



**6 STEPS
TO PEAK
FITNESS**

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About Craig

Craig Ali is the founder and director of Total Health UK, working to improve happiness, wellbeing and performance of businesses and individuals. A certified holistic lifestyle coach, Thai massage therapist, martial artist and mindfulness practitioner. Craig has spent over fifteen years working as a leading trainer to individuals, world-class athletes and business professionals. Today, Craig uses his expertise to boost health and wellbeing in workplaces around the world - and the reader of this eBook.

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Using the Programme

The step-by-step guide has been designed to take anyone from their very first workout to peak fitness. Throughout the programme, you may find that you are consistently achieving the targets set in the sections, or you may not exactly fit the order I have mapped out here. Regardless, it's great that you are focusing on areas of your health and fitness consistently - well done! You can still use this guide to achieve peak fitness; maintain what you are doing (maybe with some tweaks if you feel any of this guide's advice would benefit you) and slowly begin to implement the other activities in this guide. Use the resources provided to support the programme and enjoy your journey to achieving peak fitness. It will have a hugely positive impact in every area of your life - that's one thing I can guarantee!

Step 1 - Cleanse the Body

We have to start somewhere, but the biggest question for most people is where to start? Well, there is no better place to start than having a good internal clear out to get the organs functioning effectively. Many people try to jump straight into the intense fitness work or muscle-building thinking that this will get them to peak condition. But, if the organs aren't healthy and functioning well, the body will only get so far before breaking down. The function of the internal organs dictates the physical health of a person. This is because the internal organs control how the body makes use of the energy we put in and they repair the damage we do on a daily basis. In Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, they believe that if we look after the internal organs then they will look after the function and health of the brain. This could possibly explain the mind-body connection!

Step one is to cleanse (detox) to clear out some of the excess toxins that will be in the system if your lifestyle choices haven't been strong for a while and to help everything function a little better. After this, we can then maintain a clean healthy "base". There are many different ways in which you can detox and if you follow all of the other steps in this programme you will most likely be cleansing the body adequately for the majority of the time. There are extreme and intensive detox programmes out there which many people find to be very beneficial, but they don't suit everyone. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to anything in health and wellbeing and I would advise against over-intensive detoxing; if it is not right for you at the time, you could break your body down to a point that is not healthy, or at least very hard to recover from. Due to this, I do not recommend any specific detoxing methods or programmes. I advise learning a few basic ways to help trigger natural repair within the body and get everything functioning a little better.

First of all, get moving! Light movement like brisk walking, light jogging, swimming, bodyweight exercises and yoga are all very beneficial ways of working the lymphatic system and clearing out toxins. Below, Figure 1 gives a description of the Sun Salutation, a yoga flow and probably one of the best ways to cleanse the body through movement (or, see Appendix A).

