

THE HARDBODY CHEAT SHEET

A BEGINNERS GUIDE TO GETTING THE BODY YOU WANT

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INTRODUCTION

You're probably reading this because you have one or more of the following goals:

- 1) Lose weight
- 2) Gain muscle
- 3) Improve your health
- 4) Be happier

I should probably point out straight away, I have no formal qualifications in diet, nutrition, gym instruction, mental health, science or medicine and that anything you choose to undertake after reading this is completely your own responsibility. It goes without saying you should check with your GP before making any drastic life changes, especially if you have a known existing medical condition.

So who am I? Just a guy who has perhaps read more books than you on the subject of fitness and nutrition, or maybe I've just experimented more with myself, but either way – you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't need some guidance, so I hope I can help.

I often get compliments on my physique – I'm 6'1", about 185lbs (so by no means huge) but it would seem that that the *condition* of my body is in some way aesthetically pleasing, which is one part of the puzzle, and I'm a healthy 38 years old (touch wood) which is the other part.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

Pure and simple – I want to share with you some basic, simple rules that you can follow to alter your body composition. Wherever possible, I've avoided 'bro-science' or anything that doesn't gel with current scientific thinking, so there's nothing totally way-out (no leeches required). In fact, the beauty of what I propose is that it's so simple, so basic, that you probably already know it all.

But that's irrelevant if you don't apply it.

The general rule of thumb is – you don't have to take ALL my advice, but the more elements you action, the faster and more dramatic the changes you'll see.

You get out what you put in.

THE POWER OF HABITS

What I'm going to do throughout this document is urge you to change your habits. So I'm not going to give you a 'diet plan', I'm going to give you some rules with which you can create new dietary habits.

Habits are easier to stick with long term, because they don't have an end. Apparently it takes 30 days of being consistent with a new activity or way of doing things to become a habit. Similarly with training – if you habitually go to the gym every Tuesday and Friday, that's better than a reminder on your phone to 'go to the gym' that takes you by surprise and fills you with dread. Remember **"we are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit."** - Aristotle

LET'S BUST SOME MYTHS

Straight off the bat, let's get rid of some bullshit. I don't know why these myths won't go away, and in all likelihood me busting them here won't make a jot of difference, but here we go:

YOU CAN'T SPOT REDUCE FAT

If you have body fat, it goes to the places it is predisposed to – either by your gender, genetics, any medical issues etc. So if you're a woman, it will sit around your hips and butt. If you're a guy – your midsection will bear the brunt of any squidgeyness.

No amount of crunches, sit-ups, leg raises etc will shift your tummy fat. It doesn't work like that. You can reduce your total body fat by manipulating your calorie intake/calorie usage, but you can't target it. It's as simple as that. So all those articles in mens health magazines every month 'The secret to 6 pack abs' and so on – diet. All the ab-rollers in the world will not help you (beyond helping you burn more calories, I suppose).

CARDIO DOESN'T MAKE YOU THIN

At least, not by itself it doesn't. If you go for a 2 mile run and burn 275 calories, you could get the same total effect by choosing not to eat a Snickers bar that afternoon. Yes, steady-state cardio can help to burn some calories off, but if you have a shitty diet it's pissing into the wind I'm afraid.

Of course, cardio has other benefits (hence the name – it will increase your cardio-vascular capacity, and joint issues/other running ailments aside, will increase your general health levels). But have you ever met a habitual runner that isn't injured in some way? Me neither.

If you really want to run/cycle/row as part of your training, look into High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT), which has been proven to burn calories much more efficiently, doesn't take as long and is arguably less likely to accumulate joint issues over time.

Lifting heavy weights is cardio, by the way. We'll come on to that later.

SUPPLEMENTS ARE NOT MAGIC POTIONS

The supplement industry is huge, and every day there's a new bottle of pills, or powder you should be taking if you want to get big and lean. It's largely bullshit. Protein shakes are just food (generally whey protein), they're not a magic potion, and have to be seen in the context of the rest of your diet and training plan.

