Dave’s recovery has been “integral”: he’s now 25 kg lighter and “way more relaxed”. When you’re on the mat, he says, you can just switch your mind off to everything else. And when you want to tap but don’t and get yourself out of a hold, you learn resilience. Jiu-jitsu and Reorg are his “safety net”. Sheriff came to present his blue belt.

The complex PTSD that results from prolonged trauma “robbed” Dave of a lot. But he gets on all right now with his ex-wife and his daughter lives with him. He’s a support worker at a crisis centre, which he was shown around when he was himself homeless. He feels like he’s in a good place.

## Searching For Purpose

The remains of Mark Ormrod’s legs reminded him of a present with the wrapping paper torn off, which was apt because it was Christmas Eve in Afghanistan. His right arm reminded him of *The Terminator*, when Arnie peels his skin off like a glove. The blast from the IED (improvised explosive device) had peeled open the 3mm-thick steel tube of Ormrod’s mortar like a banana.

A T1 casualty, Ormrod – affectionately known as ‘Rammers’, as in ‘Ramrod’ – was as seriously injured as you can be without being dead and, he thought, for nothing: he hadn’t even been in a fight. His girlfriend and little girl wouldn’t want him back like this. He asked the first comrade who arrived to shoot him. “Endex”, as the Marines say. End of exercise. “No way, Rammers,” his comrade replied. ▶



**“Life is hard. It’s okay to show your emotions.”**

– SAM SHERIFF  
CEO and founder of Reorg

**LIFE IS A FIGHT.** And whether you’ve been in the military or you work in a school, there’s no real measure of what you find a struggle versus what someone else does.

My dad was an alcoholic. He and my mum separated. Seeing him on the weekends . . . I didn’t realise it at the time, but, as I’ve got older and become a father myself, that was hard. It was a hard, hard time.

It was almost like I had two dads: the dad who was my hero and the dad who drank. I couldn’t talk to my mum because I didn’t want her knowing what was going on, and I didn’t want my mates knowing because I was ashamed. But you just get on with it, don’t you?

My dad was the reason I joined the Marines. He was a diver in the Navy; his younger brother was in the Marines and a physical training instructor. My dad put him on a pedestal. As a kid, all I wanted was to be a Marine.

I lost both parents to cancer: my dad first, not long after I got back from Afghanistan. While I was in the hospice with him, my mum called to say that she’d got cancer. It was a lot. I threw myself into jiu-jitsu at that time. It was my place.

Lots of things in life are hard. How do you manage that? Certainly I’ve identified that jiu-jitsu is great for it. If you’re not able to get on the mats, go for a run, do some push-ups, get your heart pumping. Feel alive. Because it’s a privilege.



**“Jiu-jitsu is like a medication. It’s medicine.”**

– BEN MITCHELL,  
Firefighter and Reorg athlete

MY PROBLEM WAS coming out of the Marines. Joining the Marines straight from school, getting so institutionalised, then leaving and feeling like a bit of a no one, like I’d lost my identity. I was just another member of the public. All of a sudden, you haven’t got an arrow, a bearing.

I remember one time, in the no man’s land between Christmas and New Year, just feeling so lost. I had a wife and two children, but I was stuck in this gloom, like mud. It becomes a cycle: you don’t want to speak to anyone because you’re embarrassed that you were once this bloke who led men into battle and the next thing you can’t get out of bed.

Looking back, I wish I’d started practising jiu-jitsu earlier. It’s that fear of starting something and knowing you’re going to be absolutely rubbish. It really humbled me, and I realised that maybe I had a bit of an ego problem. Before you know it, you’re addicted. Don’t get me wrong, I feel good when I go out for a run, but I just don’t get the same endorphin high.

There’s no better feeling than being shot at. Many of my mates will tell you the same thing. I don’t know what sick, twisted chemical is released that gives you this yearning to go and do it again. That was a big adjustment – that I’m never going to feel those highs again. But doing a jiu-jitsu competition, the adrenaline that courses through my veins is the closest I can get to it.

Ormrod was told he would never walk again – now he’s a purple belt who never lets his disability define him.



“We’re going to get you out of here.”

According to Greenberg, whose own 23 years in the military included acting as a general-duty doctor with two Royal Marines Commando units and earning his green beret, there are good and bad wars – psychologically speaking. In contrast to, say, the Falklands, a “good” war fought for British-identifying people that was short and successful, Iraq and Afghanistan were for people who didn’t necessarily want us there, protracted, pointless. Finding meaning in struggle is a vital psychological defence mechanism. “When you come to reflect on it all, what you did has to have some sense of meaning,” he says.

For Ormrod, you can’t ever underestimate “the

power of being around good people”. Four days after his accident, from his hospital bed, he asked his girlfriend, Becky, to marry him; she said yes. A month later, after he’d struggled to crawl 2m from a wheelchair to a sofa, he asked her to help him die; she said no. Every day, he tried to find something that was a little better than the day before. Six weeks after his accident, he was upright on specially moulded plastic sockets; not long after, he walked 2m on prosthetic steel legs. He stood shoulder-to-shoulder with his comrades to receive his Operational Service Medal and danced with his wife at their wedding.

Still, Ormrod was sceptical when Sheriff offered to introduce him to jiu-jitsu. He didn’t want to be a



***“What you learn on the mats, you take off the mats”***

sympathy case or promotional tool. But Sheriff was a fellow Marine, so Ormrod gave him the benefit of the doubt. Jiu-jitsu was ground-based, said Sheriff, and Ormrod, already on the ground, was “halfway there”. They’d figure the rest out.

On camp for a charity do, Ormrod had met Sheriff by chance and opened up to him. Following his injuries, he felt vulnerable: what if someone in the street got aggressive with him or his family? Jiu-jitsu gave him back some confidence. More than that, jiu-jitsu gave Ormrod something to do better, to be better at. He’s at his happiest learning something new, pushing himself. “And jiu-jitsu gave me that, because everything for me was difficult,” he says. The cliché that “what you learn on the

mats, you take off the mats” is, in Ormrod’s case, literally true: he’d never considered his armless right shoulder useful until he was taught to grind it in an opponent’s face. He started using it in his life to carry stuff, open doors.

“My situation now is more an advantage than a disadvantage,” says Ormrod. He’s chipping away at “a million projects”: more jiu-jitsu, more books, a movie, documentaries highlighting not just the negative side of leaving the military or disability but also the positives, wins and struggles.

For a lot of veterans, lack of purpose is, says Ormrod, “a big one”. Who or what are they fighting for? Jiu-jitsu gives them back some sense of purpose. It not only gets feel-good chemicals

flowing, but also conversations: high on endorphins, people will say things that they otherwise might not. “It’s a little bit like sprinkling magic dust,” he says. “Like truth serum.”

In the realm of science, pain or discomfort has been proven to promote “affiliative” behaviour or social connection, which helps avoid or lessen pain. We’ve survived and thrived, it’s theorised, by responding to stress with not only fight or flight, but also “tend and befriend”.

One of the biggest things that veterans miss from the military, says Ormrod, is their comrades; he can meet another Royal Marine and instantly bond “because we know we’ve been through the same shit”. And it’s the same with jiu-jitsu, which is the ➤



**“I just want to be the best that I can at whatever I’m doing.”**

– MARK ORMROD,  
Reorg trustee

THAT FIRST HOUR of jiu-jitsu, rolling around everywhere, I felt seasick, dizzy. But it got my lungs burning, my heart racing; I was back in that fight zone, which I thought I’d never again experience. Its adaptability spoke to me. Starting then, I kept on training as much as I could.

I found jiu-jitsu very humbling – especially when I got my arse kicked by a 15-year-old (who I later found out was a Cage Warrior champion). That showed me the power of this martial art: the smaller, weaker man taking on the bigger, stronger man and winning. For the first five years or however long, once someone stuck me on my back, I was done. Now I’m finding that next part where I don’t let that happen, and I survive, and then I fight out of it and go for my submissions.

I had my first proper fight at the Reorg Open. Because of my disability and the lack of athletes, I had to jump up two levels\*. The bloke whipped my ass – I think it was 14-0. But he never got close to tapping me. I looked at that as a win.

Some people get into jiu-jitsu and are obsessed with competing. I got into it for the camaraderie and to learn to use my body better, elevating my mindset to another level of understanding myself.

I just want to live my life. My intention isn’t to be an inspiration: it’s just, selfishly, that I want to be the best that I can be at whatever it is I’m doing. If that happens to inspire people, even better.



*Reorg’s mission is to teach people how to go from a bad position to a better one – on and off the mat.*



closest thing that he’s found to replicating the military’s camaraderie. You can roll up at an academy on the other side of the world and be warmly welcomed by strangers. You share the same journey. There’s a ranking. There’s even a uniform.

Anyone initiated into functional fitness is certainly no stranger to the camaraderie that’s founded on shared hardship: that’s part of the secret sauce, the magic. CrossFit has strong ties with military and emergency services, helping them train for “the unknowable” and honouring them with hero workouts; there are rankings if not belts and an unofficial uniform of Stance socks and Nike Metcons. Last year, Ormrod competed in the inaugural NFG x Reorg Adaptive Games, powered by the gyms WIT and Marchon. Functional fitness, like jiu-jitsu, brings people together.

## Time To Tap Out

In the aftermath of trauma, there’s good evidence of the benefits of social support from people who can help you “avoid avoidance,” says Greenberg. Some trauma sufferers don’t want to talk and that’s okay, but someone who’s not all right “should be trying to talk about it, and reduce pressure for a short time”.

For those diagnosed with PTSD, there’s good evidence for two talking treatments in particular: trauma-focused cognitive behavioural therapy, which challenges and changes unhelpful thoughts and behaviours, and eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing, a psychotherapy that incorporates side-to-side eye movements in order to stimulate both sides of your brain and access and process what’s buried in your subconscious. Medication can also help to alleviate some symptoms. Recovery or

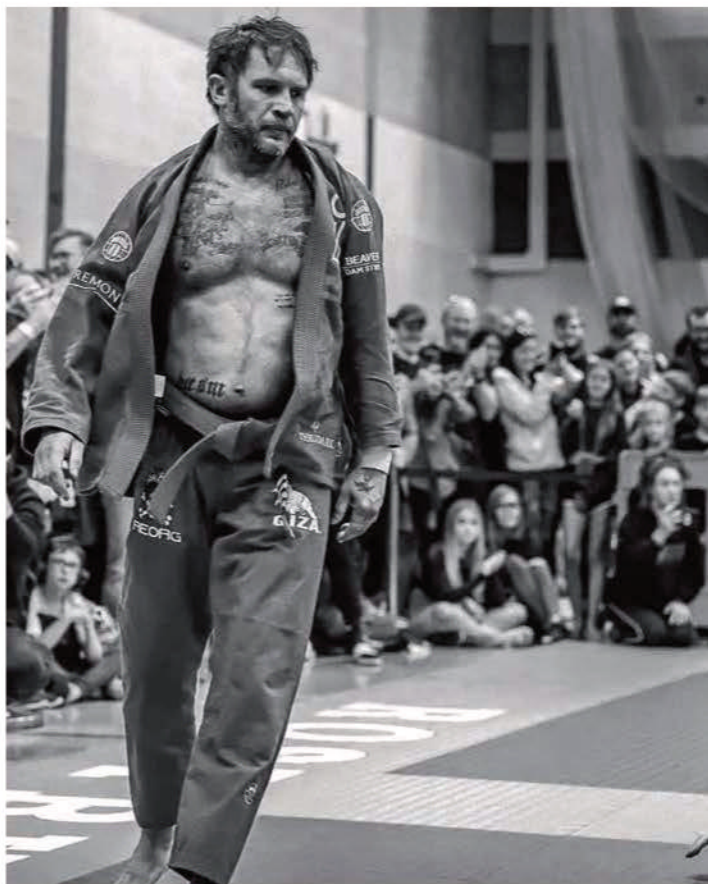
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: MOORES MEDIA. \*HE COULD’VE GONE DOWN A LEVEL BUT DIDN’T. ALSO, HIS OPPONENT HAD TWO ARMS AND ONE LEG

## **“Jiu-jitsu got me back in the fight zone, which I thought I’d never again experience”**



**“Jiu-jitsu improves character. It’s a metaphor for life.”**

– TRENT SCANLEN,  
Reorg chairman and trustee



Tom Hardy gained two gold medals at the Ultimate Martial Arts Championship in Milton Keynes last September.

“a very good deal of improvement” is possible, says Greenberg. The real damage of PTSD isn’t just the disorder, he says, but that it “wrecks lives because it spoils relationships” and ruins careers. By the time that sufferers can seek – and receive – help, they’ve often lost so much already. One evening, my dad talks to me over the phone about the things that “you” saw in Northern Ireland, the things that “you” did. So many veterans drink, he says, so that they don’t dream.

Talking to an ex-RAF therapist through the charity Combat Stress probably stopped my dad doing “something stupid” to someone; he’s lucky that, unlike some of his former comrades, he’s never harmed himself. He still struggles with anger and sleep, but he’s part of an informal group of disparate veterans united by PTSD who talk, sometimes in the middle of the night. I don’t know them, but I feel like I know him better.

### **Moving Forwards**

Sheriff invites me to a jiu-jitsu seminar he’s hosting, so we battle the traffic in a pineapple-skull van to east London’s Fight City gym. On the way, Sheriff explains that Reorg is the “glue” that binds jiu-jitsu academies and associations that can otherwise be tribal. Reorg recently started work in the US. The plan is to roll Reorg out to Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

After a video presentation and talk by Sheriff about Reorg, the Fight City inhabitants start to warm up together. Afterwards, everyone poses for a photo, sitting cross-legged in lines by rank, all feeling part of something.

In the changing rooms, one of the guys who works at Fight City asks me where I usually train. I don’t, I say: it’s a long story, but the short version is that I moved out of London. He says, “Any time you’re in town, you’re always welcome.” ■

I STUDIED BUSINESS at uni, made the board of Specsavers at 31 and got into the corporate lifestyle: dinners and drinks. When I found out my now ex-wife was pregnant, I wanted to get in shape. So, I went to my local MMA (mixed martial arts) gym.

I’d boxed a bit at uni; I was worst at grappling. But slowly, new people come in and you’re better than them. And it’s not an ego thing – you’re passing it on.

I always had niggles. After months of my lower back getting worse, a doctor friend told me to get an MRI. It was cancer: non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. Chemo shuts down your immune system. Going to the gym gave me a sense of normalcy, that I wasn’t going to decay.

My then-wife and I moved to the UK, where I started my own gym, Elevate. We spread the net wide: jiu-jitsu, MMA, boxing, strength and HIIT. Now it’s 70 per cent jiu-jitsu and growing. It’s probably the ultimate sport for delayed gratification. It’s so exhausting and frustrating, but it improves character. If you can get out of a situation where you were about to tap . . . well, there are metaphors for life.

I got Tom [Hardy] into jiu-jitsu. We met in a cafe. Then Sam came to see us one day in the gym. He was still serving; Reorg was a hobby. When Sam wanted to form the charity, he asked me, Tom and Mark to be trustees.

I love the mission. We hear stories from people making a change when they were possibly going down another path.

# 24

## Reasons Why Men Don't Talk About Their Mental Health...

...And Why They're All BS

Speaking your mind is easier in theory than in practice. Especially when our brains are so good at coming up with excuses. Consider your own busted

BY JOSHUA DAVID STEIN PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCARLETT WRENCH





## 01

**There's Nothing Wrong With Me**

This article isn't about you, right? You're fine. But here's the crucial thing: acknowledging that it's useful to work on your mental health doesn't mean there's something wrong with your brain any more than going to the gym to train your triceps means there's something wrong with your arms. It's just darn good practice.

## 02

**Fine. But I Don't Have A Mental Health Problem**

"Think of mental health as a continuum. No one is completely mentally healthy, or completely mentally ill," says Amy Morin, a psychotherapist and the author of *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*. She advises thinking about it in the same way you do your physical wellbeing. Waiting until a problem is threatening to derail your daily routine is a far less efficient strategy than seeking advice – whether from a professional, a trusted friend or even a book – when symptoms arise. Or, to put it another way, "Most men aren't embarrassed to go to see a dentist to keep their teeth healthy".

Putting pen to paper can be a good start.



## 03

**My Problems Aren't That Bad. I Can Deal With Them Myself**

Perhaps you can. But if you've been trying for some time and it's still not working, do what you'd do in any other situation: "Get an outside opinion. Objective advice is key to seeing your problems in a different way," says Morin. Talk to someone you trust, or go to the experts. "Therapists have specialised knowledge and can therefore reduce the time that's needed for improvement."