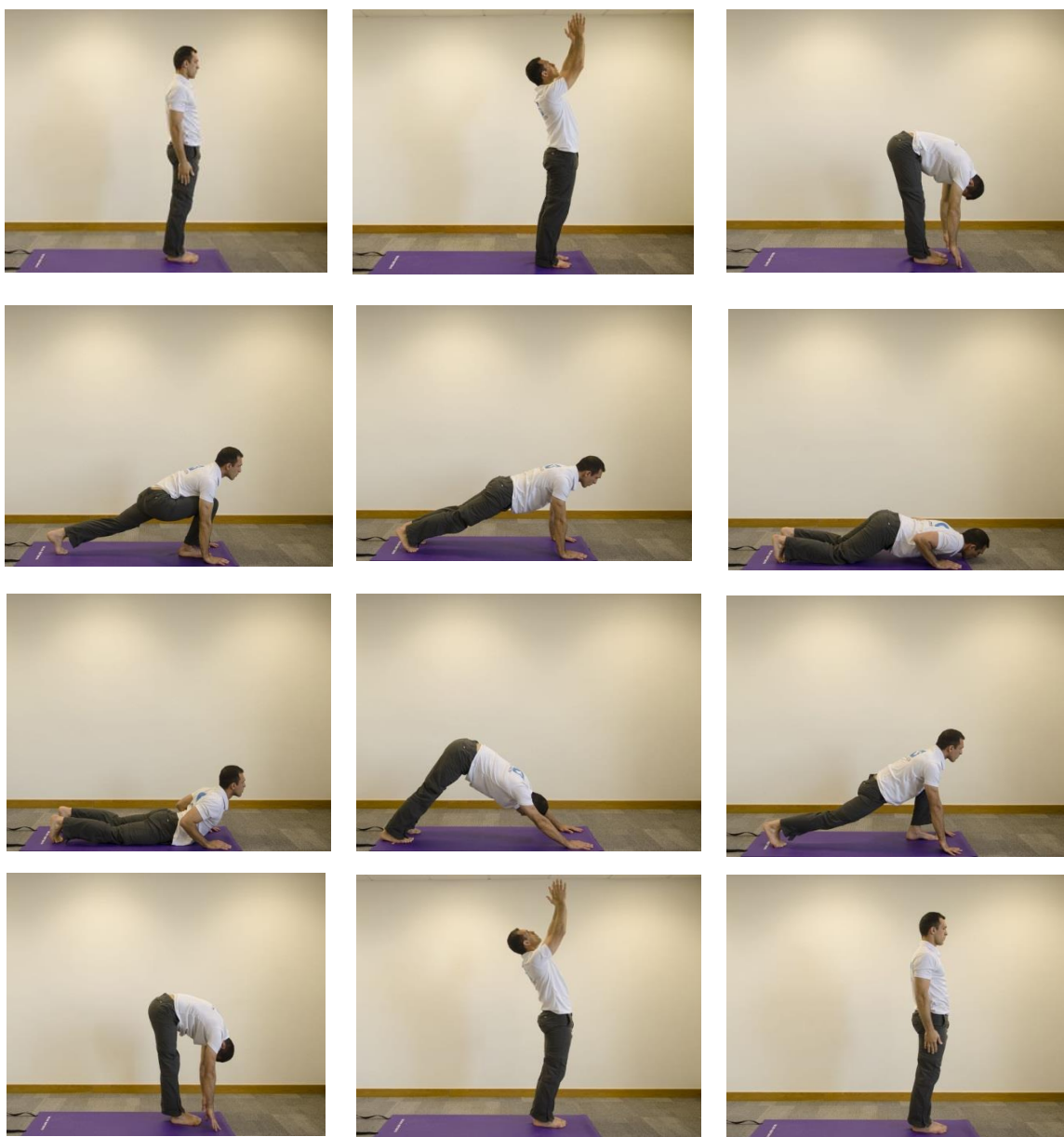
From there keep well hydrated. Your drinking water's quality will depend on where you live, but pretty much all tap water is tampered with slightly (that is, containing added fluoride or chlorine and with the natural minerals extracted). You can counter this, however, by adding a pinch of quality, high-mineral sea salt to a glass of tap water to reintroduce minerals and also adding a squeeze of lemon or lime to alkalise the water slightly. You can also drink mineral water with Evian and Fiji bottled water, which have the highest volume of minerals amongst branded water. It is not necessarily about putting lots of water into your system, but more about getting regular, good quality hydration. Always remember that if you're eating large amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables you will be absorbing a lot of water from these foods, so you won't have to drink as much water volume.

Next, ensure you're getting enough rest and sleep, as this is when your body does a lot of work. While you're asleep, the body can get on with repairing, cleansing and rejuvenating. Whatever or whoever designed the human body cleverly built in complex systems in our body that do the work we need it to do - all we have to do are simple things like eating well, exercising and resting to get every component doing its job efficiently. Sleep gives your organs vital repair and recovery time,

repairs muscle and cellular damage and removes toxins from the brain whilst reducing inflammation. Never underestimate the power of frequent, good quality sleep!

If your lifestyle has been a little indulgent at times, you can include treatments that will boost the cleansing process. Saunas, steam rooms, cold water therapy, massage, reflexology and acupuncture are considered the most effective treatments to support the body's natural cleansing mechanisms.

Essentially, live pure and you'll feel pure. When there is a bit over indulgence (which is great for you mentally from time to time) add some treatments in to shift things back on track. It's that simple!



Step 2 - Make Better Choices

After cleansing your entire body and clearing out many of the toxins, you're ready to rebuild your health and regenerate cells. It makes sense to now start assessing your lifestyle and reviewing some of your daily habits.

Once you have cleansed the body, you tend to find that many cravings just disappear. This is because these cravings come from your body lacking nutrients, your organs not functioning correctly, or experiencing major energy dips. Now that you have reversed a much of this, suddenly you will find that the need for coffee first thing in the morning isn't as strong, or that afternoon sugar craving doesn't kick in any more. You can also find that the taste or smell of a lot of these foods and drinks are not as appealing to you anymore and you no longer enjoy them, never mind crave them. The good thing is that a lot of these things just happen naturally after the detox process and, if it doesn't, that's fine too. You can still enjoy these treats from time to time, just avoid using them as sources of energy. I believe it is vital that we get satisfaction and enjoyment from our food and that we are not too strict with discipline as this is essentially energy draining - and no fun at all. Life is far too short and precious to be stressing about every morsel that passes your lips, but it is vital that you nourish the body correctly to provide you with optimal health and then you can enjoy the odd pizza or cappuccino on top as a little treat to enhance the day!

