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Strong Body Sharp Brain Endless Energy

Never Too Early, Never Too Late

[Draft of Back of Book Text]

Who *doesn't* want a strong body, sharp brain, and endless energy?

Regardless of your age, there are simple, realistic things that you can do to improve your fitness, brain health, and energy level NOW. It's easy to get complacent when we hear healthy living advice that seems at once both overwhelming and contradictory. And yet, the years are flying by and there is that little voice inside of you (echoed by your doctor and a whole lot of others) telling you that you can't afford *not* to take care of your health.

The good news is that it's not as hard or as complicated as you might think – really! You will feel inspired to take the message to heart that the habits we form NOW are the largest determinant of the quality of life we will have in our later years. And if you are already in your later years, you will feel inspired that your amazing body is still very capable of making meaningful improvements with only modest changes to your habits! Quite simply, it's *never too early* and it's *never too late* to get stronger in body, brain, and energy level!

You won't want to miss:

- Mindset mastery that will convert your intermittent efforts into lifelong healthy habits
- How exercise is the closest thing to a magic pill we'll ever see
- Strength training as the secret weapon for women and men who've never tried it
- A four-level fitness plan with tracks for “never too early” and “never too late”
- The superfoods-based timeless eating plan for a healthy weight
- Metabolism magic to burn calories like a furnace
- Goodbye back pain in two minutes per day
- Four factors that forever fix fatigue
- Brain fitness facts that will change your future
- The link between healthy hearing and dementia
- It's never too early to reduce your risk of falling when you are older
- Intergenerational vitality – rewarding strategies for families to look out for each other through all the meaningful stages to come

Cathy Richards, M.A. has more than 20 years' experience as a wellness coach and strategist. With a M.A. Degree in Exercise Physiology, she earned the C. Everett Koop National Health award for her work in corporate wellness for Marriott. Then, as a young mother, she wrote and published “The Busy Mom's Ultimate Fitness Guide” and as the children grew, she shifted again to older adults, spending eight years in wellness for a large retirement community. Her unique “never too early, never too late” approach to lifelong vitality capitalizes on lessons learned from these varied and wonderful populations. Visit her at www.CathyRichards.net



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Chapter 1: Understand the Urgency: Time Stops for No One

“Isn’t it funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back, everything is different?” My son Jeff selected this quote from C.S. Lewis for his senior yearbook to summarize his thoughts on his four years of high school. It was a wise observation that also applies to our health over the years. We might not see the effects of our small, everyday habits now, but after a lifetime of good, bad, or in-between habits, the impact adds up one way or another.

Think about the three health goals of this book: *Strong Body, Sharp Brain, and Endless Energy*. Imagine how it would feel to live that reality every day. Goodbye to aches and pains, a foggy mind, and lethargy. Hello to vitality of mind and body. Combined, these three gems are the key to, quite simply, being able to do what we want to do! Luckily, many of the factors that determine our strength of body and brain, and our energy levels are within our control. In addition, there is tremendous overlap in the strategies that lead to all three so we don’t have to worry about following three different sets of recommendations.

Regardless of your age, the time is now, hence my personal mantra and the subtitle of this book: It’s never too early and it’s never too late! Once you understand the urgency and then begin to see that it’s not as hard or as time-consuming as you thought, you will wonder why you didn’t start sooner!

After spending eight years surrounded by over 1,400 people with an average age of 85, I started asking younger populations: What type of 85-year-old do you want to be? Picture yourself at 85. What do you look like? What pursuits fill your day? How healthy are you? You may not have given this much thought. After all, we live in a society that is focused on youth and the present. We see value placed on immediacy and instant gratification and there is very little attention given to the dutiful and boring applications of advance planning.

When Jeff was in middle school, he had a lot of neighborhood friends and would run from house to house, seeing which friends were home and when they could play so he could fit them all in. He did great in school, despite having the messiest room and messiest backpack I have ever seen. He had a giant binder exploding with dog-eared papers, all out of order and not even in the prongs. Occasionally, I’d help him clean out his binder, but it was a never-ending cycle. Let’s just say that Jeff did not “get” the benefit of doing certain things now that would benefit him later.