## 04

**Having A Mental Health Problem Means That I'm Weak**

"There's a difference between acting tough and being strong," says Morin. "It's easy to act tough by pretending your problems don't exist." But addressing the issues takes true strength. If you're struggling with self-perception, it might help to make a list of men you admire who have spoken out about mental-health difficulties. That might be anyone from an actor such as The Rock, to boxer Tyson Fury, musician Stormzy or even the hosts of *SAS: Who Dares Wins*. Would you describe them as 'weak'?



## 05 ↑

**I Have So Many Other Things To Deal With, My Mental Health Isn't A Priority**

Maybe not now, but if you don't look after it, sooner or later, you'll have to deal with it. Schedule in time today and you could save a lot of time in the long run.

## 06

**I Just Don't Want People To Judge Me**

You can't control other people's reactions, but you can try to confide in someone you know to be sympathetic to mental-health issues. "Even if you pick the wrong person, it's still the right step," says psychiatrist Drew Ramsey. "People who are very private often seek [professional] help first to get a plan and support, then speak to their family and friends afterwards."

## 07

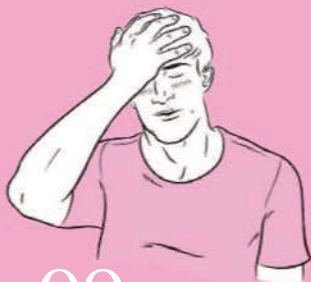
**I Don't Want A Therapist To Judge Me Either**

A therapist is, by definition, disinterested in you. That doesn't mean 'not interested', though. You are a patient, one of many the average therapist sees in a week. They're not caught up in the details of your life; they look at you in the same way your mechanic looks at your car's gearbox. One survey revealed that 93 per cent of people lie to their therapists; the prime motivations are shame and fear of judgment. ➤

# 08

## I Just Don't Want To Be A Burden

Here's another way to think about it: in a *Men's Health* survey of more than 15,000 readers, 34 per cent of respondents said that they would be more comfortable addressing a topic such as depression if a friend talked about his own mental wellbeing first. Perhaps, then, you should try to see this as a matter of helping to unburden others. "Depression and anxiety are extremely common," says integrative psychiatrist Gregory Scott Brown. "Often, when men open up to a friend, it's either an experience that person can relate to personally, or they know someone who was able to overcome a similar struggle."



# 09

## Dragging Up Old Stuff Sounds Miserable

It can be, yes. But in that sense, psychotherapy isn't too different from, say, physiotherapy. Both kinds of therapy can be painful in the short-term, but both will ultimately help you get better. If you need to have a hard conversation, just grit your teeth and go through with it. It's going to be worth it.

# 10

## I Talk To My Partner. Isn't That Enough?

That's a good thing – but it has its limits. "Sometimes, men think talking to their partner is a substitute for therapy," says Morin. "But while it's important to be able to talk about how you're feeling, venting every day may strain a relationship. It's a problem I've seen in my work. The partner who is listening may feel pressure to cheer the other person up, or calm them down." Carry on talking to your other half. But if things don't seem to be improving, you might need to speak to a professional, too.

# 11

## Once You Start Addressing This Stuff, You'll Never Be Done With It

Few of us struggle to accept that maintaining good physical health is a lifelong commitment. Likewise with your mental wellbeing. But built into your long-term plan can be shorter, sharper programs to zero in on specific issues. For certain issues, such as phobias and compulsive habits, an intensive three-hour course can be enough to free you. You are not condemning yourself to a lifetime on the psychologist's couch just because you speak the words, "I'm scared", or concede that your childhood probably wasn't all that flash.

# 12

## I Went To See A Therapist Once, But He Just Sat There And Didn't Say Anything

*We asked Dr Wexler for his thoughts...*

Q: Why is it that you just sit there and make vaguely sympathetic noises but don't speak?

A: [Silence.]

Q: No, but seriously.

A: [Silence.]

Q: Oh, I get it. It's because in some types of therapy, your job isn't so much to direct me as it is to give me space to express myself. It's as if all these words I'm saying are clearing out the tubes of my mind, like an emotional bilge pump, until, exhausted, we start getting down to issues I've long kept hidden, either because they seem so trifling – such as when I fell off my bike at the age of eight and started crying, and instead of empathising with me, my dad sarcastically said, "Wah-wah!" – or because they're shameful, like the fact that I think that I'm fundamentally unlovable and that if I let anyone know me – I mean really know me – with my defences down, they'd see that. Is that it?

A: [Silence. Hands over a box of tissues.]

# 13

## Fine, I Admit It – I'm Scared

*By author and journalist Joshua David Stein*

I get it. A few years ago, my life started falling apart at an alarming clip. I was married (spoiler alert: was) and had two young children. I was at a point in my career where I felt things should be getting easier. But they weren't. As my cohort aged and had kids, I had fewer close friends. My marriage was in trouble. I struggled with intense, body-clenching rage and existential squid-ink darkness.

In the midst of what I guess was a mental breakdown, I tried to kill myself. At that point, seeking help became life or death. The evidence that I was really struggling with mental illness was incontrovertible; that it was affecting the people I love was equally uncontested. I ended up in therapy, talking to a nice lady named Julia.

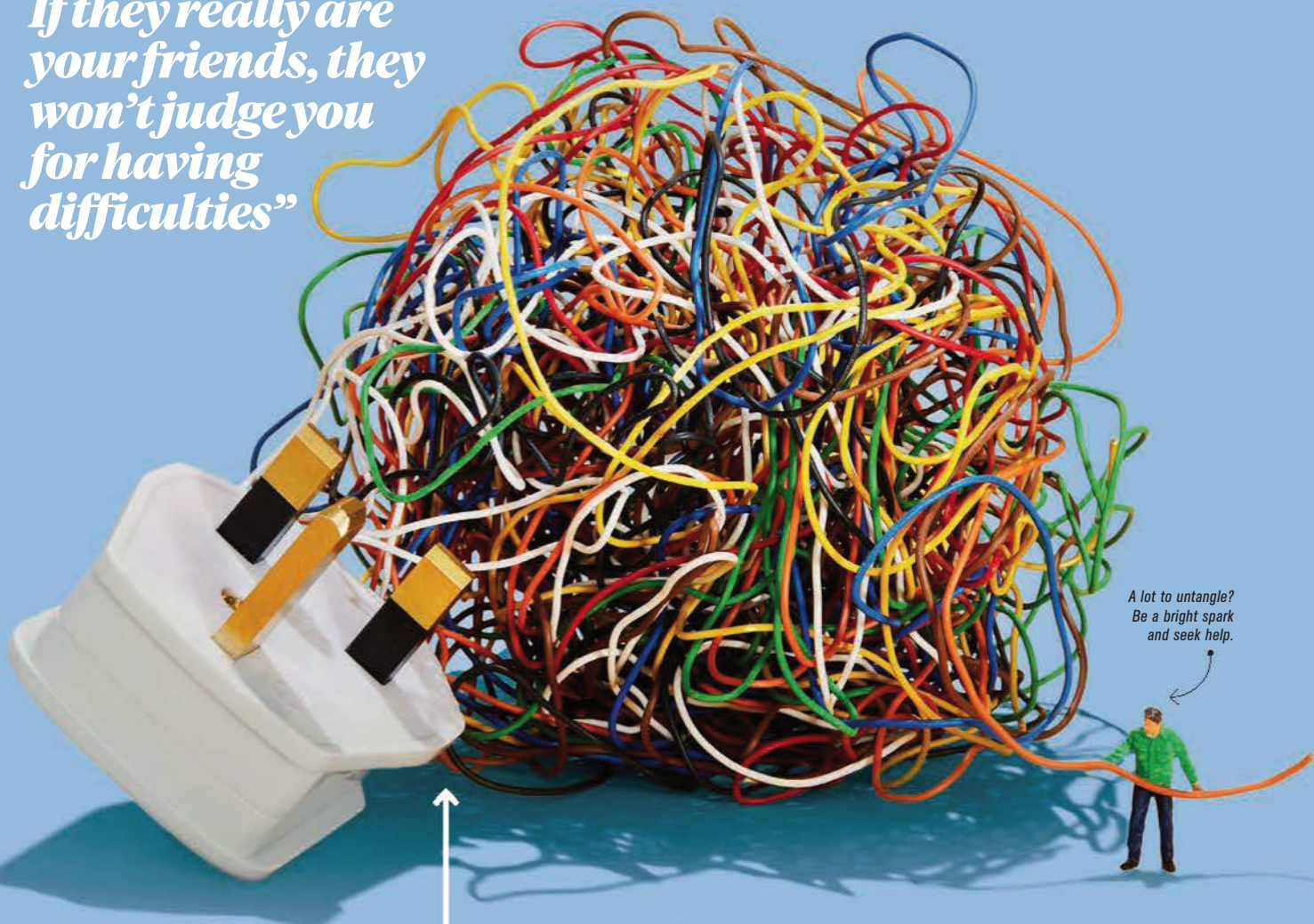
What a cliché, I thought, looking at her ready-to-pluck tissues and well-hugged pillow. But it felt good to talk to someone who wasn't mad at me for years of craziness, who could see me with professional compunction.

Julia suggested I might have something called borderline personality disorder (BPD), with symptoms including suicidal ideations, rage, impulsive behaviour and black-and-white thinking. The more I understood BPD, the more I understood what triggered what, and why. I'm not saying that I'm not responsible for the suffering I caused. I am. But I didn't have to beat myself up as much as I had.

Addressing my mental health wasn't enough to save my marriage. But it allowed me to know myself. Now, I'm happy – and sad – in a way I couldn't be before.

“

*If they really are your friends, they won't judge you for having difficulties”*



*A lot to untangle?  
Be a bright spark  
and seek help.*

## 14 My Problems Are Just Too Complicated To Fix

**That's not the point. Your brain isn't a faulty plug socket. A good first step is to forget about fixing yourself and focus on working out exactly what it is you're feeling, and what might be the root cause.**

## 15 What If Word Gets Round Among My Friends?

So what if it does? If they really are your friends, they won't judge you for having difficulties with your mental health, or for taking steps to manage it. They will support you, just as you'd support them if they were in the same situation. Friends have got your back – it's in the job description. If they haven't... well, then we'd probably advise finding yourself some new friends.

## 16 I Wouldn't Even Know What To Say...

If you're ready to open up, consider "coaching" the person you're talking to, says David Wexler, executive director of the Relationship Training Institute. "Say something like, 'I want to tell you something that's been bothering me, but all I need is for you to listen. I'm not looking for you to fix it, or come up with an action plan'. A decent friend or family member – or therapist – can rise to that." ▶

# 17

## I Want To Get Help, But I Have No Idea What To Ask For

Many so-called 'talking therapies' are available to men. As for what all those abbreviations mean...



### CBT

Cognitive behavioural therapy has a proven record for treating depression, anxiety, phobias and obsessive compulsive disorder. You'll unpick your behavioural patterns, set goals and learn healthy new habits. You won't be asked to delve into your relationship with your mother.



### MBCT

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy teaches you to identify and manage challenging thoughts and feelings. It can be useful for those with addiction issues.



### EMDR

Helpful after trauma, eye-movement desensitisation and reprocessing will help your brain to safely reprocess memories. There's also counselling for everything from bereavement to panic attacks. Your counsellor won't tell you what to do, but will help you to understand your thought processes and come up with solutions.

# 18

## I Used To Be In Therapy, But It Didn't Help At All

If you've seen one therapist, you've just seen one therapist. Methods and mannerisms vary hugely. Finding someone who is right for you is less like picking a go-to morning coffee vendor than discovering your favourite pub. In the former case, proximity and waiting time are of chief importance. The latter is more about feeling than anything else. "I always encourage people to have consultations with two or three different therapists," says Ramsey. And don't worry about moving on if it's not a good fit. "We're professionals. We can handle it."

# 19

## My Work Schedule Won't Allow It

Are you sure? Ask your HR department. Mental ill-health is covered by employment law, as well as companies' sick-leave policies, so alterations to your hours and responsibilities can be discussed in the same way as if you were recovering from a bout of pneumonia. A formal diagnosis of, say, depression means that, by law, your employer is required to make "reasonable adjustments" to your job spec. That might simply mean letting you leave early one day a week in order to see a therapist.

# 20

## Everyone Thinks I Have My Sh\*t Together. I Can't Let Them See The Cracks

**"Many men feel they need to have it all together all the time, despite how miserable they feel," says Dr Samantha Dutton, a social worker and retired lieutenant colonel. But it's very hard to do a good job when you're miserable. So, if you need your shit together, you really can't afford to ignore your mental health.**

*Speak up before breaking point.*



# 21-22

## I Always Feel Better After A Beer And/Or A Workout

Both may temporarily alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety, concedes Brown, “but neither helps to address the root causes”. While dealing with a mental health issue doesn’t oblige you to give up drinking, using your pint of Budvar as an emotional prop isn’t a failsafe coping mechanism. And as for that training you’re doing? That’s a good, sustainable strategy, says Brown. “Studies have shown that people who are more physically active have a lower risk for developing depression. However, you’re probably not going to cure any depression or severe anxiety by simply going for a run.”



# 23

## I Just Find All Of This Talk About Mental Health A Bit ‘Millennial’

Worried about snowflake jibes? It’s unfortunate but true that there’s still a stigma, but the reality is not that young people are less resilient, rather that they’re more open. According to YouGov research, nearly half of adults aged 55 and over say that they have experienced depression and/or anxiety. Besides, no one’s asking you to post about it on Instagram or start a self-care journal. Do things your way – just don’t do nothing.

# 24

## I’d Like Help, But Waiting Times Are Too Long

There’s no denying our health service is stretched, but it’s still worth consulting your GP. If that doesn’t appeal, consider self-help books: whatever you’re grappling with, there will be a guide to managing it. You can also find local support groups or, if addiction is a concern, there are various free recovery groups such as AA. If you can free up a bit of budget, many organisations and some private therapists also offer reduced-cost therapy to those on low incomes (just ask). ■

“  
**Studies show people who are more physically active have a lower risk for developing depression”**



# Man Versus Food

DISCOUNT  
PASTA  
30%  
OFF

Diet culture has always been curiously gendered. Self-restraint, abnegation, mad regimens, fad science – these were once thought the preserve of ‘neurotic’ women. **But something has shifted. From keto to paleo, experimental fasters to tech-bro biohackers, today’s food ascetics are looking distinctly ... male.** Do you see yourself on the scales? And if so, how did we become what we don’t eat? ►

BY RICHARD GODWIN ILLUSTRATIONS BY KLAUS KREMMERZ

*An abstemious approach to eating is gathering new momentum among health-conscious men.*



# B

ack in the autumn of 2016, shortly after the Donald Trump election, I drove from Los Angeles to San Francisco to interview seven young men who had started a tech company. At least, it looked like a tech start-up – but the founders were more interested in their personal biological hardware than computers or phones. “We’re looking at the body as a system with a set of inputs,” they explained to me. “You can modulate those inputs for a predictable set of outputs.”

What they were selling was nootropic pills – “apps for the mind” – designed to make you smarter, fitter, more efficient, more focused and in control. But I found myself just as interested in their diets, which they had adopted with more or less the same objectives. One of them performed a 60-hour fast every week. Another consumed all his daily kilojoules within a one-hour window each day. A few of the others communally fasted from Monday evening to Wednesday morning. All of this was tracked with a mix of spreadsheets, glucose monitors, fitness trackers, kilojoule counters, pulse oximeters, Slack groups and Subreddits. My photographer came back from his encounter with them shaking his head. “Wow,” he said. “Those nootropic guys have some serious eating disorders.”

I’ve thought about those men – and that comment – a lot these past few years. What struck me then as a very niche, very techy, very – how to put this? – male approach to food has begun to permeate the mainstream. We’ve seen it in meal-replacement solutions such as Soylent, the optimally engineered anti-food developed by San Francisco software engineer Rob Rhinehart; or the slightly more palatable British equivalent, Huel, available in supermarkets and petrol stations up and down the country. We’ve seen it in the extreme protocols gaining large (and largely male) followings: the caveman diet, the carnivore diet, the keto diet. We’ve seen the emergence of outlandish male food

personalities such as the Liver King (1.7 million Instagram followers), who thinks the crisis in modern masculinity would be solved if we all ate more raw offal – not to mention Bible influencer Jordan Peterson and his legendary all-beef diet. Meanwhile, we’ve seen the vegan diet repositioned as a macho protocol thanks to the Netflix documentary *The Game Changers*. Going plant-based will (it is claimed) do wonders for your erections. It’s all a curious mix of ideology and evangelism: my science is better than your science; my expert knows better than your expert.