Although many cravings will disappear, you will still have many ingrained bad habits - big and small - that make your choices throughout the day poorer. This, in turn, has a negative effect on your health. How many times do you go to the coffee shop and agree to the pastry they offer with your coffee? Or, how many times do you order a large glass of wine instead of a small? A pint of beer rather than a bottle? How often do you stay up past 10.30pm watching mindless TV when you know you could do with a good rest? These are all of the little habits that are difficult to recognise but have a huge impact on your energy, productivity and recovery. The key to achieving peak health and fitness is developing a heightened awareness; a greater awareness of our own thoughts, actions and habits, plus a stronger awareness of others and how they influence us or how we influence them.

At this stage of your programme you must start to become more aware before you can move forward. Again, this may happen naturally just by committing to the programme, as well as by clearing toxins from the system, because a toxic and clogged body can translate into a toxic and clogged mind. Once you have successfully passed the hard phase of your detox and you start to feel your energy building, it is time to assess the good and bad habits in your lifestyle.

First of all, look at how you eat and drink throughout the day. The best way to do this is by keeping a food and drink diary. When every single thing you eat and drink is down in black and white in front of you, you will clearly see where you are going wrong. Although there is a lot of science behind exercise, nutrition and recovery, we should also have confidence in our instincts. It can be very simple and most of us know right from wrong; it's whether we pay attention to those instincts or not that matters. You should not rely on health professionals to tell you how to live your life healthily, because you should know how to do this yourself. Yes, we can offer advice, guidance, tips and tweaks, but your health is ultimately our responsibility!

After a week of keeping your food and drink diary, review it. Consider which are the two biggest faults that pop up in your daily routine and address these faults by replacing them with something better. Of course, you can just try to cut things out completely, but this takes a lot of willpower and it's often easier to replace bad with good. For example, if you like something sweet on a daily basis try replacing the cake or chocolate with some granola and yoghurt, or allow yourself a small piece of your preferred treat two days per week and look forward to enjoying it. Another trick I use with clients who have a sweet tooth is to allow them to have the sweet if they want it, but they are only allowed to have it 15 minutes after eating a piece of fruit. A high-sugar fruit like a banana or slice of melon will satisfy the sugar craving and the desire for cake won't be there anymore. Too many people immediately give in to cravings and go straight for the massive wedge of cake. Another useful tip is to review the pattern of your craving and eat something reasonably high in protein an hour before you know you're due a sugar craving. This works because protein helps balance blood sugar and actually prevents sugar levels dropping and leading to cravings. After the first week of reviewing habits, repeat the process a week or two later and keep going until you rid yourself of the most destructive bad habits in your diet.

Now that you are eating healthily and working to improve your daily choices, it is time to assess how you are moving. First of all, are you moving much at all? If not, then simply get moving whenever you can! There is no need to worry about any fancy exercises or the amount of reps, just get out of your seat and start to walk, run, jump, bend, twist, dance, stagger – anything! Get that body moving because that's what it is designed to do! If you have that daily movement covered, it can help maintain a base line of health. Now, you want to add in some more work out sessions to increase your fitness. The amount of exercise you do will vary on how much you can fit into your lifestyle and remember that it doesn't have to be exactly the same amount each week. You are not a robot; your body is constantly running in cycles, peaks and troughs; there are times when you will need to take things easier and times when you are able to push yourself a little harder. By becoming more aware of your energy and health, and tuning into your instincts a little more, you will gain a better idea of the cycles that your body goes through and you will know when to step things up and when to wind it down. In the following chapters, we will look at the specific areas of fitness you need to build in order to achieve Total Health.

At this point, I want you to think about your energy cycles and how you manage your exercise. This is a crucial point, as there are so many people I come across that burn themselves out before they get anywhere near peak fitness because they expect to get there too quickly. Just because you really want something and are willing to work hard for it, that does not mean that you put your head down and overwork yourself to get it as quickly as possible. There are so many factors affecting your health and fitness; overexertion can actually work against you and make you ill, injured or unmotivated.

Later on in the programme we will review how to recover effectively, but now I would like you to become more aware of recovery and relaxation. When do you take time to truly relax and switch off? How highly do you value recovery? Even if you are not doing a lot physically, the stress and pressures of life wear you out on a daily basis and there is only one way we can repair: by resting. Rest doesn't just have to be sleep or deep relaxation - it can also mean gentle exercise or socialising (ideally without alcohol or rich meals, but there is a time and place for everything). Practice totally switching off from the stresses and pressures that you are under day-to-day and, if you can master this, your health will improve drastically as you eradicate the highly damaging influence of mental and emotional worry.

