



Gain without pain: the secret of sleep

There are too many fitness options to choose from these days, from opinions and diets to machines and gadgets, and all claim to get us fit and healthy. Yet there is one element of our modern fitness regime that has stood the test of time. Underrated and underappreciated, it is the easiest way to change your health. The power of sleep.

First, the dynamics of sleep take some explanation. When you first close your eyes, your body starts to repair itself physically. In general terms, this happens between 10pm and 2am, while the body's physiological repair happens between 2am and 6am. To maximize the benefits of sleep then, your recommended eight hours' sleep should start at 10pm, as sleeping for eight hours from 2am to 10am has been proven less beneficial. To be clear: if you go to bed later than 10pm you are already missing out on valuable recovery time.

The type of sleep you get is just as important. Detoxification of the liver occurs during the deep-sleep stage. If you are not allowing yourself those valuable hours of

deep sleep, your body cannot detoxify the chemicals it takes in on a daily basis. Over years of poor sleep, levels of toxicity build and can later become evident in a difficulty in losing weight or by becoming more prone to sickness and disease.

Dr Sonja Peterson highlights some key reasons why sleep is important in her article 'A Good Night's Sleep'. Lack of sleep causes a decrease in the body's production of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH), which leads to a slowing down of the overall metabolism. At this lower metabolic rate you will not be burning as many calories each day. Additionally, Peterson notes "research has shown that after just one week of insufficient sleep, the body can no longer metabolise carbs efficiently." Extrapolating a little, it is easy to see how a high-carbohydrate diet, combined with a lack of quality sleep, can lead to ill health and weight gain.

The way your bedroom is set up can make a big impact on your sleep. To set ensure you get a restful 'straight eight' try the following:

1. Make your room as dark as possible, as it is only when you are in complete dark that melatonin, which helps your body get into deep-sleep stage, is released. You should not be able to see your hand in front of your face.
2. Take all electronic equipment out of your bedroom - including TVs and mobile phones. The electromagnetic fields produced by these devices have been shown to affect sleep patterns.
3. Make sure you associate your bedroom with sleep (and maybe one other activity). No working on your laptop just prior to lights out.

Not feeling tired when you wake is the best indicator that you have had a good night's sleep. You should be able to go to bed at 10pm and get up the next morning refreshed. Whatever your wider personal health goals are - building muscle, losing fat, or simply enjoying long-term health and vitality - being able to sleep through the night is one critical factor. Best of all, it's free.

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Learn the secret to burning fat more effectively

Day after day I see people pounding the streets, often in a vain attempt to lose the bodyfat that seems to creep on little by little every year. I recently saw a quote that said “Calories - those things that sit in your cupboard and stitch your clothes a little tighter each year.” I laughed, but this really is what happens each year. Our training must be effective and in this current climate of ‘go-go-go!’ it is also time efficient. If we have 30-45 mins to exercise only you need to know that there are more effective things than going for a long run. This is especially true for people who carry their weight in the lower body (thighs). These people have been shown to have excess estrogen, and knowing how to effectively get rid of this could change the way you exercise forever. It all comes down to growth hormone: if your exercise is maximising growth hormone release, then you are truly helping to shift that fat on the thighs. So how do we do this? The answer is interval training. The start/stop nature of interval training increases your lactate, and it is lactate



that increases growth hormone. With increased growth hormone you are destroying that body fat more effectively than any form of long continuous aerobic activity.

A recent study published in the Journal of Strength and Conditioning Research showed that a decreasing sprint interval scheme (400, 300, 200 and 100 metres) produced a large growth hormone and lactate response.

So try this as your summer workout. Go to the Newtown (or any) 400m track and run 4 x 400m with a 90 second rest in between each one. Then 4 x 300m with 75 rest in between and 4 x 200m with 60 second rest in between and then finally finish off by 4 x 100m with only 30 second rest in between. Not only will this be one of the hardest workouts you will ever do, it will take less than 40 mins and you will burn more bodyfat than pounding the streets for hours.