In among this flurry of A/B testing and supplement pop-ups, good old-fashioned word of mouth has done its thing, too. Food, I find, frequently comes up in conversation. Like my mate Damian, 44, who allows no food to pass his lips before 7pm each day. He was inspired by a dad at his kid’s nursery who had exchanged a tubby dad bod for a six-pack through a regimen of intermittent fasting and weight training. Damian went online and – how many 21st-century stories begin like this? – started his own research.

“I was really taken with what he was telling me, about how your body doesn’t need about 40 per cent of what we eat,” Damian says. “He was describing this experience of becoming more alive, more awake to the world. We’re animals; we’re designed to be quick and light. Most people say, ‘I can’t miss breakfast, I’d be a mess!’ Actually? You can miss breakfast. You’re designed to miss breakfast.”

Damian skipped breakfast and lunch every day for a couple of years and says he’d recommend it (with the caveat that he could become a bit of a monster at 6pm). He lost a few excess kilos, but that wasn’t the point. “It made me appreciate the food I was eating,” he says. “I liked the feeling of being in control. I liked not having that fogginess. I saved tonnes of time. And it was a life experience that taught me how much I need.”

## The New Masculinity

What’s curious about all of this is that prior to 2016, I don’t think I had a single conversation about diet with any of my male friends. Ever. No doubt this has a lot to do with the fact that when you reach a certain age, your hangovers become crueller, your metabolism slows and you can’t burn through food like you did when you were 17. But it was also because, well, dieting was something women did. It conjured images of mums drinking SlimFast and influencers such as Ella Woodward posing with kale. Men were more likely to talk about how much they drank than how

A little nutritional knowledge goes a long way. Don’t overthink it.



much – or how little – they ate. That has now emphatically changed, says nutritionist Ian Marber – and not necessarily in a healthy way. He feels that male diet culture is displaying the worst excesses of female diet culture of the recent past. “There’s a kind of machismo, which feels really outdated to me, that is alive and well on Instagram and online marketing,” he says. “It’s the equivalent of the marketing about beauty, weight and fitness directed to women in the ’90s. It feels prehistoric. But somehow, it’s working.”

For Marber, influencer culture is one of the primary drivers. He describes a young male personal trainer who approached him recently, asking for advice on how to monetise his large Instagram following. “It was so glaringly obvious. If he posed with his shirt off, he’d get 3000 likes. If he did the same pose with his shirt on, he’d get 300 likes. The





advertisers obviously understand this. The algorithm understands it.” He says it’s no surprise that there are “thousands” of fitness influencers offering “bullshit” diet advice or flogging protein shakes and zinc supplements of dubious merit. “They get thousands of likes for posing with their shirts off. But it’s not because of what they’re eating. It’s because they’re hot,” Marber says. The truth of the matter is, we’re far more likely to take advice from someone we aspire to be than someone who’s qualified to offer it.

Marber points to a shift in the culture that’s often missed in contemporary media discussions about gender. To read the comment pages of our newspapers, you might imagine that every young person in western society had dispensed with gender and was now living in some kind of non-binary unisex utopia. But this is far from the case. The

female ideal has converged on something that the American writer Jia Tolentino termed Instagram Face: a “distinctly white but ambiguously ethnic” composite of Kim Kardashian, Bella Hadid, Emily Ratajkowski and Kendall Jenner, wearing a “sexy baby tiger look”. Social media algorithms, make-up tutorials, photo-editing software such as FaceTune and ever more accessible cosmetic surgery have all helped create this aesthetic. Dating apps have surely compounded it. Any woman who signs up to Hinge or Tinder effectively volunteers to have themselves judged on a fleeting glimpse of a 2D image.

There are precisely the same forces at work on men, too – only with different emphasis. It’s whey powder rather than lip fillers; muscle mass rather than (or as well as) weight loss; and rather than Instagram Face, it’s more like Instagram Body.

Maybe you prefer your figurine with the extravagant facial hair and ponytail of the Liver King. Maybe he has the sculpted quiff and precision stubble of *Love Island* winner Davide Sanclimenti. But he certainly has the same musculature, prominent abs, pecs, biceps and inguinal creases. “Whenever I do talks in schools, almost without exception, the boys are into protein, muscles and abs,” Marber says. “There’s no shame or hesitation. It’s just expected. They’re buying protein shakes in their teens. They’re doing keto and intermittent fasting in their twenties. We’re veering towards a *Love Island* aesthetic becoming the norm. All of those diets that you mentioned – paleo, keto, carnivore – tap into this idea that men are powerful, muscular Masters of the Universe who can control their own bodies. It’s the complete opposite of acceptance.”

The aesthetic pressures on women are arguably stronger. (I mean, the UK has semi-regular female prime ministers now, and yet: can you imagine a woman as overweight as Boris Johnson making it to the top job? I cannot.) However, women have lived with these pressures for far longer than men and have better developed defences. There is a lively literature critiquing female beauty standards, from *Fat Is A Feminist Issue* by Susie Orbach to *Hunger* by Roxane Gay. There is a wider recognition that obsessive kilojoule counting leads to joyless anxiety at best and life-threatening eating disorders at worst. Ad campaigns aimed at women now celebrate ‘body diversity’, while magazine articles celebrate the ‘anti-diet’ backlash. “The anti-diet movement is about not being a victim of diet culture any more,” one dietitian told our sister publication, *Women’s Health*. “I think in many ways it’s a female fight because women are so often targeted by the diet industry. Women especially end up tying their self-worth to how they look, and the diet industry teaches us that that’s what matters most.” Men, however, seem to be saying, “Bring it on!”

## Gurus And Prophets

So how to attain this ideal physique? This is a matter of ideological debate. For it isn’t just the visual culture that has changed. Lee Amico, a personal trainer who offers nutrition coaching from his gym in Hertfordshire, says that his male clients now come in full of diet chat that they’ve picked up from podcasts such as *The Joe Rogan Experience* or *The Tim Ferriss Show*. “The general population are now being exposed to guests and experts talking about how they got into shape,” he says. “They buy into that gospel and become

their own prophet for that religion. They listen, they think, *That makes sense*, then they start telling people – and it spreads.”

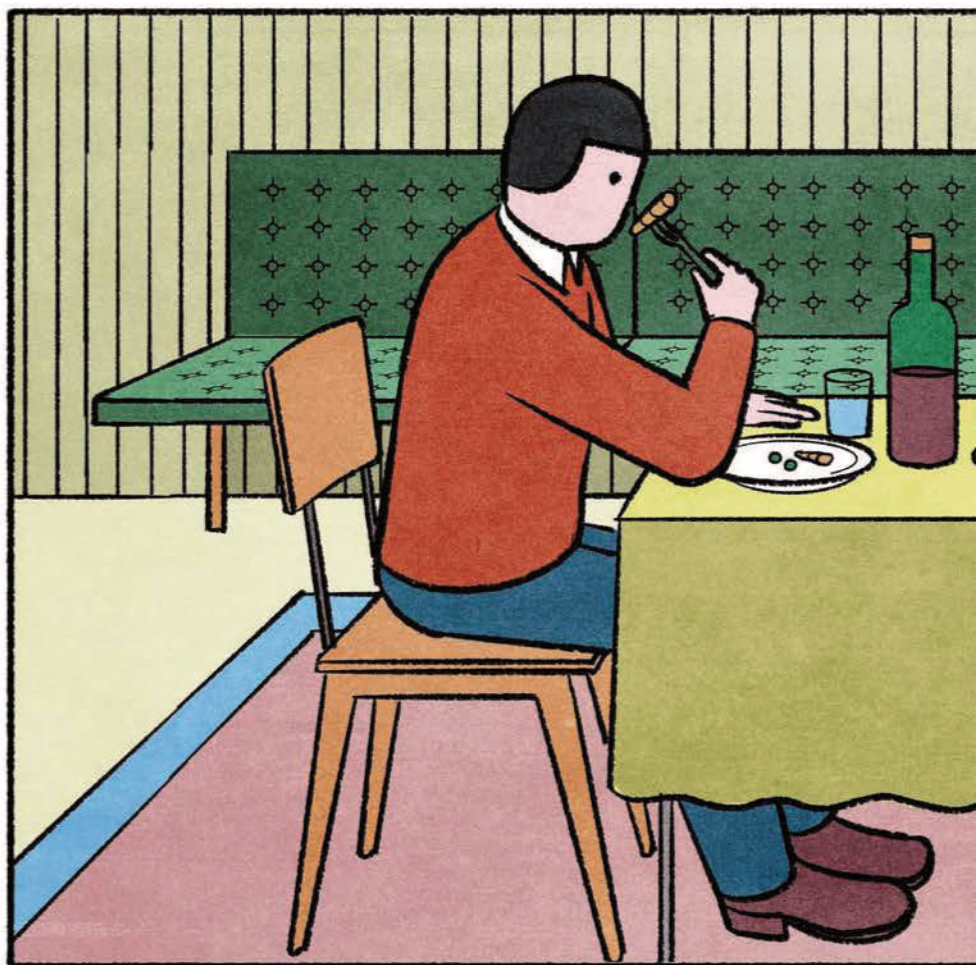
The carnivore diet – in which you eat nothing but meat (ideally plenty of organ meat) – is the one they talk about most. Amico sees it as quintessentially male in its brute simplicity, its competitive element (“How long did you last?”), its excess (eat as much meat as you can!), its pseudoscientific underpinnings and the way it harks back to an idealised past when men were men. It also has an element of clickbait to it. “It’s extreme enough to get people clicking. It’s extreme enough to keep people reading. And it’s extreme enough to get people trying. It appeals to that caveman in all of us.”

And here’s the thing – you’ll get near instant results, too. You’ll feel different almost instantly, and pretty soon you’ll look different, too. “You’re taking a whole food source out of your diet. You’re restricting your carbs, so that’s loads of calories. So you’ll see quick results and you’ll say: ‘Oh my God, this works!’” Amico explains. And in a marketplace of ideas, quick results are more appealing than slow, incremental ones. But they don’t tend to be sustainable. “What you find is people bottom out after four weeks tops. And they go back to where they were.”

Still, Amico doesn’t necessarily think that invalidates the experiment. “If it does flip someone’s focus into nutrition, then that’s not all bad,” he says. “They might realise their plate doesn’t need to be full of chips or potatoes – and then they might reduce their carbohydrate intake. They might start eating more lean meat rather than sausages and burgers. If you’re willing to open your mind up enough, you will pick up some gems on the way.” Traditionally, he points out, men have approached the business of getting in shape via training rather than nutrition. But the thing is, nutrition is far more important. “It’s not only about aesthetic goals – getting slimmer or building muscle mass – it’s about health markers, too. Nutrition moves the markers much more than exercise alone. I see a lot of people start the gym and they get so far. But it’s when they start looking at their food that they make the big leaps.”

## Hacking Our Biology

The aesthetic marketplace is not the only competition that we 21st-century men are engaged in, though. The men at the San Francisco-based nootropics company I visited didn’t seem too bothered about looking like *Love Island* contestants – but they were obsessed with establishing a competitive advantage over their fellow start-ups. They



wanted to make smarter, faster decisions. For them, diet was a way of improving their minds as much as their bodies.

It didn’t entirely work, in that their company folded. A peer-reviewed study showed that its pills didn’t do what they claimed – and so they ceased production. Live by the science, die by the science. But I did look up one of the founders, Michael Brandt, and found his quest for self-control still ongoing. “A lot of times when we eat food, we’re not eating it as food,” he tells me. “We eat when we’re anxious or depressed or stressed.” When we’re bored, too, I’d add. “I completely agree. I think the intermittent fasting movement is a response to that. It’s not really about calories. I just want to be able to control my own monkey brain.”

These days, he’s selling a drink called Ketone-IQ, funded by the US Military and endorsed by Gwyneth Paltrow, no less. Each serving contains 10g of ketones, which is the chemical that your liver produces as an alternative energy supply when you restrict carbohydrates, the body’s usual source of fuel. The idea is that drinking a shot of this every few hours provides all the purported benefits of the keto diet – increased mental clarity, faster fat-burning – without you actually

having to follow the diet. Sounds great, right?

In the intervening years, Brandt tells me that he’s tried just about every diet imaginable. The carnivore diet was “interesting”, he tells me. “I actually felt quite good. Whatever else you can say about meat, humans have been living off it forever – and it is very nutrient-dense, especially if you’re eating nose-to-tail, liver, tongue and so on.” Still, he lasted only a couple of weeks. He did better on keto, but his favourite was a week-long water fast, which he describes as “a very spiritual experience. At a low level of blood glucose, your brain can’t function that well, so your body starts converting fat to ketones,” he says. “It was cool to see how I’d survive in a starvation context.”

This was all part of what I suppose we’d have to call Brandt’s nutritional journey. And it’s a journey that he says has helped him to find equilibrium. Nowadays, he simply (simply!) omits all carbohydrates at breakfast and lunch and eats what he wants at dinner time. “I wasn’t obese or anorexic before. I was just thoughtless,” he says. “I knew that candy and alcohol were bad for me, but I still drank and ate it. Now I’m very mindful of how carbs and sugar make me feel. I’m sure I was feeling these swings before, I just didn’t have



A balance between temperance and indulgence is the surest path to sustainable results.

## The Dietary Prophets

Not all prescriptive diets are harmful, but celeb endorsements shouldn't swing it for you. Here's your primer on five popular plans

### MILD

#### Veganism

**Poster bros:**  
**James Wilks,**  
**Lewis Hamilton**

Wilks' *The Game Changers* introduced veganism to a new audience by focusing on strength and, er, harder erections. Some claims have been questioned, but it can be a balanced diet.

#### Paleo

**Poster bros:**  
**Robb Wolf,**  
**Mark Sisson**

Based on foods available to early man, the caveman diet (about which both Wolf and Sisson have written books) is unlikely to harm you. Then again, neither is a piece of toast.

#### Intermittent Fasting

**Poster bros:**  
**Elon Musk,**  
**Jack Dorsey**

Both Musk and Dorsey are firm believers of eating within a time-restricted window. Overnight fasts of 16 hours are generally considered safe, but Dorsey's seven-meals-a-week plan sounds dismal.

#### Keto

**Poster bros:**  
**Tim Ferriss,**  
**Joe Rogan**

This diet, arguably popularised by Ferriss's appearance on Rogan's podcast, is high in fat and low in carbs (including fruit and veg). Some people find it beneficial, but adherence is difficult.

#### Carnivore

**Poster bros:**  
**The Liver King,**  
**Jordan Peterson**

Peterson purportedly eats nothing but beef and salt, while the Liver King preaches the benefits of eating raw offal. Approach with caution and consult a (qualified) expert.

### WILD

the perceptual awareness of them." The idea of all this self-experimentation, he stresses, is not to spend your entire life mapping your biomarkers on Google Sheets. The idea is to find out what exactly works for your body, so you can gain a measure of control over it. "There's a way of doing it that's obsessive and controlling and counterproductive," he says. "And there's a way to underdo it, too, when you're shoving whatever into your mouth. But there is a sweet spot."

### Finding What Works

My own experience bears that out – up to a point. I've tried a few outlandish diets in my time. I once did a week-long juice cleanse at the behest of *Vogue* and a 'dopamine fast' that required me to ingest absolutely nothing (no food, media or conversation) for 36 hours. I've also kept my wife company on an enigmatic lose-a-stone-in-a-week diet that she found on the internet just before she turned 40 (lots of grapefruit and eggs). I've invariably found these experiments interesting. I've found I don't need carbs nearly as much as I think I do, and you can get back a lot of time and money if you swap a lunchtime trip to the sandwich bar for a cinnamon-swirl-flavoured Huel. Also: it's actually quite a relief to cede control to some

higher authority, even if it's just some dude on the internet. Diets help you with that.

But still, up to a point. I was rather taken with Brandt's Ketone drink and its promise to support mental clarity. Only, on my second morning of drinking it, I inexplicably fainted and lost a whole two days of work. So much for efficiency. I've also tried my friend Damian's fast – only to find myself feeling distracted all day and binge-eating in the evening. The more you consciously think about it, the more you obsess, and the more out of control it feels. I can't help thinking that I was intuitively eating much better when I wasn't thinking about my inputs and outputs all the time. Overall, it's basic things that make the difference – picking wholemeal bread, an apple instead of a Snickers. But no one wants me to talk about that on a podcast.