Step 3 - Movement, Mobility and Posture

By now you have started to energise the body internally and change many of your bad lifestyle habits. Now it's time to get moving. Nothing - and I mean nothing - has a more positive impact on the mind and body than regular movement and exercise. No drug, supplement, or food can give you the sense of wellbeing that exercise gives you. We were designed to move, bend, twist, squat, lunge, push, pull, walk, run, jump, and dance! Studies show that people who exercise regularly are 30% less likely to take sick days off work and I would argue that exercise alone is the most important thing a person can do for their health and their sanity - and I can't imagine many other health professionals arguing with that point.

Now, if you aren't moving or exercising regularly, I would suggest that you just get up and start doing anything you feel comfortable and enjoy doing. But, to achieve Total Health, I recommend regular mobility and posture-improving exercises (you can find easy-to-follow videos in the Resources section of this eBook). Think about your exercise and movement in two different sections: The first is regular movement throughout the day from walking, cleaning, gardening, dancing, to jumping up and down on the spot (trust me, you will look great doing this in the supermarket queue) along with some mobility and posture exercises to keep you supple and functioning well. The second section is your fitness work (which we will cover in Chapter 5). This will help get you fitter for more extreme tasks or sports, as well as getting you more toned, building more lean muscle, burning fat and making you stronger. Get this combination right and you will take your fitness and body shape to the next level - and beyond!

The great thing about splitting movement and exercise into two separate sections is that you don't have to try to fit in five gym sessions or classes every week to stay healthy and see results. If you make sure that you are moving as regularly as possible throughout the day, by walking a little more, avoiding sitting for too long, using the stairs, possibly cycling or walking to work and doing some mobility and posture exercises as you are waiting on the kettle to boil or dinner to cook, then this gives you a great foundation to build from. On top of this, if you fit in three fitness sessions per week (sometimes it may be more or less, but don't stress about that too much as long as you're being consistent with the average amount of sessions) then you reach an optimal level to help you achieve good health and the body shape that you want.

When trying to figure out the types of mobility and posture exercises to do, it's probably best to follow a general head-to-toe mobility routine that loosens up the entire body. Then, if you feel that a particular area is a little tighter, spend a little more time on those areas or include them more regularly throughout the day. This doesn't need to be complicated; it's as simple as moving your body any way you can in a safe manner and, if an area is tighter, then move it lightly on a more regular basis. When it comes to posture exercises, every person differs slightly with their postural imbalances, but there are a few general exercises that will help the main postural muscles.

Check out the exercises in Figure 2 to get the chest opened up and the backs of the shoulders in a good position. These exercises will combat the fact that the majority of us will become rounded through the chest and shoulders from sitting, working on computers, driving, etc. Also, most of us will get a little tight through our hip flexors as we can spend a lot of time seated and that can cause the glute (backside) and lower abdominal muscles to 'switch off'. Check out the core and glute/hip

exercises in Figure 2 below to combat this.

Including regular movement in your day, along with mobility and posture exercises, will have a remarkable impact on your health and have a very subtle - but powerful - impact on your body. You will increase your metabolism and fat-burning hormones, you will gain energy as well as reducing pain, stress and tension, improve your body shape and mental wellbeing – the list goes on.

On our YouTube channel (the link is available in the Resources section) you'll find follow-along mobility and posture exercises to get moving as much as you can throughout your day. A great tool to help increase your daily movement is a pedometer; stick it on, monitor the amount of steps you are taking and keep trying to improve it. Aim to walk 10,000 steps per day to be in the bracket of an active person.

Fig. 2

Cobra Extension



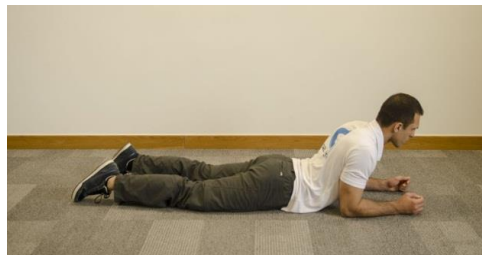
- Lie face-down on your front with your legs and feet flat on the floor and keep your lower body in this position throughout the exercise.
- With your hands by your side, lift your chest and shoulders off the ground but do not tilt the head backwards or forwards. Keep looking down at the floor with your head in line with the rest of the body.
- Roll the shoulders back and rotate the palms out so that the thumbs are pointing towards the ceiling. Your shoulders should not be turning in. You should feel your shoulder blades drawing towards one another.
- Keeping the thumbs pointing up towards the ceiling, pull your arms up. Hold this position for 10 seconds and repeat three times.