If anyone tells you that you have to take a certain supplement, they're wrong. I'll list some that I recommend later on, but that's all it is – a recommendation.

The problem with the health/fitness/bodybuilding scene is that everyone is looking for shortcuts. Sorry to break it to you – but there aren't any.

EATING FAT MAKES YOU FAT

This was disproved decades ago – but because 'low fat' foods are a massive money-spinner it's been repressed either consciously or otherwise. There is no correlation between the intake of dietary fats (ie, animal fat such as lard, butter, milk) and body fat. They're called the same thing, so I suppose that's the only link.

Get 'good' fats from egg-yolks, full-fat milk, butter, lard, nuts and get as much as you can. Fat is a great source of energy (better than carbohydrates) and keeps you fuller longer, so you're less likely to grab a sandwich (carb-heavy).

DIET/NUTRITION

I'm starting with diet because it's your baseline for what you can achieve with regards to changing your body. If your diet is shit, you can lift what you want and use any training programme in the world and you won't get optimal results.

Like everything else – it's simple. Too simple, really, for most people to follow it.

EAT THIS:

- Grass fed beef
- Other high-quality cuts of meat from local providers if possible
- Oily fish – in moderation
- Organic, free-range eggs
- Fresh fruit and vegetables (steam your veg, is my advice)
- Nuts and berries
- Full-fat milk
- Good quality butter (Kerrygold is the only way to go)
- Lots of water
- If it's grown, walked, swum or flown – eat the bastard.

DON'T EAT THIS:

- Anything with an ingredients list

So you can see I'm advocating eating **real food**. You'll probably find you'll need to eat more once you cut out processed foods, because satiety is harder to achieve eating fresh veg and fruit and so on – but bolster this with nuts (almonds, macadamia, walnuts, anything unsalted) and that should fill the gap.

This might be slightly controversial, but I've had great results from cutting grains out of my diet. It's incredibly tough – it means no porridge, bread, rice, pasta, all your staple go-to items, but seriously – I did it for a month and got noticeably more lean, with no loss of strength in the gym. The reasoning behind it is the basis for the 'Paleo diet' – that agriculture is so new to us as a species that our bodies haven't yet fully developed the systems to process grains. Whatever – try it and see if you feel and look healthier, you may have some degree of gluten intolerance without knowing it.

You already know what you should and shouldn't be eating. Unless you're a complete dullard, or Kerry Katona, you already know that broccoli is better for you than pizza. Give yourself some credit, and analyse everything before you put it in your mouth (hurr hurr).

I'm not going to recommend what macro ratios you should observe (macronutrients are carbohydrates, protein and fat) – all I will say is that you should try and swing your calories as far into protein and fat and as away from carbs as you can. Given that it's almost impossible to avoid carbs, this should self-right. Use fitday.com to track everything you eat and you'll get a handy pie chart. What fun!

SUPPLEMENTS

The only supplements you should consider taking (all optional) are:

- A good multivitamin
- Omega 3 fish oils
- Whey protein (if you struggle to get enough protein from solid meals)
- Creatine (helps with recovery and can give you a bit more stamina in the weights room)
- Vitamin D (the 'sunshine vitamin' – unless you live in sunny climes, you are almost definitely deficient, and supplementation helps strengthen bones and –in my experience – improves mood)

A good point to note with regards to supplements – buy the best quality you can find. By which I mean, don't buy it from Tesco. Go to a specialist sports nutrition shop and get some expert advice – unfortunately the supplement industry is not well regulated, so read the label of whatever you're buying closely.

CALORIES IN VERSUS CALORIES OUT

To ultra-simplify the reality of it – if you want to lose weight, you have to eat fewer calories than you burn (caloric deficit). If you want to gain weight, you need to eat more than you burn (caloric surplus). When we're talking about body composition, if you want to get thin – eat less than you burn and train hard. If you want to gain muscle – eat more than you burn and train hard. It's a lot more nuanced than that, I won't pretend otherwise, but you can't get beyond those simple facts, and sticking to that concept while eating 'clean' WILL get you results.