And is all this focus on nutrition even reaching the men who need it? Nutritionist Rob Hobson doesn't think so. "The men most influenced by the keto diet and the paleo diet tend to be the worried well, those with an interest in improving their physique or athletic performance in some way," he says. "But it's easy to fall into the trap of focusing on men who are already fit and looking to get healthier, leaner or improve their performance while having little weight to really lose." Here is a sobering fact: 75 per cent of men are overweight or obese in Australia. "This is the group that needs the most help," says Hobson. He points to studies that show a significant number of men perceive weight loss as a feminised space and are reluctant to talk about it with friends. Some are in denial about weight problems, reflecting a broader social acceptance of overweight men than women. "These men often do nothing about their weight until they receive an alarming diagnosis from their doctor."

As for the worried well – well, true enlightenment comes from accepting certain things are beyond your control. But it might also be a question of being honest about why we do all this. As for my mate Damian? He's into bodybuilding now. "[Intermittent fasting] was an ongoing experiment into how I felt, what I needed and what I wanted," he says. "But this?" he says, referring to his new musculature. "This is cosmetic. I want my muscles to look like this."

So the reason is... vanity? He laughs. "It makes you feel great, it gives you a routine, and it makes you feel strong. I mean, there are practical advantages – but that's not really why you do it," he laughs. "My body is now as close as I'll ever get to Brad Pitt in *Fight Club*. That was the goal." And who am I to judge. ■



# ***THE FUTURE OF FITNESS***

From wild innovations in virtual fitness and the at-home tech revolution to the triumphant return of group exercise, today's (and tomorrow's!) training landscape offers everyone a way to get their sweat on >

BY **MH WRITERS** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JEAN-YVES LEMOIGNE**



# VIRTUAL TRAINING, REAL SWEAT

## Can training in the MetaVerse really deliver results IRL?

BY PETER FLAX

MY JOURNEY to the future of fitness begins with 30 seconds of time travel. I park my car at Venice Beach, adjacent to the most iconic Gold's Gym on the planet. I admire the sprawling yard – where big dudes in skimpy tops deadlift in the sunshine – then walk half a block and light-years away to the headquarters of Supernatural, a leading virtual-reality fitness developer.

Ten minutes later, wearing a goofy Quest 2 headset, I'm boxing on the moon. A few minutes after that, I fire off jabs and throw uppercuts on the edge of Yosemite's Taft Point, bobbing and weaving as Drake belts out "Headlines". Working out in the metaverse is more literal than I'd imagined. Sweat trickles down my neck, and my heart rate edges north of zone 2. The sensors in the Quest's handheld controllers tell the app how quickly and accurately I'm punching. Not bad for a newbie! I throw my first crisp left-right-left combination and glance over my left shoulder at Half Dome and the 90-metre drop from this snowy precipice.

As someone who previously has worked out while carrying an iPod, a Discman and even a brick-sized Walkman, I find exercising with a Quest 2 to be a wondrously transformative experience in a moderately comical form. In a similar vein, the offerings presently available in the app marketplace still have an early-days feel. The options are far broader if you want to immerse yourself in first-person-shooter or porn action. Companies such as Sony,

ByteDance and Apple are expected to introduce or push new headset products in the next year or so, and Meta is testing new data-collection methods that would allow users to play without holding controllers. Over a few weeks, I tried a range of the latest VR fitness games, including cycling in Paris with Holofit, stretching my glutes in Tahiti with FitXR, and doing hand-eye-coordination drills with Reakt. I can report that these early offerings are fun, sweaty and surprisingly addictive.

During my visit to Supernatural HQ, I got to watch Leanne Pedante, the company's head of fitness, record intros and segues and voice-over exhortations for a "monster" 40-minute flow session in a blue-screen studio. The making of each workout is like a modest film production, combining scripting, animation, live action, music curation and extensive postproduction. Supernatural, which didn't even exist at the beginning of the pandemic, now has nearly 70,000 users in its official community Facebook group.

One reason for the rise of exercise-forward VR apps is how they deliver gamified stealth fitness: the imaginative verisimilitude translates into a real-life metabolic boost that has been substantiated scientifically. Consider a 2022 study from researchers at San Francisco State, which concluded that subjects playing three active VR games had a measurable gap between their perceived exertion and their actual exertion – meaning the apps induced people to push harder than they realised.

The actual exertion might surprise you. It certainly surprised me that a 30-minute routine of throwing punches or chopping targets could get my heartbeat into EDM territory. No one knows this more precisely than Jimmy Bagley, an associate professor of kinesiology at San Francisco State and a cofounder of the Virtual Reality Institute of Health and Exercise. Using a metabolic mask, his team can measure the oxygen usage of people playing various active VR games and thus calculate how many kilojoules are burned by sustained play. "Many people think these games are gimmicky," says Bagley. "But now that

we're doing this testing, it's clear that it *is* exercise." Supernatural's boxing is currently a top kilojoule burner in the VR space, according to Bagley's research, with users able to burn around 50 kilojoules per minute in a half-hour workout at the hard setting.

Is there a catch? You can't lift weights with the existing technology, which for a lot of people means VR will at best supplement what they're doing at the gym, on the playing field or in an endurance sport. The headset itself isn't cheap (about US\$400), and the better apps are subscription based. (Still, all are less costly than a gym membership.) Also, the Quest 2 can feel bulky when you're moving around, especially on a spin bike, and can get *really* sweaty if you're going hard.

There's no evidence that injuries are a systemic problem with VR, but a few studies and the community forums for these apps contain a smattering of posts about overuse injuries. More sobering is the risk of damaging your home through your metaversal exertion. Market research out of the UK found that VR-related homeowner-insurance claims rose 31 per cent in 2021, and there is a most entertaining Reddit thread cataloguing

household disasters wrought by the Oculus crowd. In my own living room, my 15-year-old son meandered to the side during a VR boxing routine and threw a memorable right cross into the wall, missing a glass cabinet door by centimetres. I can't overstate the importance of creating a safe space before you unleash your inner Tyson Fury.

I had imagined that the dominant audience for these apps was youngish gamers who already owned a VR headset – the dudes always trying to convince their friends that gaming is a sport. And while this demographic is quite real, reps for both Supernatural and rival Holofit say that a surprisingly large cohort of older people are signing up, as are tens of thousands of men and women who are searching for a different way to workout at home. The truth is, lots of people struggle to find a routine that works for them. Maybe they dislike being on display at the gym – whether they're heavy, trans, introverted, slow to pick up routines, intimidated by advanced gymgoers or uninterested in returning to pre-pandemic habits. Perhaps they don't feel like dealing with the cost and logistics of a gym membership or want to hole up

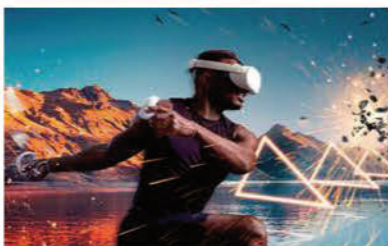
inside when the weather is bad. For these people, a VR exercise routine is infinitely better than no routine at all.

In my case, a VR headset will probably never sit at the centre of my fitness life. I love the experiential qualities of moving outside. I feel at home in IRL gym culture. But I already know that this tech will make my starting rotation. It's a fun warm-up for other activities and an effective tool for squeezing in exercise on busy days when my workout plans fall apart.

I frequently travel for work and dread stepping into uninspired hotel gyms. VR could be my salvation. For example, early on the morning that I filed this story, I was whacked-out on time zones and was wide-awake before sunrise. There was no chance I was going downstairs to the gym. So I strapped on my gear, and did a Supernatural boxing workout. I was in an anonymous room in boxer briefs, but instantly I was jabbing beside a wintry tarn in Wyoming as Post Malone riffed about love lost. For 20 heart-thumping minutes, I was transported to a faraway place where exercise isn't really work.

## SWIVEL, PUNCH, SLASH!

Three games – sorry, workouts – we like from the metaverse



### SUPERNATURAL

Rating: 9 out of 10

Features boxing, stretching, meditation and a flow workout, during which you follow an instructor to duck, squat and slash flying objects in IMAX-quality 360° settings with a legit thumping playlist.

[getsupernatural.com](https://www.getsupernatural.com)



### REAKT

Rating: 8 out of 10

Has a "sports science meets Tron" vibe. It digitises training to hone reaction time and hand-eye coordination. The app is a consumer-facing version of a platform used by pro teams to improve cognitive skills over time. [reakttrainer.com](https://www.reakttrainer.com)



### HOLOFIT

Rating: 7 out of 10

Allows users to exercise in virtual worlds (with either fitness machines or bodyweight) in 360° animated environments. Best for folks who dig cardio but want more stimulation and don't vibe with Zwift, Peloton or SoulCycle. [holodia.com](https://www.holodia.com)

# HOW DATA HELPS YOU MUSCLE UP

**Connected fitness devices routinely collect workout info. Tonal is finally using that data to help you move better**

BY EBENEZER SAMUEL

IMAGINE A PERSONAL TRAINER who's worked with hundreds of thousands of clients, charting every single rep of every single movement with each of them. Now imagine that you could access that trainer's knowledge for every workout, simply with a few taps on a touch screen. This is the power of Tonal's artificial intelligence, which has collected every shred of data on every single rep of every single exercise done by its users. For the past four years, during each exercise, Tonal has tracked the speed and direction of its cables, allowing it to calculate how explosively its users are moving, when they're fatiguing and where their form is breaking. At the end of last year, the company also started gathering video insights, thanks to a new Smart View function that lets you record your workouts.

It's all part of the company's goal to help you maximise how you train, whether or not you're working out on one of its machines. If you have a Tonal, its data quietly informs the resistance it gives you and the rep counts it pushes

you through, says Troy Taylor, Tonal's senior performance director. Don't have one? You'll still benefit: the company is partnering with a host of researchers, including trainer Brad Schoenfeld, for peer-reviewed studies on projects that rely on its data to explore resistance and arm-muscle recruitment, variable resistance and strength improvements, and more.

Consider the reverse lunge, which is a lift that many gym newbies struggle with. More than a million lunge reps are done on Tonal each week, and the information those reps provide helps the machine guide Tonal users to quality reps that can make their legs stronger and more stable.

No, it can't deliver inspiring motivational cues or notice ultra-subtle flaws in your form like an IRL trainer can. But Tonal's advanced data can get you started on the basics of the reverse lunge, an exercise every guy should learn to do. And Tonal's data indicates exactly where most users struggle with the move.



## THE AI REVERSE-LUNGE CHECK LAB

**Tonal's AI reveals that 14.3 per cent of reverse-lunge sets include incorrectly done reps, often due to these three mistakes**

Mistake

1

### SHORTENING THE RANGE OF MOTION

The goal is to lower until your front thigh is parallel to the floor and your back knee nearly touches down. But many people stop their reps early, limiting quad and glute gains.

#### YOUR FIX ► FREEZE FRAME

Pause at the bottom, says veteran performance trainer DeVetri Jordan. "You'll learn not to hide from the end of your range of motion," he says.



## TONAL LUNGES AT A GLANCE

Average number of all lunge reps done per week:

**1,067,672**

Average weight lifted per rep:

**14 KG**

Total weight of all lunges per week:

**16,382 tonnes**

Average time spent on each Lunge:

**2.89 SECONDS**



Mistake

### LOWERING TOO QUICKLY

**2**

Once you've stepped back to begin a rep, lower slowly. Tonal users sometimes miss this, thudding their back knee into the floor on every rep.

#### YOUR FIX ► **ADD TEMPO**

Take 2-3 seconds to lower on every rep – and count out loud. You'll have to appreciate the eccentric portion of each rep and increase time under tension.

Mistake

### FORWARD KNEE TRAVEL

**3**

At the bottom of each lunge rep, aim for a 90° angle at your front knee. Especially if you're a beginner, you'll want to follow this rule to protect your knees from injury.

#### YOUR FIX ► **THINK "CHEST UP"**

This will encourage you to lower your torso straight down, limiting how much your knee can drift forward. Still struggling? Drive the heel of your front foot into the floor, too. ►

# THE RECOVERY REVOLUTION COMES HOME

High-Tech recovery is no longer just for the pros. Here's how you can get in on the fun

BY LINDSAY BERRA

## EXPLORE THE ESSENTIALS

### MASSAGE GUN

► The easy entry point into recovery science (from \$199 for the **THERAGUN MINI** to \$699 for the **HYPERICE HYPERVOLT 2 PRO**). Run it over a muscle for 15 seconds pre-workout to encourage blood flow. It's great for busy people wedging workouts into active schedules.

### CONTRAST THERAPY

► The **HYPERICE X** (US\$399) hits your knee with bursts of ultracold (for pain relief) and heat (for blood flow), ideal for chronic knee aches. All athletes over 40 should consider this.



TANK TOP BY VAST; LICENSE TO TRAIN TIGHTS BY LULULEMON.

## SLEEP GOGGLES

► **THERABODY SMARTGOGGLES** (\$299) aim to evolve the sleep mask, blending heat and vibration to relieve eye strain and help you rest. They're far from perfect (for now!), so don't leap to get this iteration. But keep an eye on the space; everyone can stand to get more quality sleep.

## ELECTRO-STIMULATION

► Electrical muscle stimulators essentially contract and relax muscles quickly, which helps decongest swollen tissue. That happens regularly if you walk frequently. Weekend runners struggling to get steps in, consider **POWERDOT** (from \$289).

## RED-LIGHT THERAPY

► Exposing yourself to near-infrared light (via a device like **JOOVV**, which starts at US\$445) can increase blood flow, which speeds up the healing process. It's best for areas that lack good circulation, like your elbows and feet. Runners and tennis players, take a look.

## AIR COMPRESSION

► Boots like the **HYPERICE NORMATEC 3 LEGS** (\$1500) tighten and then loosen around your legs repeatedly, increasing blood flow to lessen soreness and increase IGF-1 growth factor production. That's useful if you've hit #legday hard. Aspiring bodybuilders, this one's for you.

# UNDERSTAND THE METRICS THAT MATTER

The tracking revolution lets you analyse an alphabet soup of body stats. Where does a biohacker start? With the basics – then evolve

## CHECK YOUR LOAD DAILY

### Movement

**Score:** From Whoop's strain score to daily steps (aim for 8200+), workload tells you how much you need to rest.

### Training Score:

How was your last workout? Monitor your typical training heart rate: it'll indicate when you're getting fit.

### Sleep Score:

There's no better metric than quality sleep, which releases hormones that your body needs for repair.

## STUDY YOUR TRAINING RESPONSE

### Heart-Rate Variability:

HRV can quickly tell you when you're fatigued – or strong. Watch how you're trending over seven days; day-to-day changes matter less.

### Resting Heart Rate:

A low resting heart rate indicates readiness. This number will fluctuate less than your HRV. Apple Watch's heart-rate data is among the deepest.

## CONSIDER LONG-TERM DATA

### VO2 MAX:

Is your regimen working? Find out by taking this gruelling test of your cardiorespiratory fitness.

### CGM:

Data from continuous glucose monitors can be inexact. Check insulin-sensitivity data once a year.

### Blood Tests:

Products like InsideTracker offer info that's useful for runners and triathletes, who often overtrain.

**What's Next** The **Oura Ring** and **Apple Watch** are here now, but a new wave of devices will define the future of fitness metrics.

**Hydration Tracking** The **Nix biosensor** analyses your sweat during training to determine water needs. For round-the-clock tracking, check out the **Masimo W1** health-tracking watch.

**HRV Coaching** How can you make your HRV better? Enter **Lief**, which attaches to your torso and promises to teach you to manage your HRV and stress levels – and may be covered by insurance.

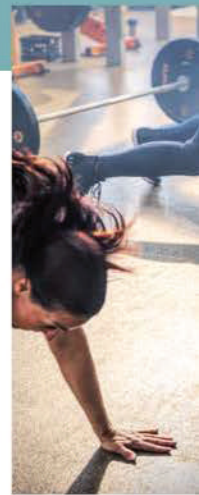
**Hearables** The issue with smartwatches: your wrist motion can subtly affect your data. That's not a problem with "hearables", a new generation of trackers that sit in your ear canal. ►

**OUR EXPERT RECOVERY PANEL** Dan Giordano, PT, Bespoke Treatments physical therapist // Navin Hettiarachchi, former Washington Wizards performance director // Raphael Brandon, head of performance science at Break Away Data, which tracks data insights for athletes // Brandon M. Marcella, researcher and high-performance strategist // Kelly Starrett, cofounder of the ReadyState

# THE NEXT CROSSFIT

BY ANDREW HEFFERNAN, C.S.C.S.

LIKE A GYM BIG BANG, CrossFit transformed the landscape in 2000, popularising functional training, group classes and burpees and changing the vocabulary of exercise (WOD, AMRAP, HIIT). Now a quartet of US brands – Hyrox, Deka, Life Time and Spartan – is aiming to evolve some of its concepts, namely intensity, competition, functional strength and community. We rate how they're doing.