Pelvic Tilt and Bridge



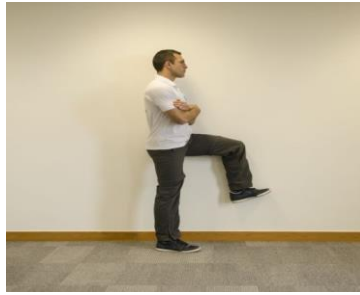
- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet shoulder-width apart. Keep your feet flat on the floor and just ahead of your knees.
- Very lightly tuck your pelvis in to “glue” your lower back into the floor.
- Imagine you are trying to fit into a tight pair of jeans, drawing your tummy in, and hold this position for the rest of the exercise.
- Maintaining the pelvic tilt, squeeze the backside and lift the hips off the floor as far as feels comfortable without curving your back.
- Hold this position for 20 seconds and slowly lower down. Repeat three times.

Lying Cobra



- Lie on your front with your elbows and forearms on the floor. Elbows should be directly underneath your shoulders and your shoulders should be relaxed.
- Let your stomach, thighs and hips rest on the floor and fix your gaze on the floor in front of you.
- Hold this position for as long as feels comfortable.

Glute Press



- Stand upright with one side of your body lightly touching a wall, but not leaning against it.
- Raise the leg closest to the wall so that your knee is in line with your hip (or slightly lower), whilst keeping your knee bent at a right angle and your foot activated.
- Keeping your hip against the wall at all times, press your whole leg into the wall as if you are trying to push the wall away from you and hold for 5 seconds. This will be a static hold.
- Whilst pressing your leg into the wall, keep the rest of your body relaxed and just slightly touching the wall. Repeat three times on each leg.

Step 4 - Reduce and Manage Stress

We are all under constant stress. This is not necessarily a bad thing; it all depends on the level of stress, type of stress and how we deal with it. Mild stress can stimulate the body and mind, but any high level of stress will break down the balance of the body and exhaust you. When the body is out of balance and there are high stress levels, it is only a matter of time before the body, mind or spirit has to give.

Here are a few questions to ask yourself to assess whether stress is having a negative effect on you:

- Are you anxious, irritable, and worried a lot of the time?
- Do you struggle to sleep well?
- Do you feel exhausted when you wake up?
- Are you exhausted regularly?
- Do you struggle to switch off from work or stressful situations?
- Are you craving sugary or fatty foods?
- Do you have skin or digestive problems?
- Does moderate exercise make you tired?
- Do you suffer niggling pains or stiffness within the body?

If you answered yes to two or more of these questions then stress in some shape or form is having an impact on you. Stress is accumulative and can be difficult to spot until you are highly stressed, so it is important to assess levels on a regular basis.

When we are under any form of stress it affects us physically and long-lasting results are hard to achieve as the body is under constant strain, being pulled out of balance, and unable to repair itself on a daily basis. It keeps breaking down and eventually you'll end up injured, ill or exhausted and unable to maintain any kind of routine. Once the body has broken down, the mind will follow, and vice versa, along with emotion and spirit (if they haven't already broken down by that point). This may not be in an extreme manner, but it can lead to you constantly feeling unmotivated, lethargic and negative. These feelings make maintaining any regular exercise and health programme very difficult.

Humans are designed and taught to be resilient physically, mentally and emotionally. So, if the body is fatigued but constantly being pushed, it will most likely rely on the adrenal glands for energy, something we should only be using in very small doses. Constant adrenal use can lead to adrenal fatigue, which will cause you to struggle with weight loss and become ill, and it can have a massive impact on anxiety and depression. Below, you'll find really simple ways to get control of the stress

and start working your way towards full health.

1. **Be kind to yourself.** Don't constantly beat yourself up about the way you look or feel. Negative thoughts or emotions trigger more negative thoughts and it builds until all self-confidence is lost. Try to get yourself into the correct balance of discipline and enjoyment so that you are achieving and enjoying at the same time.
2. **Focus on the positive things in life.** And take time to be grateful for them!
3. **Introduce recovery strategies.** If you have been under a lot of stress you need to repair and rebuild before you can feel fit and energized again. Recovery strategies may include exercise such as gentle yoga, tai chi, mobility, walking, movement and breathing exercises. Massage or alternative therapies such as acupuncture, reiki or reflexology can also be effective. Recovery strategies can also mean simply putting time aside for you, reading positive or personal development books, investing time with family and friends and simply having fun. Ideally, you will start adding a combination of all of these types of recovery into your daily and weekly routine. If you have trouble sleeping, it can be beneficial to add some of these gentle strategies in the evening before you sleep.
4. **Eat well.** There can be huge benefits for very little effort here. Make a conscious effort with your food choices. Start your day well and consider the best choice for you with each meal or snack, as it is vital that you fuel your body well. When your adrenal glands respond to stress your cell metabolism speeds up, burning many times the number of nutrients normally needed. With adrenal fatigue, the cells have used up much of the body's stored nutrients, leaving you lacking in vital nutrients. Good quality food is essential for replenishing these nutrients; hypoglycaemia and diabetes can be common problems that occur from adrenal fatigue due to its huge impact on blood sugar levels. Also, when blood sugar levels are messed up, it makes it very difficult to lose or maintain a healthy weight, so it is essential to eat good quality foods on a regular basis to maintain good blood sugar.