Or you could utilise Wellingtons waterfront by sprinting 4 x 4 streetlight lengths, 4 x 3 streetlight lengths, and so on. You will be in great shape in no time.



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Article by Jeff Willoughby

Eat Fat to Grow Slim

Can eating fat to grow slim really work, or is it simply a headline to get you to read more? How can eating the very thing that we try so hard to get rid of actually help us drop that unwanted body fat, and even have better health?

First, let's look at exactly what body fat is. It does not come directly from the fat we eat, but is a substance created from glucose stored in the bloodstream. Carbohydrates, proteins and fats all break down into blood glucose, with carbohydrates breaking down faster and more easily than the other two food groups. When glucose is present in the bloodstream the hormone insulin is released, which causes the glucose to be absorbed and stored in many parts of the body, including fat cells. The lower the insulin response to a food, the less body fat is created. So the real question should be: what foods have a high insulin response? Below is a list of such foods from Richard MacKarness's 1958 book on the subject, *Eat Fat and Grow Slim*:

- » Breakfast cereals
- » Bread
- » Biscuits and crackers
- » Noodles, spaghetti and other pastas
- » Rice
- » Jellies, jams and preserves
- » Ice-cream, cakes, pies and candy
- » Sauces and gravies thickened with flour and corn starch
- » Beer
- » Sweet wine and liqueurs
- » Sodas (and all "sweetened fizzy drinks")
- » Sugar

As you can see from this, the idea of a low-carb diet is not a new one. I would also add lactose to the list. This includes most dairy products, especially milk (excluding lactose-free options such as rice milk).

As long as there is insulin in your bloodstream, you will not be burning fat, but instead will be storing it, as Jonny Bowden states in 2003 book, *Living the Low Carb Life*: "Insulin actually prevents fat burning. That's why a low carb diet usually produces more weight loss than a high carb/low fat diet with the same calorie count."

Returning to the headline "Eat Fat to Grow Slim", where do fats fit into all this and how the heck can

they make us slim? Here is the kicker: increasing fat intake decreases the insulin response of the body. In other words, eating a food that is high in fat, such as avocado, nuts, eggs and salmon, helps to lower the insulin response.

So what to do about it? Simple: increase the fat content in your diet. When you go to the supermarket, never choose a low-fat option but instead buy full-fat milk (if you want to drink it at all), full-fat cheese, etc. Have cream with your coffee. Remove any sugary breakfast foods from your pantry and always include good fats in your breakfast, such as a handful of nuts or salmon and avocado. Hummus with vegetables is a great snack at any time of the day and takes out the massive insulin hit of rice or pasta at dinner. If you have to have that naughty snack, then go for dark chocolate-covered brazil nuts rather than sugary sweets and cakes. However, stay away from anything that includes hydrogenated fats in its ingredients. These are trans-fats that are found in foods like margarine and many cookies, and are toxic to the body.

Fat is not your enemy, and the war against your mid-section expansion can be won by making simple changes to your diet. Increase good-quality fats and decrease your refined carbohydrate intake for better weight management and health.

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Article by Jeff Willoughby

Stop stressing

How relaxation improves your abs

To have a lean stomach seems to be the holy grail of health and fitness. Abs, core, six-pack – whatever you call it, everybody wants one. Most people, however, lack even a basic knowledge of why their stomach is not as lean as they would like, and consequently often make mistakes when trying to get rid of their paunch. By gaining a basic understanding of fat storage and distribution, you are more likely to achieve the toned figure you have always wanted.

Body-fat storage is not simply just about nutrition: it is largely due to hormones. For example, high levels of insulin (produced when you eat refined carbohydrates) will lead to body fat being deposited on the sides of your hips, resulting in the dreaded ‘muffin top’.

So what is it that makes us store body fat on our stomachs and, most importantly, what can we do about it? One key is cortisol, the hormone released by the body in response to stress. When cortisol is elevated for long periods of time, body fat is stored on the stomach. According to Shawn

Talbot, author of *The Cortisol Connection* (2002), it is thought that stress-related fat storage occurs on the belly because it can be delivered to the bloodstream and distributed more quickly from here during fight or flight situations, as opposed to fat stored on the thighs or buttocks.