TRAINING

Ah so now the good bit. At the end of this document I'm going to reveal the secret to getting muscular, lean and slim. It will not shock you.

GO TO THE GYM

Yes, you could set up a home gym in your garage or spare room, but I'm not a believer in these being particularly effective, certainly if you're starting out on a lifestyle change. I think that if you have to get changed, gather your gym bag and water bottle, membership card and whatnot, then leave the house, you're much more likely to actually put some effort in when you get there. It's also much easier to stick to a proper training plan if you have access to all the proper equipment.

If you're lucky enough to have a choice of gym – please avoid 'health centres', 'fitness suites' or anything that has a café attached to it so you can have a latte and a Danish after your workout. You need a room with the following as a bare minimum:

- A good selection of dumbbells
- At least one squat rack/power rack
- A good few benches
- Olympic-sized barbells and assorted plates

I started training originally at a community sports centre and had to lobby for months for a bar. Eventually an EZ bar turned up one day, which was better than nothing.

ROUTINE

Routine is incredibly important. Look at your calendar and find the times in the week where you think you'll be able to consistently train. Every Wednesday and Friday night for example, or Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. It doesn't really matter how often you go to the gym in a week, as long as it's regular as clockwork and other things in your diary move to accommodate it ("I can't see you tonight Cheryl Cole, I'm training").

GET A GYM BUDDY

If you can – train with someone else. This has numerous advantages – including having a spotter, a little bit of friendly competition, and someone to call you a pathetic maggot when you're on rep 4/5 of your last heavy set of squats. The downside is – if they cancel on you, the temptation is to not bother yourself. Extra willpower is required on these occasions – you must still train, even if you have to modify your training plan slightly (for example dumbbell bench rather than barbell bench).

YOUR TRAINING PLAN

So, you may be thinking – how can I possibly recommend a training plan when I don't know you, don't know your history, detailed objectives, medical background, gender, age, height or religious beliefs? Trust me – what I'm recommending here is the basics, that everyone should do, and you will struggle to find anyone who disagrees strongly on anything other than personal preference. This plan is just a starting point to get you in the gym doing something useful rather than spending 40 minutes on a bloody cross trainer then 10 minutes on each machine, which just gets you tired and maybe a bit sweaty on a good day. **That's not training, that's exercising.**

Once you have the basics down, there's a whole world of training schemes out there to explore.

THE EXERCISES

For each of the following exercises, **form is key**. You must research each of these yourself, watch some YouTube videos from trusted trainers like Mark Rippetoe, even ask the big dude in your gym to give you some pointers, and most importantly of all **keep the weight low until you have mastered them**. You can and will injure yourself if you try to be the big man and lift something that's too heavy for you with bad form.

In order of importance, you **MUST**:

- Squat
- Deadlift
- Overhead press
- Bench

The only excuse for missing any of these compound lifts is injury, and even then there are workarounds. I can't back-squat (with the bar across my shoulders) due to a problem with my ulnar nerve, so I front-squat with the bar across my chest. It's a slightly different exercise but it engages all the same main muscle groups and the central nervous system.

The compound lifts above are so important because they recruit multiple bodyparts at once. They also 'tie everything together' so you'll be employing your core to lock in to your squat position, driving your hips to complete the deadlift motion etc. This is why I advise avoiding exercise machines (including Smith machines) – they guide you along a track nice and safely, but while you're isolating say, the chest on a chest press machine, you're not employing all the stabilizing muscles of the shoulder and chest to keep the weight where it should be.

Because no matter how you split it, four exercises doesn't make for much of a workout, here are some examples of secondary lifts that can be included:

- Bent over rows (barbell or dumbbell)
- Seated rows
- Stiff/straight-legged deadlift
- Dumbbell flies
- Cable crossovers
- Close-grip bench press

You can also mix in some bodyweight exercises – these will kick your ass, but because in theory they get easier as you get fitter (you weigh less, and you're stronger) they're very rewarding:

- Pull ups/chin ups
- Push ups
- Dips

You'll notice we're not doing any strict 'isolation' work – no bicep curls, tricep pushdowns etc. I've never really found I needed to if I was working heavy compounds as these wreck pretty much your entire body if you're doing them properly and with progressive weight.

