



Identifying obstacles to fat loss – why exercise alone is rarely enough

January 2008.

Article by Marek Doyle, www.blueprintfitness.co.uk

The majority of my clients come to me because they have a desire to make a change in their lives and physique; often, there will be a specific target (invariably weight loss) that jolts them into action but, in the main, I recognise a desire to improve their lifestyle above and beyond fitting into a smaller dress.

With all clients, I am happy to spend the time explaining to them that making changes to their lifestyle is an intrinsic part of achieving sustained fat loss because, if your cellular function is corrupted and lacking in essential nutrients, you cannot influence their actions and therefore cannot control your metabolism. Fat loss will be minimal.

However, there remains a significant minority of clients whose expectations are totally out of sync with reality and think they can achieve a sculpted body and balanced mind by simply amending their workout! These clients will present themselves in desperate need of a change to their daily routine, typically dehydrated, sleeping badly, over-stressed and a distinct lack of energy; the next step is to ask me what exercises will fix these problems. If your sleep, stress, digestion and energy patterns are shattered, then no matter how well I refine your deadlift, it's not going to do squat!

To change the state of your body, it helps to have a basic understanding of the way it functions and, most importantly, what its requirements are. Fat is burnt inside the mitochondrion of each cell in a process called the Krebs Cycle, which will metabolise substrates of protein, fat and carbohydrates depending on circumstances. These circumstances include the availability of these fuels (which relates to the amount of each nutrient consumed in the diet), the energy requirement of the body at the time (which relates to the intensity and type of exercise) and the cellular conditions that permit such reactions to take place. This last point refers to a number of requirements that have been sculpted over millions of years of evolution.

Areas to look at fully include:

1. Hydration
2. Sleep
3. Digestion
4. Stress load
5. Toxic load
6. Diet balance
7. Nutritional deficiency
8. Hormonal balance

If one of these is out of kilter, others will be too. Just as in the Stone Age, your body's cells can only operate the way nature intended when the body receives sufficient quantity and

quality of sleep, sufficient water to bathe the cells with enough fluid for metabolic reactions to occur, healthy stress patterns to balance hormonal patterns and immune system reactions throughout the body and, amongst other things, effective digestive function. To get deep and refreshing sleep, to maintain mineral balance to retain water in the correct places, to sustain and support healthy adrenal function and balance the immune system, etc, your body has a never-ending demand for a wide array of essential nutrients (eg. vitamins and minerals, amino acids, essential fats, etc).

If your diet is not providing these nutrients required, you will not function the way you should and you will not burn fat the way you should. If you do put these vitamins and minerals into your body but then compromise your digestive system with an excessive stress load, you will leave your body short in a similar way. Caffeine, alcohol, drug and sugar intake are all suitable ways to drain your body's stores of nutrients, thus directly working against sensible steps such as vitamin supplementation.

In an age where our foods are regularly exposed to pesticides, fungicides, herbicides and the average individual eats their own body weight in food additives each year, a high-potency multivitamin is an essential – but on its own is unlikely to be enough if your lifestyle is constantly draining your body's resources. If you do not have sufficient sleep, your stress hormones will be elevated for the whole of the days that follows, draining your stores of important nutrients (like Magnesium). If you drink your fair share of coffee, the caffeine will drain you of Potassium and Magnesium (meaning dehydration is inevitable) and the oxalic acid will ruin protein digestion in the stomach, with dire consequences further down the digestive tract. There are many ways in which you can disrupt your body's natural balance but, in any case, an imbalance in diet or lifestyle will lead to an imbalance in the body's function.

It is not necessary to move into the mountains and take up yoga, neither is it necessary to live on organic mung-bean soup and spirulina. However, finding a regime that works for you and allows you to get good sleep, eating high-quality unprocessed food that nature intended, and making the changes needed to keep a cap on stress levels, and ensuring you deliver the right level of essential nutrients to support the hydration and the metabolic needs of your body's cells should not be beyond anyone.

Most clients who think they 'only had time for a microwave meal' really did have time to put something undamaging together – only they chose not to make time. In any case, genuine time restraints will breed efficient behaviour (making a tuna salad takes seconds, after all) except in those cases where diet and lifestyle leave energy levels ineffectively low. Not making time for your body's needs is false economy with time.

Whilst it clearly requires a conscious effort to make changes, it is absolutely essential that the major parts of the lifestyle are addressed if long-term progress is to be achieved. Cellular function will be sensitive to many changes within the body and, in many cases, represents an immovable obstacle in the path of progress. My job is to help clients remove these obstacles so that, when I give them an exercise programme geared specifically for their current level of conditioning and personal aims, it has the impact that it deserves.

Marek is a personal trainer, nutritional therapist and allergist operating in Kensington, Chelsea, West London and Basingstoke. He is the director of Blueprint Fitness, www.blueprintfitness.co.uk