In high school, Jeff’s friendships were still high priority and his jovial aversion to planning was still the same. While doing homework, he would prop up his phone in “Facetime” mode every night and his laughter filled the house into the wee hours. He had a separate binder for each subject, which meant he now had seven binders that were a mess. He still left everything to the last minute. One day when I was nagging him about getting more organized, he gave me a huge grin and said, “Mom, that’s future Jeff’s problem.” He was absolutely serious! (I didn’t find out until later that it was a line from a popular sitcom!) It became his standard answer to all questions regarding boring tasks

that could be put off until some vague future time. My standard response was “Please think about future Jeff!” Thankfully, although these habits continued through all of high school, Jeff still did well and earned a Naval ROTC scholarship to Purdue. Off he went to college, with my fingers crossed.

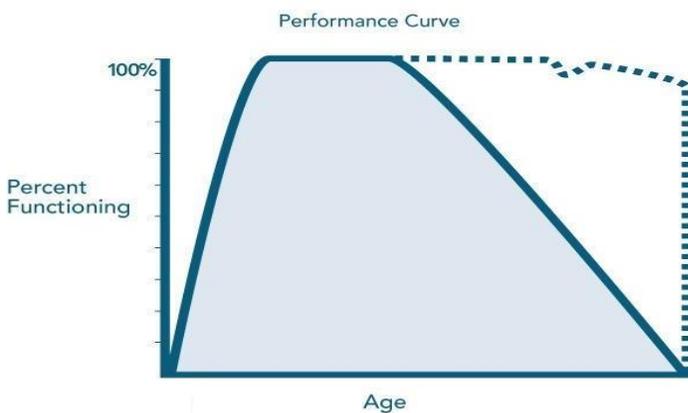
Jeff’s first year at Purdue didn’t exactly go smoothly. The demands of ROTC combined with the rigors of his academics meant that the workload has finally reached a capacity that Jeff’s habits began to fail him. There were a few learning lessons like oversleeping and missing his ROTC early morning workout. Or, waking up in time for the workout but coming home and sitting down for “a minute” only to fall back asleep with an apple in his hand and miss a major presentation. He had to retake the entire class. The consequences were stacking up, causing him to re-think some of his habits. He called me and said, “Mom, did you know that there’s an alarm on my phone? I can set it if I need to be someplace.” “Also, I hung a calendar above my desk and I was thinking that I could start writing down due dates for tests and big projects.” and finally “Mom, if there’s something I need to do in the future, I can just write it down on a list and keep the list with me.” It was all I could do to resist telling him that I had already suggested all of these things in the past! Present Jeff began to care deeply about future Jeff’s problems and things began to improve from that point on.

Let’s return to the question, “What type of 85-year-old do you want to be?” Younger people don’t usually contemplate what life will be like when they are 85, much less think that what they are doing today will have any bearing on it. When you are 25, you are going to live forever; 35 - raising a young family; 45 - gunning your career to the top; 55 - starting to joke about aging aches and pains; and 65 - perhaps starting to think about life at 85 because you might be caring for your own aging parent. The reason I continue to pose this question to younger adults is that regardless of your current age, you are working toward your 85-year-old self *right now*, for better or for worse. Is your quality of life at the age of 85 your *future self’s* problem or are you willing to take ownership of it now? Are you like the old Jeff or the new Jeff? Are you keeping your binders neat all along, or are you banking on periodic clean-up sessions that may or may not be successful because some of the papers are lost or damaged beyond repair? Many of us “get by” in our younger years without great habits like Jeff did in middle school and high school, but by our older years, the consequences start adding up, like they did for Jeff in college. The years are flying by. In fact, at almost every age, people wonder and joke out loud “How did I get this old?” We think we are “old” at 30, then 40, then 50, etc., and then in future years, we WISH we could be “that young” age again. Can you remember how you felt 20 years ago? Did that time go by quickly? What age will you be 20 years from now? Won’t that 20 years go by just as quickly if not more so? Don’t wait! Think about *thriving* through the years!