“But I’m not a stressful person,” I hear you say. You may be surprised to know that the type of stress we immediately think of – psychological stress – is only one form of stress on our bodies. We also face nutritional, physiological and physical stress. In fact, Talbot states that the number one cause of stress (physiological in this case) is not getting enough sleep – generally an easy problem to solve.

Olympic strength coach Charles Poliquin has a different approach. He focuses on food, saying that the biggest stresses on the body come from eating foods that you are allergic or intolerant to (he also states that this is a major cause of tiredness). Furthermore, eating refined foods that are high in sugar causes an elevated release of insulin by the pancreas, overworking the organ and producing a stress response in the body.

Interestingly, another factor influencing fat storage is exercise. Every long-term aerobic

athlete I have evaluated has exhibited high levels of fat stored on their stomach in relation to other areas of their body (even lean people can have fat stomachs). Surprisingly, if you run for extended periods cortisol is produced, because one of its functions is to burn muscle tissue in order to dump glucose back into the bloodstream. The answer then is to avoid long runs!

So what can we do to ensure our stomachs are worth showing off?

1. Remove wheat/gluten and dairy from your diet to eliminate stress on the body caused by any food allergies or intolerances.
2. Avoid refined carbohydrates, especially sugar and those containing gluten, such as pasta.
3. Sleep well – be in bed by 10pm and keep your room dark.
4. Train with weights and minimise extended cardio sessions.
5. Relax – take time out from work and other daily stresses.

A stomach article that doesn’t mention sit-ups?! Please don’t do these exercises in a desperate attempt to get a lean stomach. Instead, stop eating junk, train hard (but not for too long), sleep well and relax. Remember, stress makes you fat!

Paddy Borthwick
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Article by Jeff Willoughby

Stop the silliness!

Getting real results from the gym

Too many times I have seen people working flat out at the gym in an effort to reduce those ‘problem areas’ such as the back of the arms and stomach. Let’s break the myth now: sit-ups do not lower body fat on the stomach and tricep kickbacks won’t make your arms any thinner.

Burning body fat is about keeping the heart rate high and using up calories through demanding exercises that recruit the large muscle groups. Sit-ups, conversely, are a relatively easy exercise that doesn’t raise the heart rate. Done properly, they will strengthen your abdominals, but don’t confuse strength with body fat. The amount of body fat covering a muscle is not related to the strength of that muscle. So although there may be good reasons for doing sit-ups, losing the body fat on your stomach is not one of them.

For a fat-loss programme, the maximum rest you should have between each exercise group

is 60 seconds (I know this may be hard in a busy commercial club). Believe it or not, the difference between a 60- and 75-second rest is significant, so make sure you start the next exercise promptly and are not still sipping water when the minute’s up. This means you will actually keep moving quickly, with minimal time to rest (or chat to your personal trainer about your weekend), and so will be burning fat – after all, you are there for results.

When you are lean, though, sit-ups and tricep kickbacks do make sense. Now that you have lost all that fat you will want to show off what has been underneath it all along. However, if you can’t manage ten bodyweight dips or pull-ups, don’t do exercises specifically aimed at the arms. Instead, keep your exercises on a general push and pull level, which will still work the arms but also uses other muscle groups and, of course, keeps the heart rate higher.

The following programme, performed with the correct rest times, gives you an incredible workout. Note that there is a stomach exercise included, but only one in amongst all that excellent hard work.

Post fat-loss work out:

- A1 Back squats – 3 sets of 15, followed by a 60-second rest
- A2 Pull-ups using a neutral grip – 3 sets of 15, followed by a 60-second rest
- B1 Lying leg curls with feet neutral – 3 sets of 12, followed by a 60-second rest
- B2 Flat bench presses – 3 sets of 15, followed by a 60-second rest
- C1 Dips – 3 sets of 15, followed by a 30-second rest
- C2 Reverse crunches – 3 sets of 20, followed by a 30-second rest
- C3 Leg presses – 3 sets of 20, followed by a 60-second rest

NB: In A1 and A2 the 3 sets are completed alternately before moving to B1 and B2 repeat the same pattern. In C1-C3, do all three exercises in a row before returning to C1 for the second then third set.

