

Fit
and
Fabulous
after
Fifty

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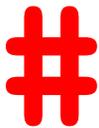
Fit and Fabulous After Fifty

by Dr. Gayle Carson

I'll tell you up front – I am not a certified professional trainer, nor do I possess a degree in physical fitness. So what entitles me to write this treatise? The fact that I believe that good health is everyone's right, and I believe that discipline in whatever you do leads to results. And I practice what I preach.



In this guide, you will not be given any fancy scientific theories, but you *will* receive practical “wisdoms” that lead to results – so buckle up your seat belts and let's go.

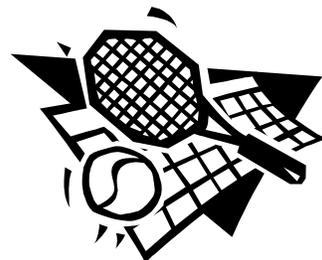


Let's start with exercise. Exercise is vital to your well-being. It isn't so important what *kind* of exercise you do as long as you do something. You have to find your own comfort level, as well as what works best for your body.



When my 92-year-old mother told me she couldn't find unoccupied machines in her housing complex, I suggested she use soup cans to exercise her biceps and triceps. Of course, she thought I was crazy... but it works! My point is, you can either make excuses for not doing something, or you can figure something out. It's your choice.

It's important that you monitor the results of your decisions. I found that when I lifted heavy weights, I developed mass and I looked like I was training for the wrestling competitions. As soon as I went to lighter weights, my muscles seemed to lengthen and become more defined.



But everyone is different. I have seen tall, slender women who use heavy weights and yet never develop mass, as well as short, petite women who look very slim despite doing weight training.

That is why you must find what works best for *you*.

So the first thing you must decide is... what do you enjoy doing? I am not good at meditation, yoga, Pilates or any quiet activities. I like aerobics, the step, weights, bike, treadmill, swimming and generally most active exercises. Even, believe it or not, kickboxing! Although I find kickboxing very hard on my body, there are parts of it that have been very good for me as far as toning and defining.



But that's what works for me. Decide on *your* favorite things and begin with those.

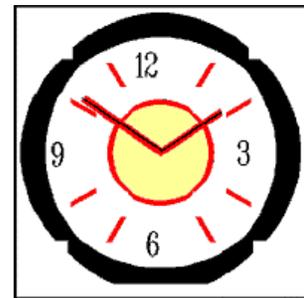
Unfortunately, age does make you more conscious of all your aches and pains. Since my feet, back and knees are bad, I have had to modify my high-impact workout to make it low-impact. *Low-impact doesn't mean less of a workout.* To the contrary, I have added one more riser to the step (I now use two) so I get greater intensity with less impact. I'm not fancy and don't hop around very much, but I get a very, very intense workout.

Although I'm ambitious, I try to recognize my limits. That's because I've found that every time I feel really good and get fancy, I pay for it the following day.

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NEXT – you must decide what time of day works best for you. If you're retired, any time may do; other people may need to search to find some available time. You also need to consider your prime physical times.

When I was on the road all the time, evenings seemed ideal. Now I prefer to exercise first thing in the morning; I find too many distractions in the evening. If I exercise in the morning, it gets done, it's over and I feel great all day.



Contrary to the popular view, I work out seven days a week, two hours a day. But that's what's right for me. You have to find what is best for you – 30 minutes or two hours, or something in between. What is your goal? You can get cardio benefit in as little as 30 minutes, but real fitness takes longer than that.

The length of time that you exercise is only one consideration. You also need to

determine the *type* of exercise that you do. You'll want to do aerobic activity for your heart, and weight training for your bones. And don't forget the need for stretching – stretching is important for flexibility.

How long and how much exercise is right for you is *your* decision. I change my routine every 30 days but I will give you an idea of my ideal week –

- Day 1. A 45-minute weight routine for my chest, shoulders and back. A one-hour step class.
- Day 2. 30 minutes on the treadmill or bike, followed by one and one-half hours of kickboxing, step and floor work.
- Day 3. A 45-minute weight routine for my biceps, triceps and legs. One hour of kickboxing.
- Day 4. 30 minutes on the treadmill or bike, followed by one and one-half hours of low impact aerobics, step and floor work.
- Day 5. A 45-minute weight workout for my chest, shoulders and back. A one-hour step class.
- Day 6. 30 minutes on the treadmill or bike, followed by one and one-half hours of kickboxing, step and floor work. Plus 60 laps in the swimming pool.
- Day 7. 45 minutes of weight work for my biceps, triceps and legs, plus 30 minutes of step, 30 minutes of floor work. And another 60 laps swimming.



Of course, this routine changes based on where I am and what I have to work with, but I have used chairs in hotel rooms, desks as ballet barres, and so on.