While I worked in senior living communities, I met thousands of 85-year-olds, some with significant physical and cognitive ailments and serious challenges in daily living that made it difficult to enjoy their lives. I met other 85-year-olds who were finding much more satisfaction in life in whatever way they defined it - finding new loves, participating in competitive sports, or traveling the world! What is the biggest determinant of the difference? It’s not luck, genetics, or your habits at the age of 84. ***The largest determinants of your health at the age of 85 are your lifestyle habits in the decades leading up to that age – your 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, and 70s.***

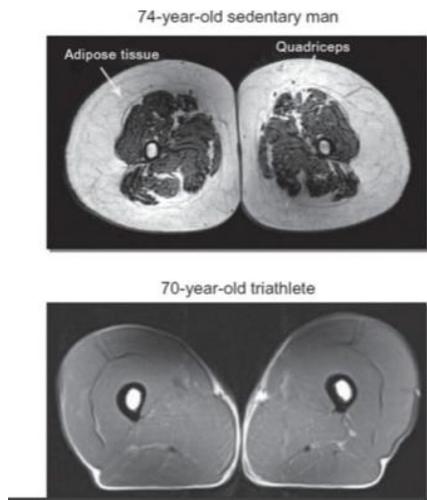
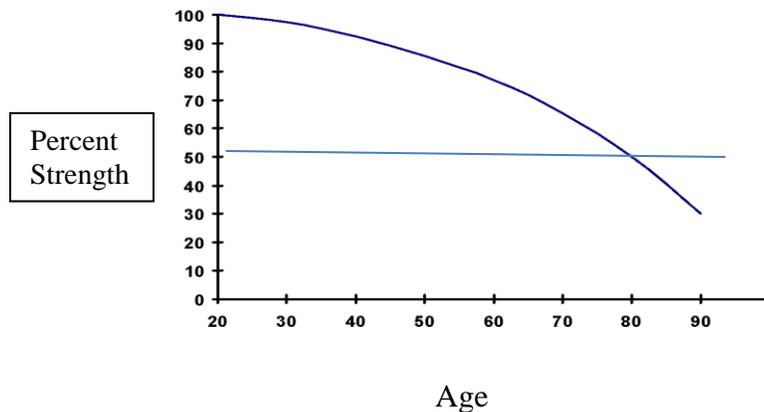
John Rowe and Robert Kahn's MacArthur Foundation Study of Successful Aging in America gave us the gifts of optimism and control over how we age. We know that life expectancy is increasing, but living longer doesn't mean those additional years are necessarily quality years. While certainly not everything that can befall us as we age is within our control, their research tells us that we don't need to anticipate aging as an inevitable period of total decline. Rowe and Kahn went even further to show us that in fact, ***up to 70% of how we age is determined by lifestyle!*** There is much we can do through our lifestyle to *preserve* our health, mobility, and quality of life, and even *improve* it as we age.

Look at the graph below from Rowe and Kahn's book "Successful Aging." The solid blue line shows a gradual decline in physical and cognitive functioning starting at middle age. Not a pleasant thought about aging, is it? Look at the dotted line as an alternative model for aging. Notice how this style of aging includes maintaining close to 100% of our functioning capacity much farther into older age, before experiencing some type of health setback (the "blip" on the dotted line) that leads to a much later but quicker descent. My mom has always said that she wanted to die with her tennis shoes on, which I think exemplifies this perfectly! Which model of aging would you find preferable? I'm sure it's the dotted line!



We're constantly joking about the aches and pains of getting older. These stereotypes are part of the problem. When we assume something is inevitable, we stop trying to prevent it.

Let's also look at one of the most shocking, yet preventable changes that can happen as we age. In the sixty-year snapshot between our 20th birthday and our 80th birthday, the average person loses HALF of their leg strength if they are not purposefully trying to prevent it through exercise. Imagine what it would look like and feel like if you were to go through daily life with your current body weight, yet only half of your current leg strength. The math should work out to feel the same as if you doubled your body weight for your current leg strength. How would that feel trying to get through the day? You might need to shuffle when you walk. You would need to take breaks to sit down. You would be hunched over. Does this sound familiar, like some 85-year-olds you might encounter?



