

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

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Author of

Rutstein on Fitness: Strengthening the Body to Heal the Mind

1. For whom did you write this book?

A better question may be who the book wouldn't be for. The book isn't meant for professional athletes, bodybuilders, or those looking for a quick fix. This book takes a different approach toward exercise. Rather than just focusing on the physical aspect of weight training and toning exercises, readers are encouraged to work from the inside out, using exercise as a means to simultaneously connect with body and mind. For a lot of people, there is a disconnect here – particularly when there is any kind of substance abuse or extreme stress. Exercise used this way not only improves physical health, it also enhances the mind/body connection putting our physical and emotional selves in harmony while enhancing physical health.

2. What is your goal with regard to this book?

The main goal of the book is to reach the vast population out there who really might never exercise – whether because of emotional distress or the simple feeling that they are too far out of shape to even begin.

How many times have we heard people say that they weren't in shape to go to a gym? How many of us have friends who complain about feeling out of place at a gym? Or friends who finally go to a gym and then work themselves so hard that they can't move, subscribing to the *no pain, no gain* mentality?

Rutstein on Fitness was written to turn this thinking around, and make readers aware of the positive psychological benefits that weight training and exercise offer when done correctly. The point is to make exercise an inviting, regular part of life.

3. What experience/education do you have that makes you an expert?

I have a degree in Economics from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and I've taken courses in nutrition and exercise science. But what really makes me an expert is my own practical experience. When I was 12 years old I picked up my first barbell. At that time I exercised incorrectly and with the wrong mentality. I was trying to lift as much weight as possible. The summer following my freshman year of college, all the way through my senior year, I took anabolic steroids. Focused on lifting more and more, straining by body and mind beyond its natural capacity, I never achieved that mind body connection.

When I went through my own recovery from alcohol and drugs, my body and mind became disconnected. What really helped me through the recovery was conscious exercise – focusing on the movement rather than just lifting the weight.

At that point, my whole philosophy changed. Having exercised incorrectly for so many years, once I was able to re-focus my philosophy, I began to see and feel the physical, and, more importantly, the emotional benefits of exercising correctly.

I understand the power of exercise and how the mind and body work together when weight training is done correctly. Having been on both sides of the fitness spectrum, I can relate to the large population who are intimidated by exercise as well as those who are abusing their bodies with it. I have been acknowledged as the Best Samaritan in 1994 from American Health Magazine, Outstanding Fitness Leader from Reebok Instructor News, Distinguished Personal

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

Trainer in 1992 from American Fitness Magazine. My work has been featured in over 100 media outlets throughout the country, as well as some international media.

4. Why should people exercise?

There are innumerable physical benefits to exercise: bone strengthening for seniors; cardiovascular benefits for everyone; lower blood pressure; stress reduction; weight control; ... the list goes on. And we do tend to focus on those physical benefits.

But one thing most people don't think about are the strong psychological benefits exercise provides. Exercise releases certain chemicals in your body, endorphins and encephalins, which I explain in Chapter 2 in the book. They simply make you feel better, provide a natural boost to your emotional well-being, have a positive impact on your outlook and your ability to handle stress. Again, in order to take advantage of this benefit, your thinking has to change. You must no longer think of exercise as a quick fix to make you look good but instead as an adjunct to mind/body health.

5. How often must a person exercise to actually get any benefit from doing so?

Well ideally, you would want to exercise or strength train 3 days per week; even a half hour or 40 minutes. Another 3 days a week, do some aerobic exercise – ideally you would want to work up to 20 minutes. But the key here is dependent on the person's condition.

Let's say a person's been inactive for years, and they are depressed. Even starting off with one or two toning exercises that take 3 minutes, or walking for three minutes, is better than doing nothing. The idea is to do as much as you can to start and to create a routine on which to build without being overwhelmed. Gradually and slowly, increase every week. Let's say that you walk for 3 minutes three days on the first week, the next week do 5 minutes, and then gradually increase it from there, where you're working up to a walk/slow jog. As far as the strength training, start off with stretching exercises and then gradually increase to some light resistance bands. All the exercises in the book are very easy to do and easy to follow. No matter what your physical condition, anyone can do these exercises. I really have to emphasize going at your own pace and everything else will follow. Don't put pressure on yourself.

That said, the emotional benefits of beginning an exercise routine and sticking with it are incalculable – not to mention the more toned physique.

6. You seem to stress the importance of the relationship between physical and mental health—why is this so important?

Most people exercise for the physical benefits of exercise, which is great, but the mental aspect is so overlooked.

If we exercise just to exercise, we miss out on the greater component. That's why it is important to exercise consciously. For example, let's consider a bicep curl. When you lift that weight, you feel your biceps moving or tightening. If you allow yourself to be viscerally aware of that muscle in your upper arm and your control over it, the power in that simple movement can change your entire outlook.