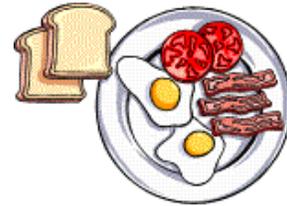
The important thing is – ***don't make excuses***. Use what's around you. And if a day goes by that interferes with your routine – so be it. If you are consistent, one or two missed days will not make a difference.

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THIRD – you need to look at what you’re eating.

Now you don’t need to become a fanatic. I am *not* a vegetarian, nor am I a fish eater. Nothing says you have to give up meat or any particular things to keep your weight in check. What you do need to achieve is *a consistent pattern of eating* that your body responds positively to.

Several years ago, I decided I wanted to lose some weight. Every year for the past decade, I had put on two or three pounds... until I had 35 pounds that I didn’t want.



Since I have exercised practically all of my life, exercise wasn’t the answer for me. Exercising was good for my health, but it wouldn’t help me lose those unwanted pounds.

So it was very difficult for me to lose weight. I tried many different things and nothing worked. I knew that my metabolism might be slowing down even though my energy level was very high, so I figured changing my diet might help. I didn’t want to follow a fad diet that would produce temporary results; instead, I wanted to find a way of eating that was healthy for me... and that I would follow forever.



I decided simply to drop carbs after five p.m. It took 90 days before I lost one pound, and I’ll admit that it was very frustrating at first. But then the pounds started coming off! It was a slow process – it took 13 months of following my plan, *but I lost 35 pounds and become a size six.*

It is now two and one-half years later, and the weight is still off. I found that once I had lost the weight I wanted, I could become a little more flexible in my program. So, although I don’t ever go crazy, I do eat *some* carbs after five.

Here’s a typical day for me:

- Breakfast – Cheerios™ or shredded wheat with raisins, and low-fat milk.
- Lunch – low-fat cottage cheese, either a salad or fruit or turkey or chicken, and

three (!!!) white chocolate Hershey Kisses™.

- Mid-afternoon – a piece of fruit or more low-fat cottage cheese.
- Dinner – meat, salad or vegetables, small potato and small dessert.
- 8:00 p.m. – fruit.
- I drink herbal ice tea with lemon or lime all day long.



You'll notice that I'm not a proponent of any one particular food. However, I must say that I believe low-fat cottage cheese is one of the healthiest things you can eat because my kickboxing instructor told me it goes directly into your bones.

I was eating it long before I heard that, but maybe it's true – my last bone density test was great... and I think it's because of the weight-bearing exercise and the cottage cheese.

I see women at my gym working out like crazy, yet their bodies – and weights – never change. A lot of their problem is their diet. They don't change *how*, *what* and *when* they eat.



Now it may take you some time to discover the right food program for you. If one thing doesn't work, try another. When you discover and follow the correct formula for you, you will see results.

Don't use "eating out" as an excuse. The great thing about what I am telling you is that over 50% of my meals are eaten out – so you can maintain your weight loss, even in a non-home environment.

Weight gain is a widespread (if you'll forgive the pun) problem. As they age, most people use fewer calories, but don't adjust their eating habits. As I've said before, changing your **activity level**, **metabolism**, **life style** and **pace** will make a difference. Just keep trying a variety of things, until you find what works for you.

Many people live to eat. I eat to live.

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FOURTH – is the vitamin supplement issue. Certainly there are pros and cons on this. Since I am no nutritionist I can't tell you what to do. All I know is I have taken supplements for years and I always feel good.

Supplements can also address specific problems. Last year when I went for my eye exam, my optometrist said I had the beginning of macular degeneration and suggested that I should start taking lutein, which had not been part of my regime before then. I added it, taking my six mg. every day, and this year when I went back, *all traces of the of macular degeneration were gone.*

While there's no proof that it really made a difference, I believe it did!

So I take all the classics – like vitamins E and C, multi-super-oxidants, calcium, and so forth. I believe in them and will continue to take them, but do your own research and see what you think.

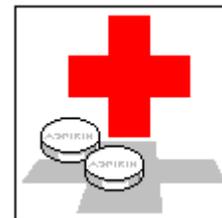


I've heard that if you eat properly, you don't really need vitamins and supplements. I know I eat well – I have sufficient fiber in my diet, I drink a lot of liquids, and I don't put junk food into my body. But I still like my vitamins!

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FIFTH – is your attitude. What does this have to do with fitness? *Everything!!* Numerous studies have shown that your attitude has a direct bearing on your physical health.

Now you may be protesting that it's easy to have a positive attitude when you're healthy and you feel good, but what about when you feel lousy? Let me tell you – there is hardly a day that I can get out of bed without gently rolling out because of my back pain. And that's not all....