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The battle where 'low fat' won

Not everyone knows where the ideas or recommendations for food that we eat on a daily basis come from. We hope (maybe a little blindly) that it is with excellent science and irrefutable research that governments make recommendations for a healthier nation.

In the early 1970s, the United States government decided to create recommendations about food and chose a senator, rather than a nutritionist, to head the select committee that would decide what these recommendations would be. And so the McGovern Report was published, named after the chairman, Senator George McGovern. For the first time, the US government recommended nutritional guidelines for the public, saying that Americans should:

1. Reduce consumption of fat.
2. Switch from animal fats to vegetables fats.
3. Reduce cholesterol by eating no more than one egg per day.
4. Eat more complex carbohydrates, especially grains.

Where did these suggestions come from? Ancel Keys was a scientist who in 1953 changed dietary perception. His study of research from seven different countries showed that fat consumption is linked with heart disease. So was born the obsession with fat, health and heart disease (or the lipid hypothesis, to be technical). However, very few people know that at the same time another world-renowned researcher,

John Yudkin, was blaming sugar for the rising fat epidemic.

And so the battle was on: Keys on one side, proposing that the more fat a nation consumes, the more that population dies from heart disease; and Yudkin on the other, proposing that the more sugar a nation consumes, the more heart disease is present.

Senator George McGovern's choice of Keys' hypothesis, reflected in the guidelines above, still influences us today as we buy low-fat milk and low-fat cheese from the supermarket. These recommendations helped to drive the creation of the food pyramid, which puts whole, natural foods such as meat and fish near the top, and refined carbohydrates underneath, forming the foundation.

Since Ancel Keys' research in 1953, there have been many international studies examining the link between fat and heart disease. The most prominent was that of the American National Institute of Health in the 1970s, which put 12,000 men on a low-fat diet with no red meat and restricted cholesterol. Their results indicated that the group on a lower-fat diet suffered more heart attacks.

My suggestion is that everyone is different, but if you are looking for true health, don't necessarily use the food pyramid as your guide; instead, stick to whole foods that are natural regardless of how much fat or cholesterol they contain, and stay away from refined breads, pasta, rice and cereal. You will be particularly pleased with this recommendation: never choose 'low-fat' products.



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DAAPHNE ORAM - ELECTRONIC MUSIC PIONEER

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Can we be fit without cardio?

One thing that has always niggled me about the health and fitness industry is the idea that cardiovascular exercise is separate to weight training, the implication being that we need to do both to be fit. I can train someone in a room full of weights, pushing them through a whole body-training session, where they are on their knees by the end of the 50 minutes and sweat is pouring off them, and still they say “now tomorrow I have to go for a run for my cardio”.

In 2005 I attended a programme-design course run by Olympic strength coach Charles Poliquin, at which the very idea of long, continuous cardio was challenged, and ever since then I have been playing with this concept – can we be fit without cardio?

I have taken many marathon runners into the gym who have had to stop after 15 minutes as they felt sick. Even these athletes often cannot keep up with me in terms of intensity or volume when we step into a gym. So I question the terminology of ‘fitness’. Are we really making ourselves fitter by pounding out hours of cardiovascular exercise, or can we be fit without it?

I often use Usain Bolt as an example: he would never dream of running more than 200m as it would hinder his chosen sport. But I don’t think you will walk into a gym and see Bolt doing 20 minutes on the cross-trainer before his weights session! As a rule, 100m runners have better bodies than their 5000m counterparts because their increased muscle mass makes them leaner due to a higher calorific demand at rest. So is Usain Bolt fit? Yes. But does he do cardio? No.

If you want to get fit then, you don’t need to run. Concentrate on activity that keeps the heart rate high (stressing the cardiovascular system) as that helps to build lean muscle. This is achieved by lifting weights with limited rest periods – we often do not rest for longer than a minute at my studio.

