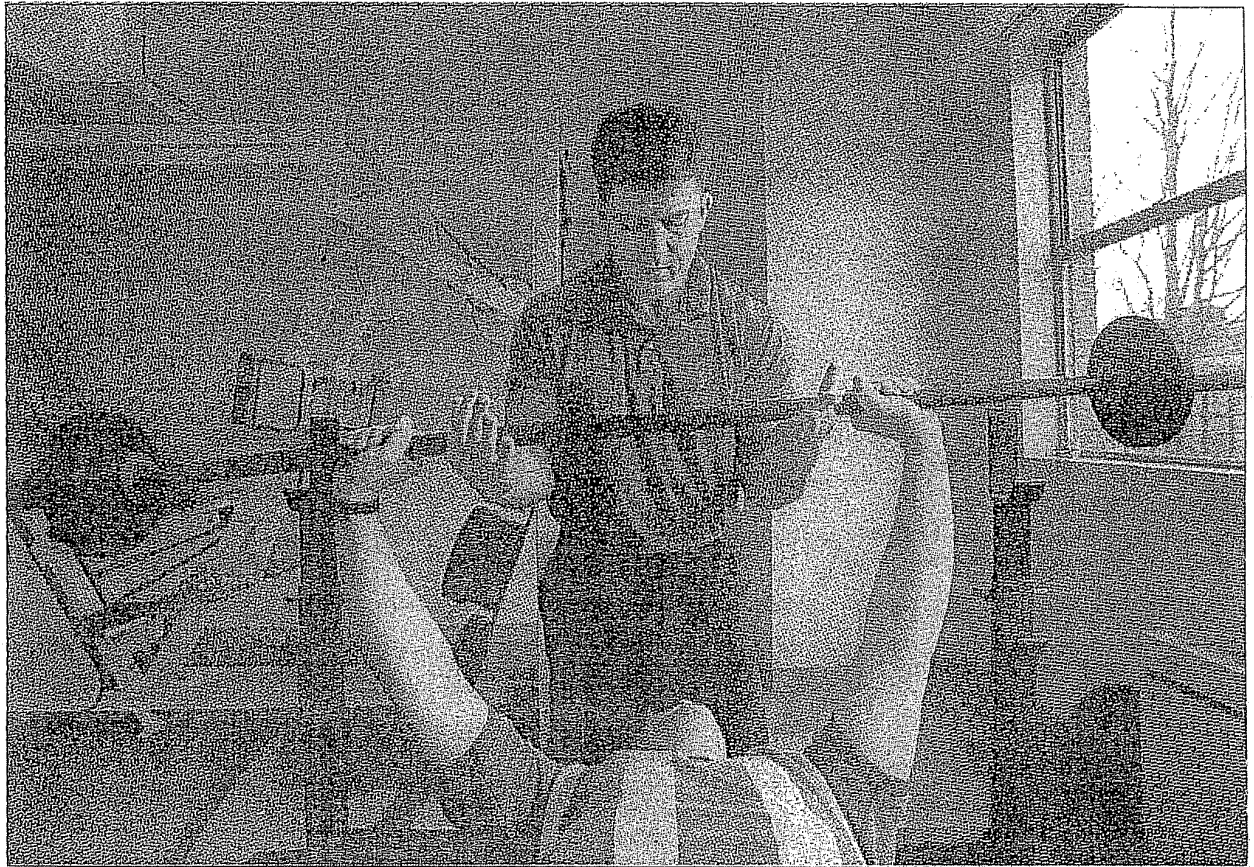


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'Most of my clients have joined gyms in the past and gotten no attention there.'

JEFF RUTSTEIN
(right) spots weights
for client Jake Katz.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO / PAM BERRY

Clean, straight, and pumped up

Personal trainer draws on life as recovering addict to build more than muscles

By Alisa Valdés
GLOBE STAFF

It was a long, painful path from being strung out to being pumped up. But Boston's Jeff Rutstein, 32, traveled it.

He replaced the habit of getting drunk four or five times a week with the habit of weight training four or five times a week. He replaced the daily syringes full of six types of steroids with plates of fresh vegetables. And in place of ingesting cocaine, marijuana, LSD, and mushrooms "whenever I could get my hands on them," Rutstein is helping other people to find the same peace he

has — in health.

A recovering drug addict and alcoholic, Rutstein is one of the most popular and most unusual personal trainers in Boston. Between 40 and 50 percent of his 100 regular clients are in recovery from drug or alcohol addiction, some of them traveling regularly to Boston from as far away as Spokane, Wash., because they say he is the only trainer in the world who understands them.