Here is a list of nutritional elements to help replenish and maintain good blood sugar levels:

- Avoid fruit and cereals in the morning.
- Limit starchy foods in the diet such as bread, pasta, potatoes, cereal, etc.
- Increase protein, especially through nuts, seeds, beans, legumes, green leafy plants.
- Eat small amounts of protein regularly.
- Limit coffee, sugar, sweets and alcohol to a minimum or eliminate completely if possible.

- Eat a variety of brightly coloured vegetables as your main source of carbohydrates - but not your only source as it is important to take in a small amount of carbs from other sources.
- Eat small amounts regularly (e.g. every 2 hours).

Once you have started managing stress through resting, implementing recovery strategies, gentle exercise and alterations to your diet, then you have to start addressing where the stress is coming from. A lot of the time we can get stress under control if we tackle the people or factors that bring it into our lives, but much of the time we create our own stress. If you constantly put yourself under pressure to achieve, compare yourself to others, are unhappy with your image or appearance, or let negative thoughts spiral, you're building up unnecessary stress.

Step 5 - Strength, Cardio and Flexibility

By this point your body will be functioning at a great level after ridding yourself of the toxins, making solid lifestyle choices, building regular movement into your day and learning to manage stress so that it stimulates rather than exhausts you. Now your body is ready to work a little harder to take your fitness to the next level. The movement, mobility and posture work you are implementing at this point will be building general fitness to a decent level, but by working on more intensive strength work, cardio training and flexibility, you will increase energy levels and affect body shape drastically.

There is no better feeling than being at the peak of your fitness; you feel confident, energised, positive and calm. So why have you waited until this point to include this type of training? The answer is that you do not need to wait until this point if you feel that all of the other areas discussed above are being worked on and are under control. Even if they aren't, I would never discourage anyone from starting fitness training, but if you want to achieve peak health and fitness and reach your full potential, then you are best addressing all of the other areas first. This will mean that there will be very little chance of fatiguing your mind and body or becoming ill, injured or unmotivated before you reach this point.

With these three aspects of fitness (strength, cardio and flexibility), you can be training for years and years and still be learning and developing, so it is entirely up to you how far you want to take things. If you are serious about your fitness and want to be the complete 'athlete', it is probably best that you cycle your focus on each one. You can be constantly training all three aspects, but for a period of time have a greater focus on one of them, and work on progressing this aspect and just maintaining or slightly progressing the others. If you are just looking to feel and look good whilst staying in good health you can work all of them into your week, and possibly even into one session, if you like.

Strength

By now, you will be incorporating posture exercises into your routine (it is important to keep some posture work in your routine- as a warm up for your strength training, for example). It is best to stick to basic strength exercises that engage the whole body in one movement. Ensure that your strength work is movement-based, so that you are strong in every plane of movement, as this will also help tone every muscle in the body. Strength exercises don't have to be really heavy weights; forget the myth that strength training only makes you bulky. You can create whatever shape and tone you like with strength training. You could simply begin with push-ups, pull-ups, squats, lunges, side lunges – you have a great, bodyweight strength routine right there, or check out the 100 Rep Challenge (www.100repchallenge.com) for great ideas on body weight training. I am also a fan of big lifts with the barbell, dumbbells and cables, which anyone, at any level, can do, but get some instruction for correct form beforehand.

Adding in deadlifts, barbell squats, military press, woodchops, Russian twists and bench press will help you balance your hormone levels, resulting in fat loss, improved sleep, better management of food cravings and an increase in mood, negating all biomarkers of aging - as well as getting you 'ripped'. If those benefits are not enough to get you lifting, then nothing is! Strength training, performed correctly and in the correct state, will help you achieve peak health and fitness, but avoid

training in a really stressed or exhausted state and do not take all of your sets to fatigue. The best piece of advice I have heard regarding strength training is to make sure that you can complete every rep in a controlled, smooth and even tempo, only on the last couple of reps of your final set can you lose some of that control and tempo. Great results won't come from working to exhaustion in every set; great results come from working consistently hard in a controlled way.

Cardio

I find that cardio training, when training intensively, generally plateaus around five or six weeks in. At this point, it can start to get very exhausting and the body generally needs a bit of rest. I recommend intensive cardio work for five weeks, and then keeping some maintenance cardio work in your exercise routine for eight to twelve weeks, before doing another four to five week block of intense cardio training. When doing your maintenance cardio, you can simply add some in at the end of your weights routine or flexibility training, but do less of it and don't work quite as hard as you would in the intensive cardio training block.