I wear a support bandage on my right knee, and my right foot looks like it has a hole right on top of the foot. Sometimes my chest area hurts from the implant I have from the reconstruction after breast cancer.

“My gosh,” you may say, “she sounds like a walking disaster.” Maybe, but it doesn’t stop me. The point is, it’s my choice – I could make excuses and never do anything, or I can do what I can, every day, and feel better.

I know that every year, things will probably get harder to do, but I’m sure that I will always do *something*. And that’s what you have to do.



There are lots of ways to improve your attitude. Make friends with people who are active and moving. Hang around people who go to plays and concerts. (I just realized I didn’t see my first “big music scene” until after the age of 62. Then came Sting, Madonna and Cher in that order.) Take elder hostel tours or cruise – whether you are single or married.

Here’s an example. I met the neatest woman on a cruise... who got around the ship *on a scooter* because of her disability. She was the most vivacious, humorous and fun individual that I have met in a long time.

AND....

She met her future partner on a cruise!



It’s amazing when you ‘think’ about it. Positive thinking makes you feel good. Feeling good gives you the energy to do anything you want. And doing what you want makes you feel good. It’s a circle!

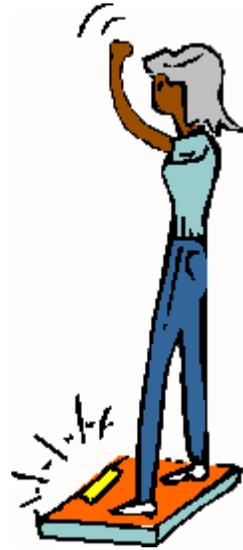
People ask me about retirement and I respond that I will never retire – or at least until I have to. It seems that many people retire when they are unhappy, forced to retire because of mandatory age requirements, or they’re ill. But if you are healthy **and** happy, I see no reason to retire.

There are lots of alternatives to choose from. You may change careers, do

volunteer or pro bono work, move to another community and start fresh, or devote yourself to a new and fulfilling hobby. But don't use the word 'retirement.' Too many people fall into a lethargic, slow paced life style that begins the slide to nowhere.

This year I went to the IDEA fitness convention for the first time. It was attended by 2000 physical fitness instructors – and me. They went because fitness was their job; I went to have fun and to learn – and mostly because I had always wanted to attend their convention.

It was an interesting event for me. I saw great bodies and O.K. bodies. But get this – in my first class (with 300 people) the instructor came off the stage, parted the class like Moses, walked toward me, kissed my hand and then went back on stage. He never said a word, but I am convinced it was because I was the oldest person in the class.

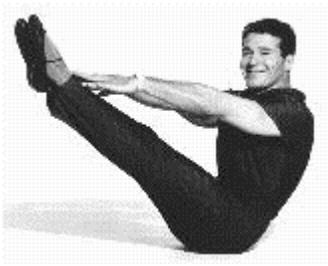


To my surprise, people started taking my picture in the classes I attended. Finally, I asked one of them why. She said, "I teach senior fitness classes, and they are always telling me that can't do what you are doing. So I just wanted proof that it was possible."

Wow! Did that make me feel good!

Were there a lot of classes too fast and furious for me? You bet. But I did them at *my* pace. I felt good about the fact that my teachers had been doing a really great job of teaching and that I was up on most things. But what was best to me is the spirit I saw. Everyone was happy and smiling and eager to learn. *These were energized people.*

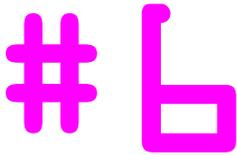
Even though I was the oldest person there, I've discovered that age is not relevant to attitude. I have found people in their 20's with the personality, attitude and energy of an 80-year-old, and 80-year-olds who have the personality, attitude and energy of a 20-year-old. Which are you?



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One last thought. My idol is Jack LaLanne, because he just keeps on “truckin’.” He is always smiling, positive and active.



SIXTH – is preventive precaution. Although we can’t always avoid accidents, disease and unforeseen occurrences, we can do as much as possible to protect ourselves from them. Each year the medical profession finds new ways to keep us healthy. Sadly, many of us do everything we can to ignore that advice.

I am speaking from experience. I am a breast cancer survivor – *twice*. I was fortunate. My cancer was found so early that I had a great chance for survival. But it was preventive measures that enabled the doctors to discover it so early.



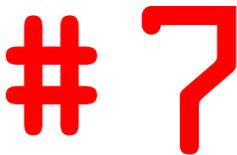
Both times it was found with a mammogram. I’m glad I had the test. It would have been at least *three years* before I would have been able to feel the lump.

