



# FitHapp=ns

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## The Eyes Have It

In all my years of training - Tae Kwon Do and basic fitness - I got to experience the physiology of metabolism mostly from a positive view. Even with the multitude of injuries, surgeries, and a bout of pneumonia, the long-term sustained fitness I've achieved since I started lifting weights at age 13 has been mostly an upward trajectory. Although age, wear and tear, and chronic self abuse in the weight room have provided me a view of the future I struggle to resist. But each injury, each illness, has merely served as an opportunity to work my way through it.

Until the retinal detachment.

In early October, I awoke with distorted vision in my left eye. It felt like I was looking at life through the bottom of a Coke bottle - maybe a Pepsi bottle - doesn't matter. After a day of wiping my eye and my glasses, I decided to call an ophthalmologist friend of mine, Rowland Hawkins, who told me to come see him. Now. Kind of like how the principal tells you to meet him in the office. Oh crap! Within moments he found a torn retina, as expected, and sent me across the hall to a Retinologist, who found that it was detached and sent me to the surgery center that same day. I quickly saw my weekend plans were shot, as were the next weekend's plan to go to Chicago to receive an award as a 2011 Personal Trainer to Watch (ACE/IDEA).

After surgery, I was confined to supine position with head turned right, or side-lying on the right, for 10 days! Way too long. The physiology of sedentary life was staring at me - sort of - out of one eye. No amount of exercise could help my recovery; in fact, it could likely hurt it. No perfect diet would speed up the restoration of normal vision. Only TIME (and I hated serving time). For many, that's a sure fire sentence for weight gain. Not ever having carried excess weight, being pretty lean and muscled, I had two options: gain weight and fat, or lose weight and muscle. Confined to bed rest, I stopped eating, and lost my appetite. I lost 5 lbs in 10 days - mostly muscle. If I was small before, I'm smaller now. And weak! Climbing a flight of stairs right after surgery wasn't an issue; today, I'm breathing harder at the top. Not horribly so, but noticeably so. Even my heart rate shows it. The loss of muscle mass and the weakening of the heart muscle can be counted in extra beats. Right before the surgery, which most would consider a stressor, I was at a calm 58 beats per minute. Ten days later: 66. I knew once I started working out again, I was going to regain strength, endurance and appetite. But the lesson is there for all: sedentary living immediately and inexorably weakens the entire body. If 10 days can do this to me, think what years have been doing to so many of our peers. Got to get off the couch. NOW!

## **From New Sight to New Site**

Hold on to your mouse pads, ladies and gentlemen... STEPS' website has received an extreme makeover! A long time in the dreaming stage, [www.stepsfitness.com](http://www.stepsfitness.com) is now live and ready for action. With the diligence and creative efforts of Scott Kinney, who's been with me for almost all of our 22 years, the new site is cleaner, hipper, and easier to use.

Among its many features are links to our Facebook page, access to my blog, and various ways to announce things that we, our clients, and the fitness world itself are up to. Also, it's easier to access our newsletters when you get the notices.

Our hope is that this site will also increase our web presence and enhance our prospects' experience of finding steps and learning about us, ensuring another 22 years in biz. Check it out and let us know how you like it!

## **The Weighting Game**

A national conference, Lifestyle Interventions, was introduced earlier this month by FitRx of Brentwood, TN, a weight loss treatment center. I was invited to speak in Las Vegas on the physiology of weight loss via exercise, and diet. I saw it as a chance to put my thoughts, research, and opinions into a coherent and cohesive format for weight management professionals from around the country. I titled it, The Weighting Game: Why it's so hard to beat the "House" - in this case, the house is the body. And for those who've struggled with excess weight, especially obesity, for the better part of life, it didn't take a rocket scientist to describe the challenges of weight loss. But I intended to demonstrate to the participants the statistical odds against successful weight loss by exercise and diet, and explain it hormonally. And that's where I jumped in deeper than I was expecting.

The hormones making headlines, leptin, ghrelin, and others, regulate appetite and hunger in not so clear fashion. For example, much like insulin resistance in overweight/obese people, where cells don't respond as readily to the insulin the pancreas puts out, being overweight/obese also engenders leptin resistance. Thus, whereas 'normal' leptin response to the body's fat stores, and to calories, is to suppress appetite and further weight gain, being overweight/obese reduces the signaling that would otherwise shut off appetite. In other words, you keep feeling hungry so you keep eating. And if you diet, you still have the urges to keep eating. Interestingly, if you exercise, and start losing fat, your body lowers its leptin output - which should make you eat more - but you become more sensitive to it and therefore can better stave off hunger. Thus, exercise is a better way to maintain weight loss in the long run, but diet is a better way to lose it early on.

The talk went well, I believe, but I learned a lot prepping for it. For my fellow fitness professionals, I would implore you to be more sensitive to the reality of exercise's value in weight loss. Furthermore, for those trying to lose weight, I would implore you to be kind to yourself. You're not just fighting off ancient behaviors and cultural patterns. You're fighting off some deep-seated brain and gut hormones that aren't very forgiving. So forgive yourself. But keep trying. Unlike gambling at the casino, this is not a game you want to lose.

## **Score One for Chocolate**

The latest issue of the Tufts Health & Nutrition Letter (Dec. 2011) reports on another study that shows the benefits of dark chocolate: it lowers total and low-density cholesterol, the bad one. It appears that the flavonols, which, it is thought, inhibit cholesterol absorption, may be at play here, despite the excess fat and sugars of the chocolate itself. It may be, too, that the saturated fat in chocolate - 50% of which is stearic acid - may be 'neutral' and not increase cholesterol. Whatever it is that makes it work, there is still a cautionary note at the end of the article: so long as you don't consume so much chocolate as to expand your waistline or your weight, feel free to indulge...in just a little bit daily.

## **Score Two for Dairy**

Also in the December issue of Tufts Nutrition Letter is a report on a pretty solid study that compared the effects of dairy consumption on muscle mass, fat loss, and weight loss resulting from an exercise program. Three groups of about 30 overweight/obese premenopausal women were assigned one of three diets: low, medium, or high dairy diets along with their 7 days/wk, 4 month exercise program. The exercise consisted of daily cardio and twice a week resistance training.

As might be expected, from the exercise program itself, all groups lost equal amounts of weight. However, the higher dairy (and higher protein as a result) group lost more body fat and abdominal fat while gaining more lean muscle mass and strength than did the other two groups. In fact, the high dairy group gained 1.5 lbs of muscle while the low dairy group lost 1.5 lbs of muscle. Thus, there was a 3 lb net difference in the kind of weight lost. The high dairy group lost ALL fat! This theoretically would provide a barrier to weight regain, a normal post-weight loss experience.

Now, to be honest, the article pointed out that several other studies of this nature have found no differences between dairy, calcium intake, and muscle gain or weight loss. So it's impossible to say with certainty that this is the ticket. Furthermore, many adults, especially, are lactose intolerant so prescribing increased dairy intake to assist with weight loss may be inappropriate. Nonetheless, for those who can tolerate dairy, and especially for women at risk for osteopenia/osteoporosis, if you are exercising, if you are lifting weights, then by all means, enjoy a nice cold glass of dark-chocolate chocolate milk afterwards. Think of it as a health food.