7. What from your own background made you want to write *Rutstein on Fitness*?

I began using alcohol at about 12, and then progressed into various street drugs. By the time I was a senior in high school, I'd gotten into cocaine and various types of marijuana and other harder drugs. While in high school, I began weightlifting in hard core gyms. The bodybuilders at the gyms seemed to command respect, which I longed for. I soon learned the secrets to their massive muscles. The vast majority of them were doing steroids, and the one thing I found out is that they

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

do work, and rather quickly. I gained over 20 pounds of muscle within the first 6 or 8 weeks, but when I came off them, I just as quickly lost my size and strength along with the aggressiveness that made me exercise harder than ever. Before long, I was right back on the steroids.

You are no longer in control, and depression sets in. The steroids were affecting my mood so much that I began using more street drugs and, with that, drinking more alcohol. The cycle was really just so overwhelming. When I did come off everything cold turkey, I fell into a deep, dark depression that seemed endless.

Exercising one way got me into this fix, and exercising another got me out of it. I took an approach that I call *mindful movements*. Instead lifting as much weight as possible, I began to focus more on the movement. This not only awakened my body, but more importantly, my mind. For close to a year I had felt numb; my mind and body had become so disconnected that when I began exercise mindfully, with awareness of both, the experience was powerful. And I see that happen with my clients as well as others who follow the program in the book.

My personal journey informs this book and enables me to relate to others apprehensive to begin a fitness program which can be of help to them.

8. What type of influence should parents have on the physical activity level of their children?

As a parent, I know how easy it is for parents to just put their kids in front of the TV. Add to that computers, video games, excessive homework – all of which lead to inertia in children. And when we don't exercise, we tire easily and soon begin to feel that exercise is beyond us. Add to that the amount of junk food kids eat, and you have a recipe for obesity and depression.

Children need regular exercise. Whether they join a recreational team sport or shoot hoops out in front of the house or just walk or bike to school every day, regular exercise should be part of their routine. If it can become part of the family routine with parents showing as well as telling kids about the benefits of exercise, all the better.

But keep in mind that the key to keeping children exercising is to make it enjoyable.

9. How can diet and exercise reduce stress and affect your mood?

Besides the stress-reducing chemicals produced by the body when we exercise, and the rise in self-esteem, just the knowledge that we are doing something for ourselves helps reduce stress. Most of us live in a busy environment; we juggle our way through numerous responsibilities and take little time to nurture ourselves. Mindful exercise is a way of reminding ourselves of just how important we are – especially to ourselves. It becomes as much a treat as that hot fudge sundae!

10. How can exercise improve sleep?

Exercise, stress reduction, and better sleep go hand in hand. Through exercise you are able to relieve stress and negative thinking, putting you in a calmer state. This in turn, can help you sleep better. When you're exercising again, you are also more apt to eat healthier, which will also help you sleep better.

11. What studies, if any that you know of, support the relationship between exercise and mood elevations, stress reduction, and/or better sleep?

While there have been a number of studies on the effects of aerobic exercise on mental health which show that exercise can have as great an effect on mood as anti-depressants, there are not many studies on weight training or strength training. One of the reasons is that most doctors and researchers simply don't know the correct way to strength train. When done correctly, I firmly believe that strength training has at least as great an effect on mental health as aerobic exercise because the strength of the mind/body concentration required to do it correctly.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

12. What are the worst foods for your mood?

Sugary foods, processed carbohydrates, and excessive caffeine use are the worst because they cause a trigger which makes you want to keep eating these foods. This makes them especially toxic for someone in recovery from alcohol or drugs abuse. Candy, cakes, white flour, white bread, sugar, ice cream, and soda all fall into this category. If you see high fructose corn syrup or sucrose near the top of the ingredients on food labels, you know that these foods will trigger a response that will make you want more and more of them. You also want to stay away from palm oil and coconut oil and trans fatty acids, which are the fats found in processed foods. This is another topic covered in my book.

13. What can parents do or say to start their children on the right track with regard to exercise?

Parents need to avoid putting pressure on their child, while simultaneously making exercise fun. Have children go at their own pace and don't compare them with other children. Encourage them to excel within their abilities, making stretching those abilities secondary. So long as they are enjoying their activity, they will want to continue.

14. What do you think needs to be done to combat the rampant use of steroids among high school athletes?

When a child sees an admired professional athlete using steroids without repercussions, it diminishes whatever warnings that child might hear about the drugs. Thus, we must hold our professional athletes accountable.

Education is also important. Children need to hear from athletes who have been there. Many high school students take steroids just for appearance sake. They have to be made to realize that the effects of steroids don't last. Within a very short period of stopping the drugs, which you must do from time to time, they will actually be weaker and their physique less developed than prior to doing the drug. This creates a vicious cycle because they will want to get back on the steroids and take larger quantities of them. They have to realize that doing steroids is just a very short term fix and be made aware of the long-term consequences of using them.

15. What advice would you give to young athletes looking to improve their strength and physique?

The best advice would be to just go at your own pace and exercise correctly, using the correct technique. Don't try to lift heavy weight that is unnaturally heavy for you. Just enjoy what you are doing. Eat well. Nurture yourself. Allow yourself to develop at your own pace. Create a mind/body connection through your exercise. Don't look for the quick fix through either supplements or illegal drugs.