Look at this image comparing a cross section of the leg muscles and fat of a 74-year-old sedentary man with that of a 70-year-old triathlete. Quite a difference, huh? The significant muscle loss that happens to many individuals as they age is called *sarcopenia*. The great news is that the decline in muscle mass is to a large extent both *preventable* and *reversible*! No matter how late in life you start, the body will respond to exercise. The earlier we start, the better off we are. A research study in 2018 at Ball State University found that individuals in their 70s who had been exercising most of their adult lives had muscles that were similar to 25-year-olds! There are research studies done with very frail, elderly people who began strength training at an advanced age with

fantastic improvements and increases in strength through weight training exercise. In many cases, their results were significant enough to reduce or eliminate their need for walkers or canes. For fitness professionals, working with older adults can shed a new perspective on some of the more shallow, vanity-related goals that are commonly linked with fitness. Most older adults aren't exercising to show off their bodies on the beach; examples of their goals might include being strong enough to travel to a grandchild's wedding or simply maintaining the ability to shower and dress oneself. These are not situations that many of us think about if we haven't been faced with caregiving in our lives.

For older adults who have experienced a decline in function to the extent that they need regular assistance with activities of daily living, it doesn't have to be a failure or a reason to give up hope for improvements in quality of life. Families and individuals can work with their caregivers to provide appropriate opportunities for movement and realistic goals for mobility.

What a wonderful, inspiring message it is that the muscles and the brain respond at any age, impacting mobility, agility, independence, metabolism, weight management, appearance at whatever weight you are, posture, back pain, and so much more! The "use it or lose it" principle extends to many of the physical ailments that we like to "blame" on age. Research tells us that ***many of the changes that we commonly blame on age, are not due in total to the physiological aging process, but rather the gradual decline in activity – both physical and cognitive - that***

typically comes with aging. It's something to think about! What type of 85-year-old do you want to be and are your current habits going to get you there? If your current lifestyle needs a little adjustment, that's ok! ***It's never too early and it's never too late!***

If lifestyle accounts for 70% of the differences in how people age and we want to age as healthfully as possible, why not look at examples of people who are doing it well. *The Blue Zones* by Dan Buettner tells us that there are three groups of people who have the greatest percentage of centenarians on the planet. A good portion of their elders live past the age of 100 – quite a feat! These groups include Okinawans, Sardinians, and Seventh Day Adventists. If we want to increase our chances of living to 100, why not follow their example for lifestyle habits? What do they have in common?

- They don't smoke.
- They are active every day.
- They put family first.
- They maintain active social lives.
- They eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Do these habits seem difficult or complicated? Of course not. Rather, they are probably things that many of us would like to do in theory if we aren't already, but in our busy or preoccupied lives, we don't prioritize because we don't think they will make that much of a difference. Perhaps it's time for a more serious effort, knowing what we have to gain. Time and again, we will encounter small changes that yield meaningful benefits!

There are also examples all around us of inspiring people who are challenging the stereotypes of aging. Check out Marc Middleton's website www.GrowingBolder.com for motivational profiles on older adults doing amazing things. From swimming champions, models on the catwalk, graceful ballerinas, and super strong yoga instructors, you are sure to be inspired!

Never Too Early, Never Too Late: Let's Get Started!

Regardless of your age or stage of life, isn't it time you took charge of your health and wellness if you haven't already? It doesn't matter where you are now or how great or small your ultimate aspirations are. You can get a stronger body, a sharper brain, and gain endless energy. Don't wait another day!

As you read along, look for the little sidebars that highlight thoughts and tips that are specifically more applicable for the ***Never Too Early*** or the ***Never Too Late*** reader. I hope they resonate with you: The ***Never Too Early*** mindset = start now and you'll stave off many of the ailments that might otherwise impact you as you age. The ***Never Too Late*** mindset = regardless of your age or physical limitations, there are things you can do that will improve your health, mobility, and quality of life!