## FOR THE ULTRA COMPETITOR: HYROX

_ INTENSITY	
_ COMPETITION	
_ COMMUNITY	
_ FUNCTION	

► Think of Hyrox as an indoor 'race' of functional moves. Each event has you take on eight 1000-metre runs. Between runs, you complete one of eight challenges. Like CrossFit, Hyrox delivers accessible strength moves. And gradually, gyms and trainers have started building training plans specifically for Hyrox.

### GET YOUR HYROX ON

**Directions:** Do 4 rounds of this circuit. Rest 60 seconds between rounds.

- 1) SkiErg: 500 metres.
- 2) Farmer's carry: 50 metres. Aim to use 30-kg weights.
- 3) Walking lunge: 20 reps per leg. Aim to use 10-kg weights.
- 4) Wall ball: 25 reps.

## FOR THE WOD LOVER: LIFE TIME ALPHA

_ INTENSITY	
_ COMPETITION	
_ COMMUNITY	
_ FUNCTION	

► Imagine CrossFit with consistency over chaos. That's Alpha, an hour-long class available at Life Time's more than 160 US locations. Each Alpha class consists of a dynamic warmup, strength work (think CrossFit moves, like deadlifts), and a metabolic conditioning circuit. And yes, you can do it seven days a week.

### GET YOUR ALPHA ON

**Directions:** End your next workout with this finisher. Set a clock for 7 minutes. Then complete as many rounds as possible. Aim to finish at least 4.

- 1) Cardio row: Burn 10 calories.
- 2) Push-up: 10 reps.
- 3) Goblet squat: 10 reps. Use a 10-kg dumbbell.

## FOR THE WEEKEND warrior: DEKA RACING

_ INTENSITY	
_ COMPETITION	
_ COMMUNITY	
_ FUNCTION	

► Known as the "Decathlon of Functional Fitness," Deka takes aim at intensity and competition in a beginner-friendly atmosphere. You can enter (and survive) a Deka race on a whim, but you will be challenged, especially by the final event, which requires you to do 20 burpees with a 20 kg weight.

### GET YOUR DEKA ON

**Directions:** Do 4 rounds of this circuit. Rest 40 seconds between rounds.

- 1) Reverse lunge: 10 reps per leg, holding 10-kg weights.
- 2) Fan bike: Burn 18 calories.
- 3) Box stepover: Use a 24-inch box or step. Do 10 reps per leg.
- 4) Weighted sit-up: 20 reps.



FOR the group-fitness fan:  
**SPARTAN RACE**

- INTENSITY 🔥🔥🔥🔥
- COMPETITION 🔥🔥🔥🔥
- COMMUNITY 🔥🔥🔥🔥
- FUNCTION 🔥🔥🔥🔥

► Founded in 2007, Spartan has been reimagined into a less rugged race focused more on community. It remains challenging, but you can take it on with gym buddies. If you fail on any obstacle, in most races you'll draw a 30-burpee penalty. Like CrossFit, Spartan has online content to make you a better competitor.

**GET YOUR SPARTAN ON**

**Directions:** Find an outdoor park and tackle this speedy 1-round circuit. Do a 2-minute jog between movements.

- 1) Monkey bar traverse: 40 seconds.
- 2) Burpee: 10 reps.
- 3) Bear crawl: 1 minute.
- 4) Box jump: 10 reps.

BEN MOUNSEY-WOOD (ILLUSTRATIONS)

# THE MOVES OF THE FUTURE

Rows and kettlebell swings may be your training mainstays – but don't you want to try something new? Here are three innovative and effective moves

## THORACIC ROTATION

The future of mobility training involves more than basic dynamic stretches like cat-cow. Trainer Vernon Griffith (@vernongriffith4 on IG) wants you twisting your torso, a key action you'll do more with moves like this.

► Set up in a half-kneeling stance, left shoulder, hip and knee touching a wall, hands on your head, back arched. Staying close to the wall, shift your torso forward and rotate to the right so your chest now faces away from the wall. Slowly return to the start. That's 1 rep; do reps for 30 secs on each side. Do 2-3 sets.



## SHUFFLE BALANCE

The foot-health revolution has paved the way for you to embrace agility drills, which Rischad Whitfield (on IG as @footwork\_king) loves. Not just for athletes, they can aid in ankle mobility. This Whitfield favourite is a good start.

► Set up or draw 2 circles as shown. Stand to the right of the rightmost one, balancing on the ball of your right foot. Shuffle your left foot, then your right foot, into each circle, landing to the left of the leftmost one, balancing on the ball of your left foot. Pause. Reverse back to the start. That's 1 rep. Do 3-4 sets of 4.



## HIP AIRPLANE

Hip mobility is central to every athletic movement – and it's becoming more popular thanks to trainers like Aaron Horschig, who regularly posts moves like this on his Instagram (@squat\_university).

► Stand barefoot, left foot off the floor. Spread your arms out and hinge forward over your right leg. Aim for a straight line from shoulder through left ankle. Rotate your chest to the left, then back to the right. Return to standing. Do 1-2 sets of 5-10 reps per leg, working to increase reps over time. ■



# REDEFINING

# ABILITY

Roughly one in five of us live with some form of what's usually called a disability. **But difference is not weakness – in fitness, work or life.** *MH* spoke to five men about how the things that once held them back have ultimately unleashed their potential

BY ALEX GARDNER AND KEVIN SWAN PHOTOGRAPHY BY JORDAN NICHOLSON

But first, a word from one of our authors... As a man who uses a wheelchair – no, those are not my abs on the right, though my mum says I'm very handsome, too – I have an interesting relationship with my own disability. Born with chronically weak muscles from a condition called central core disease, I have never been able to walk or stand. While I can't possibly hide that fact in person, it's something I hope fades from view when people get to know me. I want the world to see Alex: a funny (hopefully), smart (it could be argued) guy who sends too many TikTok videos of cats. The men on the following pages are equally unique. They inspire me, not because they are people with disabilities who are changing our world, but because they are embracing all of who they are, while relentlessly and ambitiously pursuing big goals. We are not who we are despite our disabilities or because of them. We just are – and want the most out of life. Who couldn't relate? >

*Woody Belfort,  
Champion bodybuilder.  
Read his story on  
the next page.*

W





Belfort brings crazy stunts to his bodybuilding sets.

# THE HEAVY LIFTER

**WOODY BELFORT, 26**, champion bodybuilder and motivational speaker

"I'M A BODYBUILDER. Yes, you heard that right. You're probably thinking of guys who look like the former governor of California and whose arms are so big they can't scratch their backs – not a man whose legs don't work. But for the past three years, my goal has been not only to get jacked and put on a show for the audience, but to make people rethink what a strong body looks like.

I was born with a form of cerebral palsy and have used a wheelchair for essentially my whole life. Some people with a physical disability may steer away from activities that are just that – physical. I steer into them. But more than overcoming obstacles, I want to be in the spotlight, competing and enjoying the moment.

In June 2022, I entered a bodybuilding competition, the IFBB Professional League Toronto Pro SuperShow. I like to select poses that show I'm big and I'm not here to mess around. I try to hold myself



**I SELECT POSES THAT SHOW I'M BIG AND NOT HERE TO MESS AROUND"**

in positions for two seconds or more to demonstrate strength and stamina. I did some of the standard upper-body poses, but then I shared my own moves – the ones I came up with.

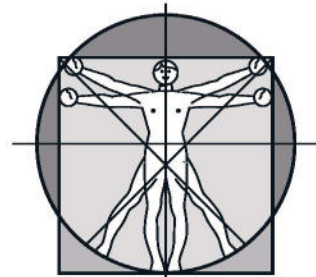
I did a backflip in my wheelchair. Then I did a handstand and held it with the chair upside down, too, still attached. At the end of my routine, I balanced on the

chair's foot bar and pulled off both wheels to finish out my poses. The audience loved it. Standing ovation!

In the bodybuilding community, I'm the only one doing crazy stunts. I taught

myself them because I thought they would be cool.

I hope kids with disabilities see me and that it inspires them to try things they want to do. It's worth the training and hard work. We are in control of how we live our lives. We set our own limits. We can challenge them. If something looks fun, why not try it?"



# THE NEW VITRUVIAN MAN

**JERRON HERMAN, 31**, professional dancer





JERRON HERMAN never expected to become a dancer. Then he interned with a theatre company in New York and was inspired. During college, he auditioned for Heidi Latsky Dance, a collective of dancers with and without disabilities. "Heidi was interested in my form of cerebral palsy, as I moved in a way that excited her, even though the left side of my body is impacted by spasms and mostly restricted movement," he says. He became a lead dancer and eventually began performing independently, booking shows everywhere from the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to the Whitney Museum of American Art.

“**EVERY SINGLE TIME I DANCE, I AM COMMUNICATING FREEDOM**”

"You have to give yourself grace," Herman says. "My movement on the day of a performance could be very different from prior rehearsals. I have learned to be okay with that. There's even a beauty in the uniqueness of each performance. I most recently choreographed and performed, as a black disabled man, my rendition of Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man to get others to think about disability aesthetics and man's function. But I think every single time I dance, I am communicating freedom. It's the freedom to be true to myself. The freedom to listen to my body. The freedom to create. You don't need to be able-bodied to be free."



Every performance Herman gives is beautifully unique.



PHOTOGRAPHY: JORDAN NICHOLSON (BEI FORT), NOAH BEVUS (HERMAN), ELIZABETH COX (WITOUS)

Witous is a black belt in taekwondo and a CrossFit king.

# THE WORLD'S FITTEST DWARF

**MIKEY WITOUS, 30**, WheelWOD champion and CrossFit athlete

## 220KG

That's the weight the self-proclaimed "fittest dwarf on earth" can back-squat. He can also do 30 pull-ups in a row. And he took first place in the inaugural short-stature division of WheelWOD, an adaptive CrossFit competition. "I want to show parents of dwarfs that everything will be okay," explains Witous.

## FIVE DAYS

That's how often Witous trains each week at his local CrossFit gym in South Bend, Indiana, US. "I believe in rest both mentally and physically," he says. "I don't want to burn out, so I make sure I'm enjoying it and not making it feel like work."

## ONE IN 40,000

Those are the rough odds of Mikey Witous's average-height parents having a child with achondroplasia, one of several genetic conditions associated with dwarfism. While Witous has three average-height siblings, he became the family sports star. Inspired by the film *Rudy* – about 170cm American football player Rudy Ruettiger – he played football as a kid and wrestled competitively enough in high school to be recruited by college teams before a diagnosis of spinal stenosis forced him to quit or risk paralysis. He's also earned a black belt in taekwondo and dominated at CrossFit.

## 18 YEARS OLD

That's the age Witous was when he attended his first Little People of America event, a place for people of short stature to connect. "I realised just being able to look eye to eye with another person, or not receiving stares or laughs or people trying to take your picture, was actually nice."

## 20,000+ FOLLOWERS

@MikeySwoosh1 is crushing it on Instagram. "My parents always made it known that dreams can be reality if you work hard enough," he says. "My favourite thing my mum ever told me was, 'Life's not fair; get over it. The sooner you do, the sooner you'll be happy.'" ➤



Holness doesn't see his autism as a disadvantage.



# THE 'OPENLY AUTISTIC'

**SAM HOLNESS, 29**, Ironman World Championship competitor



"I HAVE A FAVOURITE SHIRT I wear at every race. It says boldly in big letters, 'Autism is my superpower'. I don't see my autism as a disability but as an advantage, because being autistic allows me to be ultra-focused and not easily distracted during endurance races. I see myself as an athlete with autism rather than an autistic athlete.

My autism probably plays a role in how energised I feel. My dad thinks it's crazy how I can rise and shine without ever thinking, *I really don't feel like training today*. It's routine to wake up and train every day except for Friday, my rest day. I just do it, even when I have to train in a 40°C heat chamber. During a race, I can cycle for 112 miles [180km] without losing concentration. I'll tell myself, 'Come on, legs', and keep going. It's just how my brain works. I will never give up.

Earning my degree in sports science has helped with many of the tools that

are necessary to become a competitive triathlete. This includes the use of metrics such as VO2 max, heart rate and power output during cycling and running. I focus on increasing or decreasing those numbers to improve my performance.

Last year, I completed the Ironman 70.3 World Championship in Utah, and a

reporter said that I was the first autistic person to do it. My dad and I corrected them. I was the first openly autistic person. Autism is an invisible condition. We assumed there had to have

been many autistic athletes competing. Sure enough, plenty of individuals soon started coming forward. I compete against neurotypical people because there isn't a category for people like me with intellectual disability.

I want everyone to not only see me as a person, but see what people and athletes like me can accomplish."



**IT'S JUST HOW MY BRAIN WORKS. I WILL NEVER GIVE UP"**

# THE NEW UROLOGY OPERATIVE

**DEREK HERRERA, 38**, former Marine Raider team commander and founder and CEO of Bright Uro

“ON 14 JUNE 2012, I led a small team to conduct an ambush patrol in Afghanistan and we came under heavy fire. I was shot through my left shoulder and the bullet caused a bit of damage on its way to my spine. I have a spinal-cord injury and am paralysed from the chest down. One of the major problems for people like me is that you can’t empty your bladder without using catheters, and that the bladder becomes spastic and overactive.

Personally, I went from planning and leading some of the most challenging special operations in the world to – in an instant – the total opposite end of the spectrum, where I have anxiety any time I go out with friends and drink a beer, hoping that I don’t piss myself. But after I put my ego and self-doubt aside, I realised that so many others have some serious trials and tribulations. If you live long enough, you will be challenged. The way you respond is the true measure of your character.



*Herrera has always been motivated by helping others.*



**“HOW YOU RESPOND TO CHALLENGES IS THE TRUE MEASURE OF YOUR CHARACTER”**

I decided to go to business school. In March 2021, I founded Bright Uro to develop the next generation of diagnostic devices for urology. We’re using tech developed at the Cleveland Clinic to create the first wireless, catheter-free method to help diagnose lower urinary

tract symptoms. The field of urodynamics hasn’t changed in nearly 50 years. Ultimately, this will help millions dealing with incontinence or other bladder issues.

I have always been motivated by service and helping others. Bladder function is one of the most personal bodily functions. Helping someone regain control over something they thought was lost forever motivates me to push forwards through any obstacles we may face.”

## HERRERA’S MANTRAS

### ADVERSITY IS YOUR ASSET

Basketball coach John Wooden’s famous maxim helped Herrera think about how to inspire positive change. Here are three more mantras he deploys:

### CALM BREEDS CALM

In all aspects of life, the example you set is contagious and will influence others, he says. “Some of the best Marines I have ever served with taught me this.”

### YOU CAN LEARN SOMETHING FROM EVERYONE YOU MEET

“In the special-operations world, we deploy to foreign countries and work with people from all walks of life. Without this skill, ego can get in the way.”

### EVERY DAY IS A CHOICE

“While I was dealing with [my injury], three Marines I served with were killed in Afghanistan. Every day, I choose to take advantage of the opportunities I have.”

## ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS



### KEVIN SWAN, 41,

has written for *Men’s Health* and *Fatherly* on topics such as mental strength and parenting. He has been a disability advocate since his diagnosis of amyotrophic lateral sclerosis in 2012.



### ALEX GARDNER, 32,

has written for *Men’s Health* and is currently a senior press officer for a medical school and health system in the US. He uses an electric wheelchair and plays the violin, piano and guitar.



### JORDAN NICHOLSON, 33,

has photographed Pharrell, Drake and Ciara. Born with TAR syndrome, a rare condition that causes short arms, he believes his unique perspective informs his work. ■

# UN INTER RUPTED

ALSTRAIAN  
**Women's Health**

**WEEKLY  
EPISODES**

Join the *Women's Health* Australia team as we talk with a few well-known names and leading experts about all aspects of health and wellbeing in our weekly podcast. From the impact of orgasms on mental health to debunking the latest diet fads, no topic is out of bounds in this podcast series. These chats are honest, backed by research, and uninterrupted.



