

AMERICAN HEALTH

THE BEST
samaritans

STRONG AND SOBER

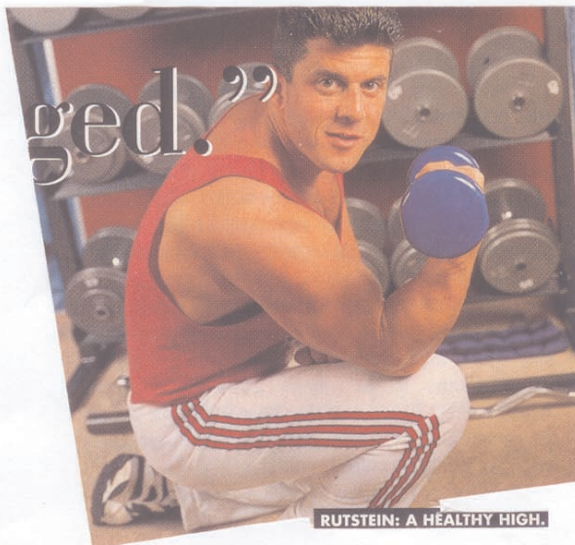
Jeff Rutstein

Boston

What inspires personal trainer Jeff Rutstein's clients isn't his 44-inch chest or the fact that the 30-year-old could once bench-press 400 pounds. It's his recovery from a 10-year addiction to alcohol, cocaine and steroids.

"As a teenager, I was so high all the time," says Rutstein, who had his first drink at 12, "that I was basically an ass." To pump up like his idol, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and impress girls, he started taking steroids as a college freshman. But by age 22, an inflamed liver and a racing pulse sent him to a 12-step program. Although he managed to kick the drugs and alcohol, the once active bodybuilder wound up overweight and lethargic. "I felt like I was stuck in a black hole somewhere," he says, "and no one could help me."

With the urging of a favorite uncle, Rutstein started pumping iron again. This time, though, he concentrated on each move, working slowly and deliberately, instead of worrying so much about the amount of weight he lifted. "It made me feel alive again," says Rutstein. That's not surprising, since exercise builds up levels of endorphins, the body's natural opiates.



RUTSTEIN: A HEALTHY HIGH.

Rutstein realized that what worked for him could also work for others, and he started an exercise program geared toward recovering addicts. Today he trains nearly 100 clients, many of them former substance abusers, in his Boston studio, Custom Fitness.

He also acts as a sponsor to clients in 12-step recovery programs, offering understanding and encouragement when it's needed. With his easy manner and soft voice of experience, he's even been called a guru—a measure, perhaps, of how far he's come since high school. "If I can help one person feel better," says Rutstein, "that's better than making a million dollars a year."