They pay around \$85 an hour for his services.

"I know what it's like to black out, I know what it's like to have delirium tremens," said Rutstein, who started drinking heavily to combat loneliness and neglect when he was a 6th grader at North Junior High school in Ran-

dolph.

At a time when drug usage is skyrocketing, alcoholism is epidemic, and the Center's for Disease Control report that more Americans than ever are dangerously obese, Rutstein is quietly fighting a double battle that he says can be won through the simple joys of moderate exercise.

While many trainers pay lip service to the notion that exercise should be done to make you feel good rather than to make you look good, Rutstein actually adheres to the concept, almost religiously.

"Most of my clients have joined gyms in the past and gotten no attention there," said Rutstein. "You always

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Personal trainer builds more than muscles

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hear that exercise is a great stress reliever, but if you go into a gym depressed, and you are ignored because you are not in great shape, it just creates more stress."

While the benefits of exercise are well known to most people, Rutstein says that for people who were addicted to drugs or alcohol the traditional competitive gym environment of "Spandex and grunting" can be almost unbearable.

So Rutstein tries a different approach. Instead of pushing them to go for the burn, Rutstein talks to his clients so much that they say he is like a therapist. If they tell him they are eating doughnuts for breakfast because they are too depressed to cook, he greets them at the next session with several boxes of high-fiber cereal and a hug. If he trains them at home and they are too bummed out to cook, he will make lunch before he leaves.

It works so well that therapists like Harvard Medical School psychiatry professor J. Alexander Bodkin refer their patients to him.

"Jeff is doing us all a fantastic service," said Steve Thompson, a recovering alcoholic who heard about

Rutstein from a friend at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in Boston, and has been training with him twice a week for the past year.

"He is going out of his way to help people who are at their wit's end. There is no one out there like him. I've been in gyms before and, you know, they say 'no pain, no gain.' With Jeff it's just the opposite. I always leave his place feeling 1,000 percent better, mentally and physically."

Rutstein's gentle approach to exercise appeals not only to recovering addicts, but to many people. It also mirrors recommendations made last year by the US surgeon general.

Ken DeMontigny, 51, is a draftsman from South Boston who was born with a handicap that left his left side slower and weaker than his right.

"Jeff doesn't treat me like I'm handicapped," said DeMontigny. "He is very special. He watches everyone closely and knows exactly what we need."

"He has a really holistic approach to all of this," said Jake Katz, 46, who teaches at Boston University and trains with Rutstein once or twice a month. Katz is not a recovering drug addict, but he falls into the group of "stress-addicts and work-

aholics" that Rutstein says are psychologically very similar to substance abusers.

"At the root of all of this behavior, whether it's taking drugs or working constantly, is the goal of covering up your true personality," said Rutstein. "And when you want to cover up who you are, it's usually because you are depressed and in a lot of pain."

When he was 18, Rutstein began body-building to boost his self-esteem, but did not understand at first why he was not getting as big as the other guys at the gym, but "that was only until I learned their little secret."

The body-builders' "little secret" was steroids. By the end of his addiction, Rutstein was injecting six different steroids into his shoulder, buttocks or thigh every day.

Still drinking heavily, Rutstein said, the steroids made him an "unbearably aggressive ass." So Rutstein said he began taking all the drugs he could, just to escape himself.

Friends began telling Rutstein he had a problem, and he denied it—even though it literally stared back at him in the mirror in the form of a morphing nose, repeatedly broken in barroom brawls he had initiated.

"I finally realized I had a problem, and quit cold turkey on New Year's Eve of 1987."

Rutstein lost 40 pounds within three weeks of quitting because he was not eating or sleeping. His body reacted with an inflamed liver and a resting pulse of 140 beats per minute — "heart attack level" — and he was hospitalized.

For the first year after the hospitalization, Rutstein said he felt nothing. "I have felt physical pain, and I would much rather feel that than I would nothing at all," he said. The highlight of his life for that year, which he spent in bed at his parents' home in Braintree, was "going to the Brigham's for a quart of ice cream and hot fudge sauce. There was nothing else in my life."

After a year, and at the urging of a favorite uncle, Rutstein decided to begin exercising again, but with a new philosophy.

"I had always exercised, but for all the wrong reasons. When I began again, I used light weights. I concentrated on what it felt like to move my muscles, and it was amazing. My mind reconnected with my body. I relaxed. For the first time in my life I felt good."