FIND 'UNINTERRUPTED BY WOMEN'S HEALTH AUSTRALIA' ON APPLE PODCASTS, SPOTIFY OR YOUR FAVOURITE PODCAST PLAYER

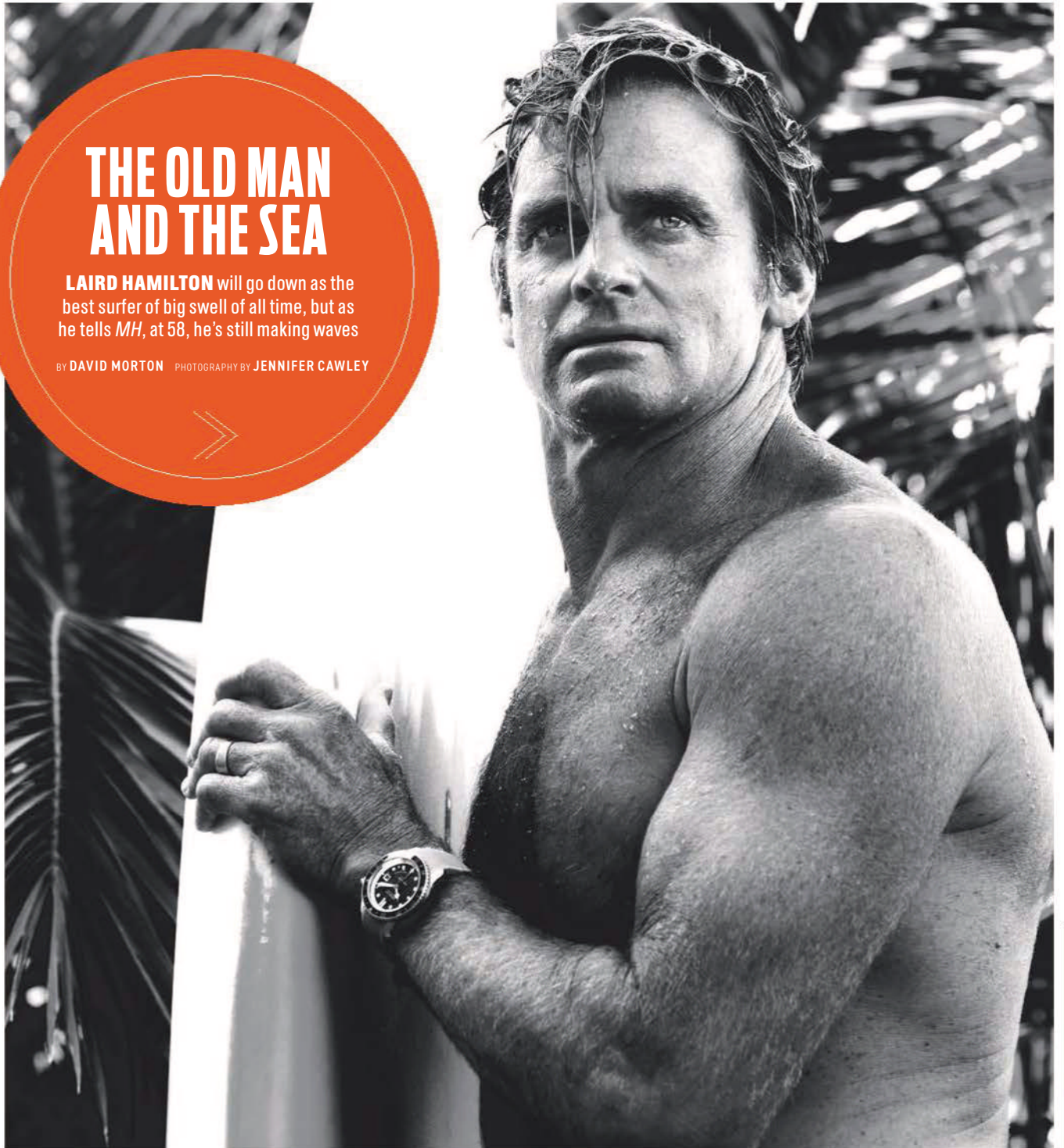
# TRAINER

BECAUSE FIT IS THE NEW RICH

## THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

**LAIRD HAMILTON** will go down as the best surfer of big swell of all time, but as he tells *MH*, at 58, he's still making waves

BY DAVID MORTON PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER CAWLEY



**Men's Health:** *You're still as famous for what you get up to on a surfboard as you were in your twenties and thirties. How have you managed it?*

**Laird Hamilton:** Well, I have a couple of things on my side. One of them is that my platform – my sport, my art – is not restricted by a structure that would make it more difficult to stay at the top. You see older guys in other sports, such as Tom Brady or Roger Federer, and your ability to participate decreases as the younger guys come in.

With surfing, you don't have to be in a structure like that. You don't have to tour around and be a part of a season and all that stuff. So that helps.

Passion is a big piece of it, too. You have to like what you do – love what you do and really want to do it.

Sometimes it's easy to get burned out because you've done it for so long. The schedule is brutal, the training is brutal. You just tap out. So retaining that passion is crucial. I've put a lot of effort and conscious thought into retaining my passion. I always use the quote "retain your youthful enthusiasm". It should be something fun. Make it interesting, make it exciting. Make it something you're learning.

I also make the effort to keep myself in one piece. I envy the guy who's in his forties, hasn't done much and everything works! His hips are good, the knees are good, the shoulders are good. You just need to have the discipline to work out



*"You have to love what you do and really want to do it. I've put a lot of effort and thought into retaining my passion"*

# 20m

## HAMILTON HAS SURFED WAVES HIGHER THAN FOUR GIRAFFES

a little. And you don't make it an option. You don't say that you might eat today, or you might not eat today. Or drink water or sleep or breathe. These aren't options; they're just things you do. Exercising needs to be one of those things you do.

Personally, I have to recover and rebuild the pieces after all my injuries. The truth is, I'm all in: my diet, my lifestyle, my sleep. Everything I do is to support the system. That includes making sure your relationships are good and that there are no distractions or deterrents from being positive. It's a daily struggle. Everyone thinks that the grass is always greener, but when

you get over there, it's just grass. We've all got the same things we need to deal with. It's our approach and techniques that are different.

**MH** *Has that routine evolved over the years? How different is it to the way you approached life, say, 20 years ago?*

**LH** Well, I used to drink alcohol, so one thing I've done for my overall wellbeing is stop drinking. That's one of the most challenging things that we can do. But the overall philosophy to my approach hasn't changed that much. It's all about diversity: some lifting, some cardio stuff, some stretching and some activities. I like doing

activities because it distracts you. If you go and ride a stationary bike, 20 minutes in and you're just looking at the clock. If you go out for a paddle in nature, or go ride a bike in the mountains, not only are you getting the benefits of nature, but you're distracted. An hour and a half in, you're not even thinking about the time.

The biggest change is that I'm aware of things that can undermine my overall wellness. I try to avoid any ego in my training. It's hard not to grab the big weights and ride for five hours, but you learn to listen to your body. That comes with maturity. You listen better.

**MH** *How has your attitude towards the ocean changed? Do you ever look back and think what you did was crazy?*

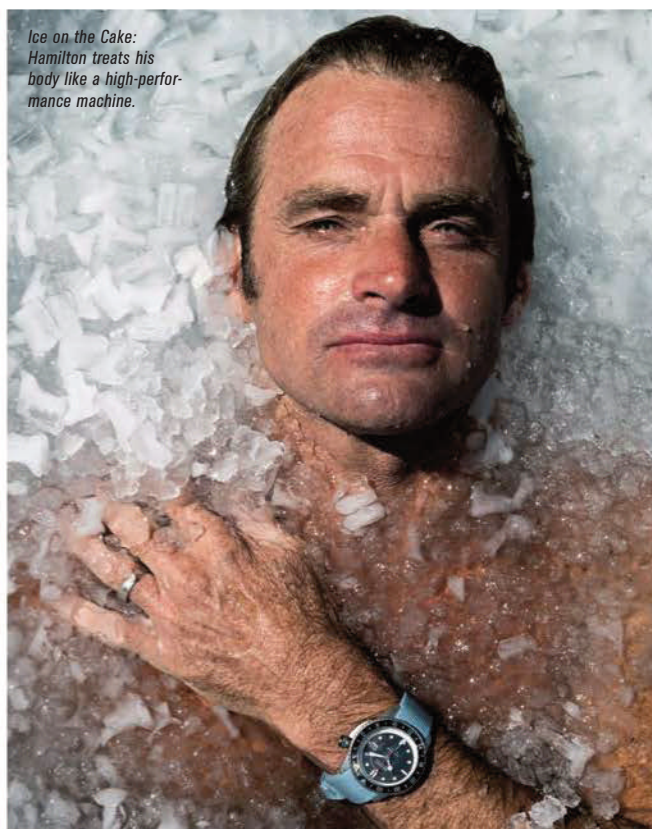
**LH** I hate to say it, and it's probably a sign of a lack of maturity, but I don't ever look back at situations and wonder what I was doing or thinking about. Okay, so maybe like the cover of *National Geographic* where I'm just wearing surf shorts and no flotation protection. We were flying by the seat of our pants and there was a lot more exposure then. But we just didn't know. You can't blame yourself for not knowing.

In terms of my appreciation of it all, I think I would have soaked it in a bit more. A friend always

*Point of Breaking: Hamilton eats the extreme for breakfast.*



*Ice on the Cake: Hamilton treats his body like a high-performance machine.*



of the stone – is something certain people share, regardless of their field. Those people can often switch to something else and have the same level of success. It's down to curiosity as much as it is discipline. You're constantly willing to learn and that's another huge piece of the process. Smart guys say they don't know anything.

**MH** *How much of 'polishing the stone' is about failure rather than success?*

**LH** It's what it means to you. How does failure sit with you? Are you okay with it? Show me a good loser and I'll show you a loser. If you talk to any of the top guys, the times they missed, or lost, or failed – those are at the top of their mind. Not the games won. That's what sharpens the tip of the spear. Those failures are the ones that shape and drive you. They are hugely impactful and motivating.

But then failure for me can also mean death, or at least serious injury. My body is like, "Hey! We can't let this happen again!" It's evolutionary. It's a deep biological response.

**MH** *Was there a situation you can pinpoint when you failed and learned?*

**LH** I watched that documentary about [free climber] Alex Honnold, and it focused on the point his brain changed, so he didn't get scared. I think he was exposed to a lot of circumstances we'd consider death-defying at a young age. It takes a lot of work in your own systems to get over that, to recalibrate. Personally, I was rescued a lot as a child. I was in rip currents, getting ▶

*Sinking Feeling: Underwater weight sessions help build strength and resilience.*



differently?" She said, "I would enjoy the moment more and I'd eat more ice cream". So he went straight to the fridge, grabbed a giant tub of ice cream and ate the whole thing.

My point is, be more appreciative of those unique moments, about why you're doing it. Soak in more rather than being so quick to devour it and move on to the next thing. Anything you do that's special to you, try to absorb it more. Be in it, while you're in it.

**MH** *Are there athletes in other sports that you feel an affinity with?*

**LH** In the pursuit of mastery, I think there are only similarities. I relate much more to Tom Brady than to most people who surf. What I do and the way I approach it is completely different to other surfers. That pursuit of mastery, that refinement – the polishing

tells the story of how at one point he was eating a lot of ice cream. He was eating pints of it every day and people would tell him that he was addicted. He replied that he could stop any time, so he stopped eating ice cream. Then he was watching a program about a woman who was 105 years old and she was asked, "What would you do

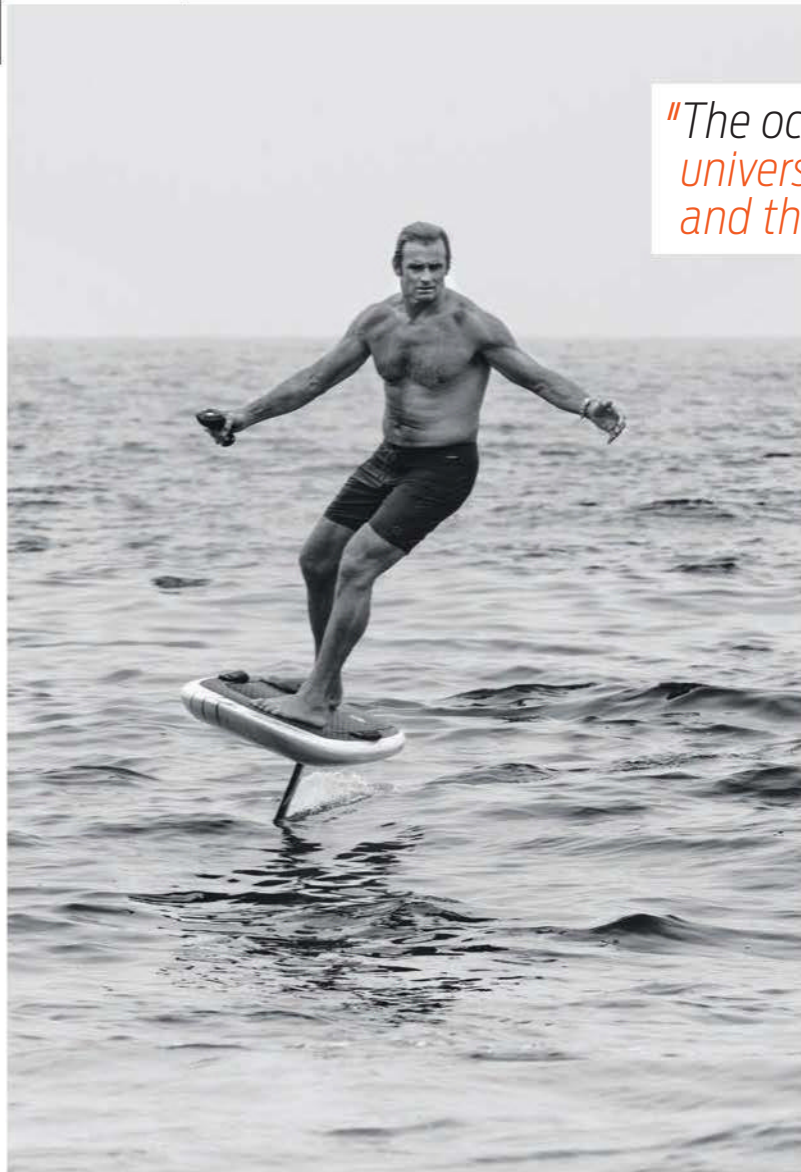
**Bremont Waterman Apex \$8250**

*"Laird is the ultimate innovator and a true Waterman. To have the opportunity to work with him has been a dream come true. And for him to become a Bremont ambassador, wearing our most high-performance diving watch, is just the icing on the cake."*

*Nick English, Bremont co-founder*



IMAGE COURTESY OF BREMONT



*"The ocean is alive. It has been my university and my church, my hospital and therapy. It cures your spirit"*

sucked out to sea on a regular basis. As a child, these things feel huge, and I thought I was going to drown a lot when I was growing up. But it happened so often that then I thought maybe I wasn't going to drown. I recalibrated.

**MH** *Do you feel like you were born to be in the water?*

**LH** First, I think there are exceptions to every rule. But my stepdad used to say that big-wave riders are born and not made. They can come from anywhere; they just have a calling to it. But when you have

someone with the natural disposition and skill, and then they're placed in an environment from an early age where they can lean into it, that's when you see real affinity. It can almost seem unreal. It seems to the layman as impossible. As magic. But it's being naturally suited to something and then having the perfect incubation.

**MH** *What has changed about your sport since you've been in it?*

**LH** The same as all sports. I think there's a lot of distraction and not so much of a foundation. Kids are not playing outside as much.

We're getting youngsters who know how to surf but can't swim very well. On the other hand, we're seeing an evolution in performance, whether that's due to equipment or the training and being more conscious of fitness.

The media has changed, too. We used to do it and then get filmed, so any footage of us surfing was crazy. It was special. Even a still photograph. But now every kid has a GoPro. Now every set of every day is published.

**MH** *With everyone always being 'on' and connected, do you feel a*

*sense of escape when you paddle out?*

**LH** Yeah, it works very well. I've surfed in front of thousands of people, but I get as much fulfillment from achieving things when people aren't watching. Probably more. I've worked at that – separating feelings of accomplishment from the audience. We're in a world now where we need other people to tell us if we're successful. We're giving up our sense of fulfillment to the masses, and that's why a lot of people are unhappy. I can go out surfing and have a great session alone, or with one or two others for a bit of natural camaraderie. That way you control your destiny.

**MH** *You've said before that surfing has saved you from going down a destructive path. How so?*

**LH** The ocean is a teacher. It's the most conductive substance on earth. It's alive. It takes bad energy out and gives you good energy. It's cognitive; there is a memory to it. You can't help but be humbled by it. You can give it all the aggression you've got and it will just absorb it like it's nothing. It's consistent and reliable. There are things about the ocean we need that we just don't get on land. Life came from the sea.

The ocean has been my university and my church, my hospital and therapy. It cures your spirit.