The same preventive principles apply to men also. My husband found his prostate cancer through his PSA test – a *must* for every man over 50. So as much as we don’t like going to doctors, it’s a necessary evil for you to have a bone density test, get a colonoscopy, have blood work done, test your cholesterol levels, measure your blood pressure, and so on. You may not be able to prevent something from happening to you, but there’s a good chance you can stop it from becoming a disastrous event.

It is my personal opinion that being fit does not necessarily extend your life, but it *does* give you a better quality of life. It allows you to continue the pursuit of your dreams, and to have the energy to do the things you enjoy. It gives you a reason to get out of bed in the morning. It makes you a better grandparent (or great-grandparent), friend, activist, student or advisor.



It is interesting to note that the greatest growth of computer users is in the over-50 age bracket. When I speak on cruise ships, it's always fascinating to me that the people using e-mail are doing so to keep in touch with their kids and grand-kids. And at home, e-mail is a great way to receive instant pictures.



So this brings me to point **SEVEN** – mental fitness. Mental fitness is as important a component of good health as anything else I've mentioned.

Now earlier I talked about attitude, but this is different. Mental fitness is the desire to focus on lifelong learning – to continuously be upgrading your knowledge and skills. It's developing a new hobby, researching new information, or taking on a new project that is challenging and exciting.

I must admit that I have always admired my mother who does crossword puzzles every night, and is a constant source of information on everything. She reads, loves to try new things, and is an exciting companion on many of my trips. She goes on day trips with her apartment community, and takes new courses wherever she can.



What I'm writing about can also be called 'spirit' – spirit to always 'be' and 'do' – to *try*. That's the kind of mental fitness that I'm talking about!

I have always found the nicest people in the senior population. (Maybe because I am a senior!) They're willing to go the extra mile and give you a helping hand – just generally being a great population. Great because they've seen

and done most things – good and bad – and are willing to keep going and doing.

I must confess I recently went into a retirement facility to check out rates, vacancies and the lay of the land. My first words were “Hello – I’m here to check out your facility and what it offers.”

The receptionist replied, “Oh, you’re too peppy for us. You wouldn’t be happy here.” All that from my dozen words. But I’ve had that happen over and over, where people just are blown away my how energetic I am. I consider it a compliment, and testimony to the fact I am happy, healthy and fit.

Certainly we can only do so much against diseases such as Alzheimer’s, although there is some data on how continuing stimulus of the brain can slow the process; however if you do nothing to make yourself move or make new friends or think about new ideas, not much will happen. There are people who do everything possible to keep themselves healthy and fit, while others do nothing at all, yet complain continuously about all their problems.



I admire the mental toughness of the physically disabled who compete in special forms of marathons and sport activities. I respect their continual achievement in scientific, mathematical, artistic and literary fields. I applaud their contributions to their communities and families. Yet others who don’t have to struggle nearly as hard, give up if things don’t come their way on the first try. Young or old – mental fitness is important for *everyone*.

So let’s recap:

- #1. Physical exercise is the #1 requirement for fitness. Whatever form it takes, it must work for *your* body. Use a combination of strategies for strength, flexibility and cardio results.

- #2. Understand your biological time clock and primary hours. This includes your work and life style requirements as well as environment. Find things that work for you at the right times so you have no excuses.
- #3. Eat healthy. Smaller and more often is better. Be sure to include fiber, a balanced diet and foods you like so you don't feel deprived.
- #4. Determine what vitamin supplements are necessary for your body. Have the necessary blood work done to see if you can have any deficiencies, and just include these as a regular part of your meal plan.
- #5. Maintain a positive attitude. Don't let anyone shed gloom on your sunny side of life. Hang around with people you like and who inspire you.
- #6. Practice preventive medicine. Take your tests and go for your checkups. Don't make excuses or procrastinate. Early detection is the safest way of maintaining good health.
- #7. Keep mentally fit. Stimulate your brain and ensure lifelong learning. Stimulate your mind and challenge it with new thoughts and ideas on a daily basis.



Practice these principles, and – regardless of your age – I'm confident that you will lead a happier, healthier, more enjoyable life.

Fitness is your birthright. Claim it!

About Dr. Gayle Carson....

Gayle Carson is known as “The Business Person's Business Person”. She has been featured in *USA Today* and she appeared on the *Larry King Show*. She developed the cable series “Business Today” and she is the author of *Winning Ways: How to Get to the Top & Stay There*.



Dr. Carson says, “My mission my entire adult life has been helping people ‘Be The Best You Can Be.’ It isn't to compete with someone else, or do things because other people want you to – it's realizing your dream and your greatest potential, and loving every single day.”

She continues, “The most important thing in life is waking up every day with a smile on your face and happiness in your mind. If I can help you discover how to do that, I will receive the greatest reward of all.”

You can contact Dr. Carson by e-mailing her at gayle@gaylecarson.com or through her web site at www.gaylecarson.com .

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