But, if you insist on pounding the streets, stick to short interval runs in the hills of Mt Victoria or the many steps in Wellington. These higher-intensity workouts are shorter in duration but much harder to do. Combine this with intense weight sessions that keep you moving, and you will be fitter than ever in no time.



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The Ennis Effect

With the London 2012 Olympics now behind us, we can look back on the amazing athletes and highlights of the London 2012 games. One of the most talked-about bodies is that of British heptathlon gold medal winner Jessica Ennis. But how do we get a body that looks like this – toned, lean and athletic, all the attributes that most people would die for?

Have the genes

Sorry to include this, but if you ever have the chance to choose your parents, take it. The gene pool plays a large role in your ‘twitch’ percentages. The more fast-twitch muscle fibres you have, the faster you will be. The faster you are, the easier it is to put on muscle.

Variety

The trick here is balance. People say you need to ‘keep the body guessing’. This is true

to a point, although too much guessing and you get nowhere! The key thing here is that Ennis has had the time to become good at her disciplines through plenty of repeated practice, but enough variety within the chosen disciplines to be beneficial. Each event in the heptathlon requires different muscle contractions, which is one of the best ways to ensure variety in a workout. The worst thing you can do is the same old 20 minutes on a cross-trainer time and time again.

Do things fast

This is key. Athletes who have long aerobic training sessions do not achieve better results than those who train at maximum intensity for shorter periods of time. I think that Ennis has proved we do not need to run a long way to look great. How can we put this into practice? Go to the track, run 400m laps 10 times, but each time you run a lap, run it so fast that you have to rest between each one. Run fast,

rest, then repeat. It’s pretty simple really. If a track isn’t the place for you, simply choose a path up Mt Victoria and sprint uphill for about a minute, walk back down to recover, then repeat. Even using a couple of flights of stairs will do the job.

Eat clean

Base your nutrition around wholefoods. Eating cereal for breakfast is the worst thing you can do. Protein and good fats such as eggs and smoked salmon will take you further than Coco Pops or Weetbix. And when you do eat carbohydrates, go for rice or quinoa as they are tolerated better by the body than gluten-filled pasta or noodles. Don’t be afraid of fat: hummus is a great snack with vegetables throughout the day. If you are as lean as you want to be, then add sugar to your post-workout shake – but only once you are lean. Until then, sugar is the gold medal enemy.

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The Healthy Way to Start Your Day

They say breakfast is the most important meal of the day, and I believe firmly that what you eat when you wake up affects you for the rest of the day, either positively or negatively. One quick walk down the cereal aisle will tell you that most cereal companies do not have your best interests at heart: sugar is now the second ingredient in many breakfast cereals. These traditional staples are becoming something that should be eaten once a week (perhaps this is part of the reason why, as a generation, we are getting fatter).

Eating any sugary food sets the body up not only to store body fat but also to rely on the next sugar hit as energy levels are sent on a rollercoaster ride. Sugar peaks and then troughs send you looking for that mid-morning coffee or snack to lift you when your

blood sugar levels drop. It is not uncommon to overhear someone saying “I always need my pick-me-up coffee in the morning” around the water filter.

When you wake up in the morning you want to start your digestive system with a low-sugar food that causes the body to turn on its fat-burning hormones. Instead of cereal, I recommend protein and healthy fats to start your day. Protein forces the digestive system to work harder to break it down than the refined sugary cereal option, and therefore wakes you up more.

So if you want to trim up and get healthy, throw your breakfast cereals out and start eating protein in the form of eggs, beef, chicken or fish. Add some greens and a handful of nuts, and you really are off to a good start. Eggs are a great source of protein,

but only buy eggs from free-range hens allowed to feed on insects and green plants as they can contain omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids in the beneficial ratio of approximately one to one. In contrast, eggs from hens fed a diet high in omega-6 can contain as much as 19 times more omega-6 than omega-3, which leads to greater clogging of cholesterol in the arteries when the eggs are eaten.