**MH** *Finally, you haven't followed the same route as the majority of sporting legends. You've often shunned the tours for big feats and firsts. Is being a pathfinder your personal mission?*

**LH** It's amazing. I could have never imagined the route I've taken. As a young charger, I had a belief that I wanted to have an impact. I didn't know what that was going to look like; I just wanted to be free. I was raised in a wild environment and my mum, an amazing woman, gave us freedom. Incredible freedom. I watched my stepdad surfing in contests and his fate being decided upon by a group of judges. I knew I never wanted to subject myself to that.

For me, it's art. It's an expression of me. The innovations have been invaluable. I started doing stand-up paddleboarding by myself in Hawaii and was the only one doing it for seven or eight years. Now it's happening around the whole world. There are guys riding the biggest waves ever using the techniques that we came up with. Those are my trophies. When I'm in a hole with a stone above my head, it's not the contest I've won that counts. It's the impact I've had and will continue to have long after I'm gone. For that young rapsallion who wanted to make a difference, that's all that matters. ■

*—Laird Hamilton is an ambassador for British watch brand Bremont*



**THE FINISHER**  
**YOUR TRIAL BY HELLFIRE**

*Lifting heavy is all well and good, but the ability to shift weight quickly, and under fatigue, is far more useful. This devilishly challenging full-body finisher will help to keep your rig in prime condition*

**THE FORMAT**

Jumper season is no reason to skip your conditioning work. This session will keep those lungs tickled and your heart ticking. Grab a pair of moderate-weight dumbbells and set yourself up near a clock or timer. This one follows an AMRAP format, which means you'll race through as many devilish rounds as possible – while maintaining saintly technique, of course – until the timer hits eight minutes. Warm-up, then jump in, resting only as necessary to make sure your form is tight.



START

1

**THE DEVIL'S DUES**

This hellish combo mashes up every move you love to hate; begin with the better part of a burpee: drop to the floor with your hands on your dumbbells and tap your chest to the floor. Hop your legs back towards your chest, brace your core and, in one motion, grip your bells and stand up explosively. Use the momentum to swing your dumbbells from between your legs to overhead. Lower to the ground and repeat; tick off five reps in quick succession.

2

**DO THE LEG WORK**

After your fifth and final devil's push-up, drop the dumbbells on to the front of your shoulders, take a deep breath and get ready to double the reps for 10 front squats. Breathe into your belly, creating a stable trunk, before pushing your hips back and sinking into a deep squat. Keep those shoulder blades back and dumbbells secure on your shoulders. Stand back up explosively and repeat.

3

**PUSH, PULL, REPEAT**

This move pumps your chest and back, combining a push-up with a single-arm row for 20 reps. It also gives your anti-rotational muscles something to think about. Drop into push-up position, your hands on the bells. Lower your chest down, then press up. At the top of each rep, row one of your bells up to your hip; switch sides after each push-up.



FINISH

4

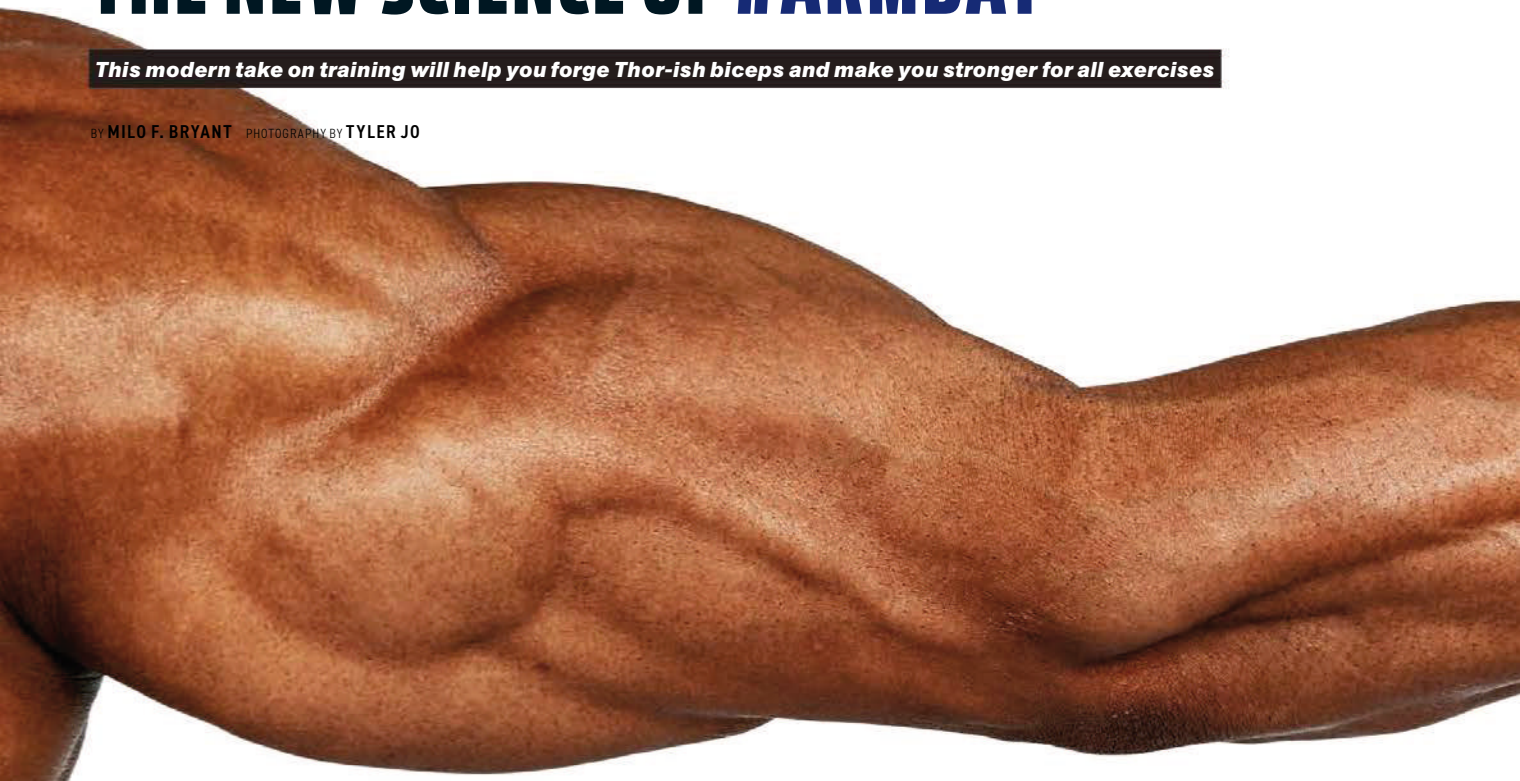
**HELL FOR LEATHER**

With your first round in the bag, you're going to cycle back to those devil's presses – and, good news, you're already in your starting position! With only eight mins on the clock, just try to keep moving. The end is nigh. Work through your reps quickly, but try to maintain impeccable form. If you can make it through your first three rounds without letting go of your bells, you're a beast. ■

# THE NEW SCIENCE OF #ARMDAY

**This modern take on training will help you forge Thor-ish biceps and make you stronger for all exercises**

BY MILO F. BRYANT PHOTOGRAPHY BY TYLER JO



Spend two minutes on Instagram or TikTok and you'll see all kinds of #BigArms training tactics. Not all actually work, of course. Experts do agree, however, that arm training has evolved. A decade ago, you'd simply do curls, curls and more curls. But today's top trainers now prioritise a range of exercises that target the biceps and triceps from different angles and emphasise time under tension, and they recommend more total-body work than you may expect – yes, to build thick, 3D arms. These best practices set you up for gains that also beef up your grip for other exercises and give you greater endurance for moving day. It all starts with understanding the answers to the following five questions.

## 1/ SO WHAT'S CHANGED ABOUT ARM TRAINING?

The classic biceps curl can always be a staple of your arm training. But if you truly want big, strong arms, consider those curls (and many other arm moves) a side dish. Your entrée: big lifts. **"Major exercises, like bench presses, pull-ups and rows, will play a huge role in building your arms,"** says David Otey, a trainer and the author of the just-released book *90-Day Transformation Challenge: Arms*. **"Lifting heavy helps push your body to grow. That doesn't happen often when**

**you only train arms."** Think about it: you might row a 25-kilogram dumbbell. You likely won't curl that same weight, in part because you can't recruit as many muscles to assist in the lift. So if you really want bigger biceps and triceps, make sure to do four sets of dumbbell or barbell rows at least twice a week, and do dumbbell bench presses at least once a week.

## 2/ THEN WHAT'S THE PURPOSE OF ISOLATION EXERCISES, LIKE BICEPS CURLS AND TRICEPS PRESSDOWNS?

Mind-muscle connection. Very often when people do an exercise, they simply lift the weight, going through the motion of the exercise. But building arm strength requires you to concentrate on contracting the muscles you're aiming to train – in particular your biceps and triceps. "That's not easy to do on those heavyweight motions," says fitness expert Ebenezer Samuel. **"But during targeted motions, you can go lighter**

**and focus on the muscle contraction."**

To enhance that connection, says Samuel, you should incorporate mid-rep pauses into your arm exercises. Imagine curling a pair of dumbbells to your chest. As you lower the weights, pause for two seconds once your forearms are parallel to the floor. Do three sets of 8-10 reps. "You're teaching yourself to squeeze your biceps," says Samuel. That can help you use your biceps more effectively on exercises like pull-ups and rows, setting the stage for

even more gains. Aim to do them at least once a week.

## 3/ SPEAKING OF ONCE A WEEK, HOW OFTEN SHOULD I BE TRAINING ARMS?

You can actually train them more frequently than you think. Most large body parts, like your lats or your legs, require days to recover between sessions, in part because you're moving your heaviest weights. That taxes your central nervous system and your whole body. Since you're using lighter weights on most arm exercises, you can insert them into your workouts

COURTESY BRANDS



## CALL TO ARMS

NEED HELP GROWING YOUR ARMS?  
TRY THESE THREE TOOLS



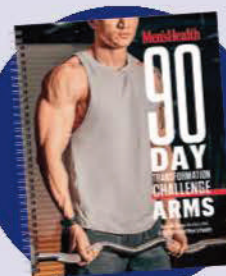
### FAT GRIPZ

Rubber grips that instantly make dumbbells thicker, forcing your forearms to squeeze harder on every rep. (\$48; [citystrength.com.au](http://citystrength.com.au))



### OLYMPIC EZ CURL BAR

It allows you to curl with subtly different levels of forearm rotation, stimulating the biceps from different angles. (\$115; [gymandfitness.com.au](http://gymandfitness.com.au))



### 90-DAY TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGE: ARMS

MH's three-month plan delivers a daily workout to strengthen biceps, triceps, forearms and shoulders. (\$40; [menshealth.com/90dayarms](http://menshealth.com/90dayarms))

more often. **"You can do arm exercises three or four times a week,"** says Otey. That doesn't mean doing a full arm workout, though. Instead, plan to do one or two arm exercises at the end of each workout, after you've done other, more taxing moves. "Think of three sets of curls on the days you train back and three sets of skullcrushers or pressdowns on days you train chest," says Samuel.

#### 4/ SO I SHOULD STILL DO SOME BASIC CURLS AND PRESSDOWNS, RIGHT?

Nope. That's where arm training has become more nuanced. Research has shown that different arm muscles are activated best when challenged at different moments in the curl. **Challenging every muscle in your arms (a key for well-rounded growth) means changing angles.**

So, at least once a week, do a biceps exercise, like a preacher curl, that has your elbow out in front of your torso. Even changing your grip helps. So make sure to include both hammer curls, which have your palms facing each other as you curl, and biceps curls, which have your palms rotating up towards the ceiling, in your regimen.

Also, be sure to do an exercise for your triceps that has your upper arms overhead, like an overhead extension; it's crucial for developing the long head of the triceps, says muscle researcher and trainer Brad Schoenfeld.

#### 5/ WHAT ABOUT MY FOREARMS? DO I NEED TO TRAIN THEM?

Yes – and this just may be a missing element in your training. **"Forearm-specific training might be one of the most underrated aspects of**

**body-part training,"** says Otey. "You need strength through your inner forearm in order to squeeze your pinkie hard around a dumbbell." That squeeze is key to helping your forearms rotate your palms toward the ceiling as you curl – and this act, called supination, is a critical function of your biceps. You can train your forearms easily, too. Otey suggests holding heavy objects with awkward grips (think large stones or oddly weighted plates). Samuel also has a simple forearm-focused curl: stand holding dumbbells at your sides. Curl up, keeping your palms facing each other, then lower until your forearms are parallel to the floor. Pause and twist your palms towards the ceiling, then back to neutral. Do three sets of 10-12. Popeye will be envious. ■

# ONE TOOL, 6 MOVES, ALL THE #GOALS

With a single kettlebell and lots of creativity, you can build muscle, burn kilojoules and forge strength

BY MARCUS MARTINEZ PHOTOGRAPHY BY TYLER JOE

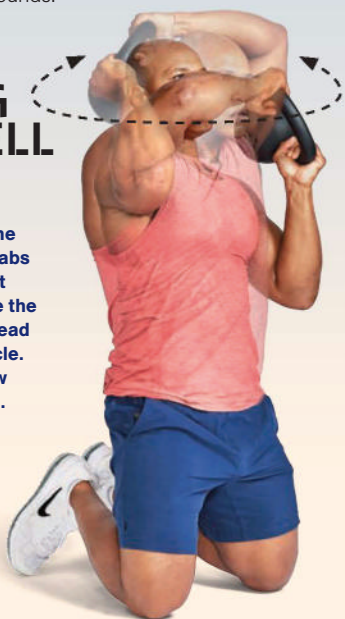
**DIRECTIONS:** Do this workout 3-4 times a week. Rest at least 1 day between sessions. On all other days, go for a 20-minute walk or run.

## WARM-UP

**DIRECTIONS:** Do this warm-up as a circuit. Do each move for 20 seconds, then rest for 10 seconds. Complete 3 rounds.

## KNEELING KETTLEBELL HALO

► Kneel on your shins, holding a kettlebell by the horns at your forehead, abs and glutes tight. Without moving your torso, move the kettlebell around your head clockwise in a close circle. Repeat the process, now going counterclockwise. *That's 1 rep.*



## BOTTOMS-UP MARCH

◀ Stand holding a kettlebell at your chest, the ball of the bell facing upwards. Tighten your abs and aim to keep your hips and shoulders square to the front. Begin to march slowly, lifting each knee high; focus on not letting the kettlebell tip as you do. *Do 1 set on each side.*



## WORKOUT

**DIRECTIONS:** Do this workout as a circuit. Do each move for 30 seconds, then rest for 60 seconds, then move on to the next exercise. Complete 3 rounds.



## 1 ROTATIONAL PRESS

► Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding a kettlebell in your right hand at your shoulder. Tighten your abs and glutes. This is the start. Press the kettlebell overhead. As you do this, rotate your torso to the left and turn your hips towards the left, pivoting onto the toes of your right foot. Return to the start. *That's 1 rep. Do 1 set on each side.*



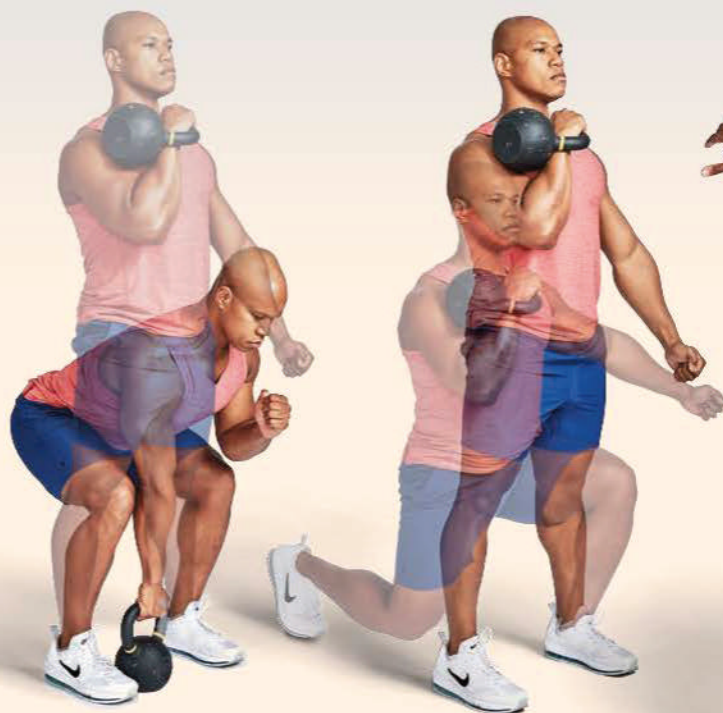
## 2 BENT-OVER SINGLE-ARM ROW

◀ Stand holding a kettlebell in your right hand, abs and glutes tight. Push your butt back and lower your torso until it's at a 45° angle with the floor. Keep the kettlebell close to your shin as you do this. This is the start. Tighten your shoulder blades, then row the bell to your right hip. Lower with control. That's 1 rep. Do 1 set on each side.