You may be wondering what kind of cardio exercise you should be doing and that really depends on your current health and fitness levels. If you're in good health, with no joint problems and at your ideal weight, then you could go for some sprint training to really rocket your fitness levels. Or, if you feel that you are a beginner, simply go for a light walk or cycle.

The most effective way of building up your cardio is to do some kind of interval training. This simply means that you work at a harder level for a short period of time (anything from 30 seconds to 5 minutes). Work for a chosen amount of time at a level that pushes you until you feel like you need a break. Once you get to the end of the chosen time, take as much of a break as you need - but keep moving at a less strenuous level - before returning to high intensity. You can repeat from two to ten sets depending on your chosen time brackets and intensity. If you want to get scientific, you would use a heart rate monitor and work at anything from 70-90% of your maximum heart rate, wait until your heart rate comes down to around 120-130 beats per minute, then go again. Just remember to always feel like you can do one or two more when you finish. Just like your strength training, you do not want to work to the point of exhaustion because this will only exhaust you - funnily enough - and most likely make you ill or injured. Ultimately, the key to getting fit is consistently working hard but never to complete exhaustion.

Also, really focus on your breathing throughout your cardio work. Take good, deep, controlled breaths when recovering and short, sharp, but relaxed breaths when working harder. When things are getting hard, focus on short breaths out as this will help clear the toxins building up in the lungs and relax the body. You will naturally take breaths in when needed, so try not to fill the lungs up with big breaths at this point as there will be no room for the air and this is not what is needed. Let everything out with short, sharp breaths then recover with a couple of big breaths in.

Flexibility

From all of the work you have been doing up to this point with your posture, mobility and movement-based strength training, your flexibility will most likely have increased a great deal. If you want to take your flexibility to the next level, start to incorporate stretching, either into your cardio

and strength routines or through dedicated stretching sessions.

I would recommend anyone to take a beginners course of yoga in order to get an understanding of flexibility, health and how to stretch effectively. Ideally, you'd introduce some of these stretches into your routine or continue with a regular yoga class. Pilates, Tai Chi and Qi Gong are also excellent systems for developing flexibility, strength, relaxation and movement. I believe that everyone should follow elements of these systems to maintain good health simply because they are so effective. These movements do not only improve all aspects of fitness, they also help to balance your nervous systems, hormone levels, organ, glands and brain function. Practicing these movements and routines alone will drastically improve your health and fitness, as they are the most complete systems around.

If you want to fit in all elements discussed in this plan, practice these systems of yoga, Pilates, Tai Chi and Qi Gong regularly. Remember that the key to developing flexibility is relaxation; breathe and relax into the stretch and you will get deeper into it and develop the flexibility. You can't force a stretch; you will create tension and your body will just pull you out of the stretch. Similarly, do not keep pushing the stretch to the furthest point (do you see a pattern here?). Take it to a point where it is challenging your flexibility but you still have control and can relax into it. To get started immediately, try the yoga routines in Appendix B for a complete all-over stretch

Step 6 - Recovery Strategies

A lack of effective recovery strategies is the missing link in most people's health and training programmes and this prevents them reaching peak fitness. Recovery strategies are the glue that holds everything together; even if you train consistently hard, eat well and challenge yourself, you will not reap real benefit unless you are recovering effectively. The body gets stronger after it has repaired from overload - not while it's working. The body will utilise good quality nutrition to enhance energy, health and repair, but only as long as it's not burned out and broken down. The mind will gain clarity and focus, and reduce anxiety and stress, when there is stillness.

If you are not doing much to challenge yourself physically and mentally, you do not have to worry about introducing recovery strategies other than a good night's sleep. But, by this point of the programme, you will be consistently training hard and functioning at a higher level, so it is important that adequate recovery is now implemented to enhance the repair of cells, organs and muscle fibres.

Before you get ahead of yourself and try out fancy techniques you've seen Andy Murray and Bradley Wiggins use, let's just focus on some basics.

First, focus on getting some good quality sleep! If you cannot get the recommended seven to eight hours, get as close as possible. Also, it's not just the amount of sleep that counts; when you sleep counts just as much. Our body goes in natural cycles throughout the day (circadian rhythms) and the peak recovery time for repair is between 10pm and 6am. Physical repair of the body will be at a peak between 10pm and 2am, with cognitive repair at a peak between 2am and 6am. To make the most of this repair time it is best to be fully rested and asleep. I understand that this can be difficult for some if they have to work, eat or socialise late, but try to get as close to this as possible. If your sleeping times are way off this mark, try and change your routine in a very gradual way, for example by going to bed earlier by fifteen or twenty minutes earlier, until you are used to the new routine, and then scaling it back again. If you suddenly go to bed one or two hours earlier than you normally would, you will just be lying awake for hours.