Remember to relax when you eat breakfast too. When you are relaxed your digestive system works best, whereas if you are rushing around your digestive system slows down. Find the time in the morning to take five to ten minutes to sit down to eat your breakfast. By enjoying a leisurely, protein-rich breakfast, who knows, maybe one day you wont have to reach for that mid-morning coffee.

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Seeking out Serotonin

Part of my work as a trainer includes giving nutritional consultations, and I am often surprised by the number of people who are on antidepressants. Most of these people say that they are not 'depressed', but just having a few current stressful issues. So why does it seem that more and more people are taking antidepressants? Are people not as happy as they used to be? Or are doctors prescribing antidepressants as a first option, rather than looking at possible alternatives?

First, let's look at what it means to be happy. For this we have to understand serotonin, which is a neurotransmitter, or chemical messenger, in the body that is linked to feelings of happiness. Other neurotransmitters include GABA, which enables us to relax; dopamine, responsible for our ability to focus; and acetylcholine, which allows us to learn and remember. Low levels of these neurotransmitters have been linked to a variety of conditions – in the case of serotonin, low levels are associated with depression.

It therefore makes sense that if we can understand what causes low serotonin and learn how to increase levels of the neurotransmitter and hence improve mood, we should be able to reduce the need for antidepressants. Prescription antidepressants such as Prozac work by increasing neurotransmitter levels, but surely it would be better to look for natural ways to do this if we can?

Serotonin is made primarily from the amino acid tryptophan, which is a constituent of most protein-based foods (vegetarians be aware). It

is particularly plentiful in salmon, cod, Cheddar and Parmesan cheeses, sunflower and sesame seeds, and pork, turkey, chicken and beef.

Low serotonin is caused by high levels of stress (indicated by the hormone cortisol), which increase the enzymes that break down the neurotransmitter. In addition, a high-sugar diet causes inflammation in the body, which leads to the release of messenger molecules called cytokines. These break down tryptophan, resulting in less serotonin in the body and hence an increased risk of depression.

If you're deficient in vitamin B6 you don't make as much tryptophan anyway. A B6 deficiency is often caused by stress, alcohol and medications like the birth control pill. A magnesium deficiency, which is caused by stress, caffeine, sugar and alcohol, also prevents the body from making serotonin.

To ensure high levels of natural serotonin, you should therefore eat a high-protein diet to increase your tryptophan intake – make sure you have protein at every meal (including breakfast). You should avoid sugar and refined foods, as these reduce serotonin in the body. To maintain your magnesium and B6 levels, don't drink too much coffee or alcohol, and supplement your diet with good-quality fish oil, a multivitamin that is high in folate and B vitamins, and a good magnesium supplement.

Perhaps we will see a time in the not-too-distant future when someone going to the doctor for depression will be referred to a nutritionist to help change their diet before antidepressants are prescribed?



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The constant frustration of failure

I recently posted a funny caption on my Studio41 Facebook page: “I screwed up my diet today. Looks as though I will have to wait until next Monday since diets can’t possibly start on any other day of the week.”

The New Year is a great time to talk about goals and the reasons why people are often not successful at achieving them. But really if you are constantly putting off the inevitable, you are likely to be one of the many that start the New Year with a hiss and roar, only to live the remaining 50 weeks with an underlying level of frustration.

The problem is that people know what they don’t want: “I don’t want to be overweight”, “I don’t want to be tired”... the list goes on. But they don’t often know what it is that they do want. The first thing people have to do is to understand their **goal**. What do you want? See it, visualise it. Don’t pick something vague like “I want to be healthier”. Be specific: “By 13 August I will weigh 53 kilograms and be able to run 10 kilometres in under 50 minutes.”

People dislike making specific goals owing to the fact that they increase their potential risk of failure. However, if you live your life trying to avoid failure you might also find yourself avoiding success. And write the goal down – writing anything down confirms it at a deeper level.

The underlying problem is that people want both the luxury of drinking and eating too much and the health benefits that generally come from doing neither of these activities. The fact is, however, that you can’t have both. This is where the frustration comes from – people move away from their ideal self because of the choices they make on a daily basis.

Tough decisions have to be made in alignment with your goal.