### FINISH

## 4 SINGLE-ARM SWING

▼ Stand about 60cm behind a kettlebell. Push your butt back and lower your torso until you can reach the bell with your left hand. This is the start. Explosively pull the bell back between your legs, then stand and squeeze your glutes; this will propel the bell upwards. Allow it to swing between your legs again; push your butt back as this happens, then stand and squeeze your glutes to begin the next rep. Do this for 15 seconds, then switch arms and go for another 15 seconds. ■



## 3 CLEAN TO LUNGE

▲ Stand directly over a kettlebell. Push your butt back and lower your torso until you can grasp the bell with your right hand. This is the start. Explosively stand; as you do this, pull the bell upwards. As it approaches chest height, bend your knees and pull the bell close to your body. Step your right leg back, lowering into a reverse lunge. Stand. That's 1 rep. Do 1 set on each side.



TANK BY TEN THOUSAND; SHORTS BY RHONE; SNEAKERS BY NIKE.

**TRAINER SPOTLIGHT: MARCUS MARTINEZ**, is a longtime trainer who is known for his creative kettlebell workout programs. He designed the workouts in the new book *No Gym Required: Kettlebells*, which will be available in June at [shop.menshealth.com](http://shop.menshealth.com).

**FEATURED MODEL: JAH WASHINGTON** is a Harlem-based trainer and the owner of the Harlem Kettlebell Club. Follow him on Instagram at [@jah\\_holla](https://www.instagram.com/jah_holla).

# NOTHING JUST HAPPENS

**For Melbourne Demons star Christian Petracca, the pursuit of victory starts in the off-season and continues in virtually every spare moment between games. That said, the midfielder strives for something higher than superlative match fitness – to be fit and healthy for life**

BY CAYLE REID

BEFORE THE THRILL of the season's first bounce, there is the torturous slog of the pre-season. Right? Well, not all players see it that way. Take, for one, Christian Petracca, who happens to revel in the grind.

It's 7am and Petracca has arrived at the Demons' high-performance training facility at Gosch's Paddock in central Melbourne. He prepares for the punishment ahead with a massage and physiotherapy treatment. Once he's feeling switched on, he dives into an hour of plyometrics and light cardio to activate his muscles before a 10-12km track run that's focused on building both endurance and explosive speed. The running complete, he climbs into an ice bath to kick-start recovery, followed by a session of mobility work and stretching.

His day doesn't end there. The midfielder spends the afternoon rotating between hour-long education sessions (studying game tapes and working on strategy), strength training in the gym and additional physiotherapy. In the preseason, this is what five days a week look like for Petracca, who's not one to ease himself back into training after cricket season. "I've been doing it for years," he says. "I'm

pretty tough, so I like to get straight back into it."

The 27-year-old says he uses the off-season to "reset" and to get his body where it needs to be to hit the ground running. This time around, that meant jetting off to Europe for some R&R before a high-intensity Red Bull training camp, where intense aerobic work took his endurance to a new level.

*"I LOVE MY MINDFULNESS. I LOVE MY MEDITATION. AND I LOVE MY VISUALISATION."*

Petracca has the same goal with his mental health. "To be honest, I feel like I do more from a mental point of view than physical," he says. "I love my mindfulness. I love my meditation. And I love my visualisation. They're things I've added to my routine over the years."

If you want to reach the top, you need to train harder than anyone else. For Petracca, that's the mindset that has propelled him to stardom and AFL premiership glory. Overcoming sky-high expectations and a series of cruel injuries early in his career, Petracca's hardcore training routine and commitment to recovery have lifted him to the apex of his sport.

The second pick in the

2014 AFL draft, Petracca felt the weight of the world on his shoulders as pundits and fans alike proclaimed him as the game's Next Big Thing. Nearly 10 years on, he hasn't disappointed one iota. In 2021, Petracca helped the Demons end their 57-year premiership drought, collecting the Norm Smith Medal in the process. And on the back of a holistic approach to

his health, he's since cemented his place as one of the game's best.

## NO "I" IN TEAM

To speak with Petracca is to receive a lesson in humility. The guy always puts his team first – personal accomplishments are an afterthought. His number-one goal this year, he tells *Men's Health*, is to help take the Demons all the way to another flag.

"Individual accolades are nice, but it's a team sport," Petracca responds when I ask him if he's eyeing this year's Brownlow Medal. "For me, the ultimate goal each year is to do what's best for my team."

For someone who battled through his fair

share of injuries early in his career, Petracca won't let any fear of misadventure stop him from giving everything at training. Taking care of his body has become a critical aspect of his routine – and besides, Petracca sees injuries as a learning opportunity.

"I did my ACL when I was 18 – that was just a freak accident," he says. "I feel like it's really helped me become a lot more professional and understanding of my body."

That torn ACL and then a broken toe delayed his AFL debut for more than a year. Things have gone smoother since, with Petracca staying close to injury-free throughout his career. Since making his debut, the Demons star has missed just a single game – and that was the result of an infection he sustained from a dog bite.

## RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Petracca's built something of a cult following on social media. His culinary skills, combined with a knack for turning those skills into viral videos, have helped him rack up more than 120,000 followers on TikTok. But when I call him a "chef", he's quick to demur. "The last thing I'd call myself is a chef," he says, adding

that cooking is not something he does in pursuit of fame – it's just something he's always had a passion for and he wants to share his nutritious meals in a no-nonsense way. "At the end of day," he says, "I just show that I'm a human being. I think that's why those videos are so popular."

Always keen to broaden his fitness and find new ways to boost his wellbeing, Petracca is a big advocate of yoga and Pilates.

"I've got a reformer at home and a little yoga studio close to my house that I try to go to once a week", he says. "I use it as an opportunity to work on my mobility and loosen up my muscles. I find the whole process therapeutic."

There aren't many athletes on the planet with Petracca's immense understanding of fitness. From mindful mental-health protection and peaceful meditation to punishing workouts and rejuvenating recovery sessions, Petracca knows what works for him.

Seeing as an all-out mentality is the only way he knows to approach his health, you can expect Petracca to continue kicking goals, taking marks and winning accolades for years to come. ■



## PETRACCA'S PILLARS OF RECOVERY

*With a supreme understanding of what makes his body tick and a holistic fitness regimen to match, it's easy to see how Petracca has risen to the top. But as he says, you can't work as hard as you need to without a focus on recovery. "My three pillars are nutrition, hydration and sleep. As long as I address those each week, I feel like I have a good chance of playing well"*



### 1/ Nutrition

If his social-media exploits don't clue you in, allow Petracca to explain his love of cooking and nutrition. "It's something I've always been passionate about. Growing up in an Italian family, cooking is part of our lifestyle and our culture. I used to be really specific about what I ate before games. But now, as long as I get my carbs and protein and eat well . . . that's what's most important."



### 2/ Hydration

Before, during and after his high-intensity sweat sessions, Petracca takes in a lot of water. He's similarly focused on rehydration around the use of his home sauna - sauna heat having been shown to enhance circulation and speed muscle repair in the wake of vigorous exercise.



### 3/ Sleep

Yeah, yeah - you've heard it all before about the importance of sleep. But Petracca hasn't just heard the advice around optimal sleep hygiene - he's acted on it. His pursuit of solid sack time isn't just about feeling well-rested; it's about being disciplined and sticking to a routine that will help him be at his best as often as possible.

*Consummate Pro: Petracca looks after the one centers off the paddock.*

6AM WITH...

# THE FLAVOUR KING

**Kwame Onwuachi, the chef at New York's Tatiana and author of *My America: Recipes from a Young Black Chef*, is all about creativity in the kitchen and gym**

BY MICHAEL J. LEWIS PHOTOGRAPHY BY JUTHARAT PINYODOONYACHET

SOMETIMES IT COMES during his lunges. Or it could be in the middle of a biceps curl, or maybe while he's sweating through some calisthenics. But as chef Kwame Onwuachi powers through his hour-long, five-times-a-week workouts in his Manhattan apartment building's gym, inspiration may strike. It doesn't happen often, but man, when it does? It's magical.

A few months ago, the 33-year-old chef, known for bold dishes that draw flavours from his multicultural heritage – including the American South, the Caribbean and Nigeria – was going all out in his workout when he got a delicious idea for a crowd-pleaser at his new restaurant, Tatiana, which opened in New York City's Lincoln Center last November. "All of a sudden I got in my head a salmon dish with a gumbo panade on top – like, as its skin – with a Creole sauce and crispy okra," Onwuachi recalls with the smile of a man happily lost in memory. "I made it, and it was really good!" He laughs. "Hey, inspiration comes in many forms. I try to tune out and forget life when I'm working out, but sometimes you get a great idea."

Onwuachi has had lots

of great ideas in his life, which has taken him on a flavour odyssey from Long Island, where he was born, to Nigeria, Louisiana, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and now back to NYC. He's gone from selling sweets on the subway to make a buck to opening several eateries, including the award-winning Kith/Kin. A stint on *Top Chef* in 2015 helped raise his public profile.

His workouts, which he takes very seriously, serve as both a fitness check and a professional boost. "I definitely feel like working out makes me sharper and healthier, and that's good for my career and my health," Onwuachi says. "When I start my day running two miles [3.2km], I find I'm more effective and motivated to seize the day. I like to run at 6 or 7am, and then once you've done that, you're ready to go."

Onwuachi's workouts mash up modalities and generally begin with 15 minutes of cardio – running, box jumps or walking lunges (or, in the summer, basketball with friends). Then he hits the weights. He says he focuses on one body part per day and tells himself to clear his mind of any work-related worries. He loves doing dips and



bench presses – I watched him sweat through 90-kg reps in a recent session. He usually ends with some soothing and meditative yoga. "I've learned that working out doesn't totally clear me, but it relieves job stress, and I take some frustration out on the weights," he says. "Now having an education in opening restaurants – trial

by fire – I'm able to problem-solve and not get as upset about certain things as I did before."

He's been exercising seriously for only a few years. A little before the pandemic hit, an old friend of his, Nigel Quiroz, entered a bodybuilding competition, which shocked Onwuachi. "I saw he was doing that and

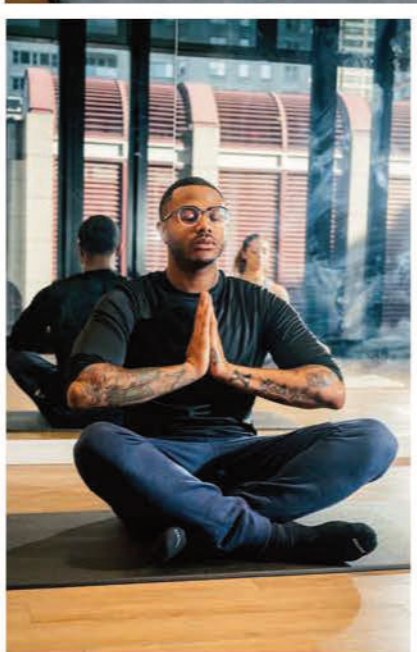
basically said to him, 'How the hell did you do that? That's crazy!'" he recalls. "And he was telling me he just starts with cardio in the morning, weight training at night, but mainly it was watching everything he eats. So I started taking his advice."

Onwuachi credits his workouts with helping him maintain a healthy





*Kwame Onwuachi training at the gym in his apartment building in New York City. He also runs and plays hoops outdoors.*



## SHORT-ORDER FITNESS

*When the chef is on the road, he does a simple workout like this in his hotel room*

### 1/ BICEPS CURLS WITH STRENGTH BANDS

Easy to use in a hotel room. He does 3 sets of 12 to keep his arms in good shape.

### 2/ PLANKS

Do 4 reps of 30-60 seconds. Brace your core and breathe deeply.

### 3/ HIGH-INTENSITY CALISTHENICS

Do 15 push-ups, 15 deep lunges per side, and 30 air squats. Do 4 rounds.

lifestyle, which he admits is difficult, because running a restaurant is not the easiest thing. It helps to be physically fit when you're dashing around stoves and racing to greet customers at their tables all night. "I operate businesses where the goal is to have a good time, and I like to have a good time," he says with a chuckle. "But working out

helps keep me in check. If I'm, like, thinking of having a drink or two, I think to myself, *Why would I want to waste that workout I did today?* And it applies to my whole lifestyle. After workout days, I go to sleep on time, and that helps me a lot."

Onwuachi's training calendar is different from most people's. He says

he'll go through stretches of working out constantly for three months, but then he'll take a month or so off to relax and have a good time.

"I'll take a break for a little while, and then I find myself missing it," he says. "When I know I'm going on TV, that's when I gear up and work out a lot. We all like to look good on TV." ■

## BETWEEN SETS



### FAVOURITE EXERCISE?

"Bench press. You're using your whole upper body – it's a tonne of energy released. You get up from the bench exhilarated."



### MOST HATED MOVE?

"Lunges. I do, like, 125 lunges, and toward the end my legs are shaking."



### WORKOUT TUNES?

"Varied: Erykah Badu, Drake, Frank Ocean, some Dipset, Travis Scott, Kodak Black, and even some Montell Jordan."



### CHEAT MEAL?

"Bacon cheeseburger and fries. I make it myself. When I'm working out, that's what I crave. I think because it's so greasy."



### WORKOUT MANTRA?

"Pain is temporary. If I'm like, I can't do these last couple reps, I tell myself, Pain is temporary."



# 60

## SECONDS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

### DATE:

March 20, 2020, 12:30am

### EVENT:

Rocked by a series of misfortunes during the pandemic, musician MICHAEL FRANTI makes a life-affirming decision

IN APRIL 2020, I was about to go on one of the biggest tours of my life, opening for this huge artist named Kenny Chesney in the States. The first show was going to be at the Dallas Cowboys' stadium in front of 80,000 people. Then the pandemic caused the tour to be cancelled.

Now I've spent the last several decades touring for six months of the year, but I also own this wellness hotel in Bali called Soul Shine Bali. As a family, we always said, If the touring ever stops, we'll still have the hotel to rely on to earn a living. But due to the pandemic, we suddenly went from 90 per cent occupancy down to three per cent occupancy, and that three per cent consisted of me, my wife and my four-year-old. Everything shut down and we were left thinking, *How are we going to get through this?*

Then my father died of COVID. We had to have a Zoom funeral for him and that was just horrible. I felt like everything that I thought I was as a musician, as an entrepreneur, as a son, as a man in the world, was suddenly pulled right out from under me.

This one night, I sat up with my wife and we counted up all the ways that we could still earn a living. We put all our options on a spreadsheet, but gradually we realised that whatever we did it still wouldn't be enough. At first, we were like: "We are so fucked". But then we started thinking about what our ancestors had been through. My wife's family were refugees from Iran. They went to North America with just \$700, a suitcase and a

baby – that was it. And while we were talking this through we suddenly came to the realisation that actually we were going to be fine. Our families had survived things that were much, much harder than this. And we were going to find a way to figure this out, too.

That was a profound moment. It's one thing to try to keep the lights on in the building and another thing to keep the lights on in your heart and in your head. I realised I could make a decision: I could either live with a mindset of lack, or I could live with a mindset of abundance. I could focus on the fact that I wasn't playing for thousands of people cheering for my band; that our hotel wasn't filled up with people; and that our savings were

dwindling down to nothing. Alternatively, I could focus on the positives: that we had this rare time together as a family; that I could do everything I ever dreamed of at the hotel; that I could write so many songs so that when we toured again, our band was going to be better than ever.

After that moment, everything changed. I started doing livestream events to reach my fans. We did so much work on the hotel, commissioning artists in Bali to build statues and paint murals. But the most important thing was that I redefined my idea of wellness, and realised it wasn't about whether I could still fit into my jeans or stand on my head in a yoga class. It was about happiness. Was I happy in my relationships? Was I happy with my friendships? Was I feeling joy in my life? That realisation prompted me to reinvest more energy into building deeper friendships.

While all this was going on, I also took the opportunity to grieve for my dad. He was my biological father who I didn't even know before I was 22. But rather than dwell on all the ways that he wasn't there for me, I decided to focus instead on all the ways that I could be there for my four-year-old son now. I learned so much from the pandemic, but it all came from that one conversation that made me decide to live with a mindset of abundance. ■

“

*I could either live with a mindset of lack, or I could live with a mindset of abundance”*



Michael Franti + Spearhead is performing at various venues across the country until April 13, before heading to the US. For details, visit [michaelfranti.com](http://michaelfranti.com)

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