To get the most out of your sleep you want to make sure that your body can use its energy to repair rather than doing unnecessary jobs. It is important to not eat big meals close to going to bed; one of the best quotes I have heard is, "The hardest workout the body can do is break down a big meal". This is especially true if you eat heavily processed foods late in the evening. Again looking at our natural cycles of the day, the digestive system is not at its strongest late in the evening, so food can sit in your system, turning toxic and making your body work incredibly hard to break it down. The key is to eat most of your food earlier in the day and eat only lightly in the evening. I appreciate that not everyone has the luxury of having an early dinner due to work schedules, etc., but to ensure good recovery, it is important that you don't consume a big meal in the evening. Get a little bit more in at lunchtime, or in snacks, and have a decent breakfast the next day.

As well as eating late, avoid alcohol in your evening wind-down. I know that there is sometimes nothing better than a nice wine or beer after a long, stressful day, and occasionally you just have to treat yourself to it. But a small glass of alcohol to wind down in the evening, if it is more than just a one-off, may not be excessive drinking but will be ruining the recovery of the body. The sugar in the alcohol will excite the nervous system, making it difficult to repair effectively. Plus, your body will be

trying to clear the toxins from the alcohol, taking up repairing energy and most likely disturbing your sleeping pattern. This is one of the biggest faults that busy professionals get into and it is one of the biggest energy drainers. Use alcohol as a treat and enjoy your glass, rather than using it as something to wind down. It may help you unwind mentally, but it will actually stimulate and burn you out physically.

Also, to get the most out of your sleep, you want to make sure that you've wound down from the day's stresses and are not trying to fall asleep while you are still physically and/or mentally awake. Gradually relax throughout the evening and, once again, try to fit in with the body's daily rhythms. The release of cortisol (the stress hormone) reduces in the evening and the repair hormones increase, so you do not want to stimulate adrenaline and cortisol late in the day, as it will be difficult to get to sleep or to repair effectively if you do fall asleep. The best ways to wind down include something natural like a bath, light exercise or movement, meditation or yoga. I understand that sometimes you will read, browse the Internet or watch TV, but avoid getting into the habit of doing this all the time, or right up until you fall asleep, because these activities stimulate the brain (sometimes with a stressful response depending on the story you are watching/reading) and drain your energy.

Once you are on top of your sleeping patterns and getting good-quality sleep, you can then look to build in other strategies that will enhance recovery and relaxation. Some of the most obvious and beneficial ones are massage, light stretching, breathing exercises and meditation. All of these should be built into anyone's lifestyle to help drastically improve physical, mental and emotional health. You can also look at more advanced techniques such as cryotherapy and ice baths, regular nutrition cleansing, Reiki, acupuncture, sound therapy or Bowen therapy. I guarantee that, if guided correctly or practiced by a quality therapist, all of these techniques can have huge benefits in helping you achieve, and maintain, peak fitness. Try out different therapies, see what suits you best and what you enjoy, then starting to implement them into your lifestyle. Again, there doesn't need to be a daily or weekly slot for all of these more advanced techniques (although that's great if you can fit it in), but treating yourself to a course of treatment once every couple of weeks or months is also effective.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that you will get stuck along the way, or stop for a while, or not get the results as fast as you'd like (no one ever does and most people are unrealistic), but results will happen if you keep working consistently, remembering that every single mini target doesn't need to be hit to achieve the ultimate end. As long as most of the targets are met, occasional blips in between are perfectly acceptable and completely normal.

If you find yourself really struggling for motivation and feeling unsure about achieving your goals, then I encourage you to look up Kyle Maynard on YouTube (see the Resources section). In fact, it is an order - he is the most inspirational character I have ever come across in terms of achieving against the odds.

Any doubts you may have are made up in your own mind and they simply aren't true; I have been through it myself thousands of times (and will continue to do so) and I have witnessed and helped so many people achieve peak health and fitness from a weak starting point.

Enjoy the journey!

Craig

Appendices

Appendix A.

Follow-along guide to the Sun Salutation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAsJe4CR0Kw&list=UU_Re1iQb1zkwLvWJNxbPmJA

Appendix B.

.Sun Salutation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAsJe4CR0Kw>

Triangle:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkSZqMvs7pM&list=PLpWtY0uvlJo4dhPDa9iieMuOvyu19xiv>

Resources

Total Health UK website (<http://www.totalhealth.uk.com>)

Total Health UK YouTube channel (<http://www.youtube.com/user/TotalHealthUK>)

100 Rep Challenge (<http://www.100repchallenge.com/>)