Once you have your goal clearly in your mind, concentrate on your first **outcome** – the first step you have to reach on the way to achieving your end goal. You can think of it as breaking down the goal into smaller chunks. Often thinking of something three months away is too far, so think about what you need to achieve in four weeks. If you want to lose 6 kilograms in a three-month period, say, then it would make sense that after four weeks you should have lost 2 kilograms. If you do not achieve this first outcome you have a choice: change the goal to one you now know is more realistic; or change your weekly commitment to achieving the goal.

Once you break your goal down into outcomes, you need only concentrate on your first outcome. Break things down further into **weekly actions** to help you achieve each outcome. By doing the small things right, you will achieve the large things.

One final point to remember: even though you are concentrating on achieving your weekly actions, keep in mind both your outcomes and, most importantly, your **vision**. Your vision is the ‘why’ behind your goals, the reason for working so hard on your weekly actions. There will always be parties to go to and tempting slices in coffee shops. If you can make it through the month of January with your vision and goals still firmly in place, then you may be one of the few that actually make it through February as well. Good luck!

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The Power of the Sun

With the long days of sunshine ahead (even in Wellington), understanding vitamin D and its effect on our long-term health is crucial.

Vitamin D is produced by the body during exposure to the sun and can be obtained in small amounts by eating certain foods such as salmon, mackerel and tuna. Even on beautiful summer days, however, we can still become deficient in vitamin D if we spend long periods of time in front of a computer under fluorescent lighting, or if we are overcautious outside and apply too much sunscreen.

Supplements of cod liver or fish oil, or even vitamin D tablets, will help boost the body's vitamin D levels, but do take note of the supplement you are buying. According to strength trainer Charles Poliquin, you should take 35,000 IU (international units) twice a week, so buying a vitamin D supplement that contains only 1,000 IU will not get you very far. It should be noted, however, that his recommendations are far higher than the upper daily limit of 3,200 IU recommended by the NZ Ministry of Health in 2005.

There are many reasons why you need vitamin D:

1. Vitamin D promotes calcium absorption, allowing for the maintenance of strong bones. Low levels of vitamin D can therefore lead to osteoporosis and bone fractures. Research has also shown that reduced levels of vitamin D can result in muscle weakness and abnormalities in the muscles' ability to contract and relax.
2. Vitamin D deficiency can also contribute to an increased level of body fat. A study reported in 2010 in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* showed that subjects with a vitamin D level of less than 29 ng/ml had 24 percent greater fat infiltration into the muscle than those whose vitamin D levels were higher than this.
3. At my gym, Studio41, we are big on improving insulin sensitivity as this helps the body to regulate glucose levels raised after eating sugary and/or refined foods. Research carried out on women living in New Zealand, and reported in the *British Journal of Nutrition* in 2009, showed that taking 4,000 IU of vitamin D per day increases the body's sensitivity to insulin, in turn helping to keep storage of body fat in check.
4. If you are pregnant, vitamin D is essential for the healthy development of your baby. In particular, several studies have found

that women who are deficient in vitamin D during pregnancy have a higher risk of giving birth to babies with neurological problems. According to Poliquin, research has also shown that the offspring of mothers who are deficient in vitamin D are more susceptible to schizophrenia, bone disorders and diabetes.

Make sure you follow the tips below to maintain your body's required levels of vitamin D:

1. Get outside into the light – UV rays can't pass through glass, so your body won't make vitamin D if you lie inside behind a window or sit in the car.
2. Using sunblock can reduce the skin's production of vitamin D by up to 95 percent, so don't slap it on as soon as you head outside. Instead, allow your body some important vitamin D production time first – the New Zealand Dermatological Society recommends five minutes in high summer before 11am or after 4pm for fair-skinned people who burn easily, and 20 minutes for dark-skinned people. This allows enough time for the body to make sufficient vitamin D while keeping the risk of damage to the skin at a minimum.
3. During winter, when our exposure to the sun reduces – or all year for those who spend most of their time indoors – it is important to alter your diet or take vitamin D supplements.