REPS AND RANGES

A rep (repetition) must always be completed fully, with full ROM (range of movement), with as much attention paid to the negative part of the movement as to the positive. Every rep counts, but the last few are the ones that give you the most benefit. When it really starts to burn and you desperately want to rack the bar – push through these as this is where the good stuff is.

As far as ranges are concerned, there is a ton of advice and training programmes out there advising all kinds of things. If you are completely new to lifting, after much experimentation, my advice would be:

Compound movements (squats, deads, bench, press) – 5 sets of 5 reps (5x5)

Secondary movements (rows, flyes, bodyweight exercises) – 3 sets of 10 reps (3x10)

Generally speaking, low sets at heavy weight help build your strength, which is what you need early on, and if that strength is distributed around your whole body in a compound movement, all the better. Higher rep ranges (and by necessity, comparatively lighter weights) tend to focus more on hypertrophy (increase in muscle size). I'm a big believer in functional strength being the ultimate end game, so get stronger as a priority.

PROGRESSIVE RESISTANCE

This is absolutely key. I'm going to put this in bold, in fact:

Once you can complete a full set of an exercise with good form, increase the weight, even if it's only by a little.

With weight training, there is no 'maintenance' phase. You're either getting stronger, or you're stagnating. Remember why we're lifting weights – to trigger the body's hormonal response to a new stressor. The body gets the signal that it needs to suddenly lift these heavy things off the floor or press them away from itself, so it responds as nature intends – by increasing the number of muscular fibres available to do the task. Science, bitches.

So start off with light weights (even an empty bar in the case of squats and deadlifts) then gradually add the smallest plates you can find, until these turn into big plates. It will happen quicker than you might expect, if your diet and recovery are in good shape.

TRAINING INTENSITY

Focus - use the mind-body connection to really feel the muscle group work as you do the exercise. Do not use momentum or gravity if you can possibly help it. Remember – every rep counts and you’re only cheating yourself if you’re doing half reps or throwing the weight rather than lifting it.

Be prepared to work extremely hard. Get used to the feeling of light-headedness and nausea that comes from training very hard indeed. Mediocre effort gets mediocre results – I can’t put it more plainly than that.

THE SPLIT

Depending on how often your routine allows you to go to the gym, you can split these by body part in the following ways:

3 DAY SPLIT – PUSH/PULL/LEGS

Day 1 – Bench press, secondary chest work (close-grip, flyes, cable crossovers), shoulder press (standing military barbell press is my favourite)

Day 2 – Deadlifts, secondary back work (SLDL, rows, chins)

Day 3 – Squats, secondary leg work (leg press, hack squat, extensions)

2 DAY SPLIT – UPPER/LOWER

Day 1 – Bench, flyes, rows, overhead press, chins

Day 2 – Squats, deadlifts, secondary leg work

These are just suggestions – the important thing is to get each major exercise in each week, with sufficient rest period in between.

The remaining option is a full-body workout each session. I used to do this for years, but the problem is you won’t have the capacity to go all-out on all 3 compounds in one session, let alone include secondary work, so if you can only train once a week, choose one of the splits above and do one day per week, alternating.

TRACK YOUR LIFTS

It's really important that you take a little notebook or printed training plan along to the gym with you, and record absolutely everything you lift. That way, each session you know what you're aiming to beat, and if you don't quite manage it – be honest and record exactly what you did get done. You're going to have good and bad days, it's natural, but you will see a very satisfying increase in weights lifted, the volume of reps and sets and so on.

Store all your old training logs to look back on – if you hit a plateau it's good to remind yourself how far you've come.

DOMS

Say hello to your new constant companion – DOMS (delayed onset muscular soreness) is the reason you're going to be walking like John Wayne a day or so after leg day. It's a good pain, I think – but don't get into the mindset that major DOMS equals a great workout. You can have a very effective workout with little soreness, and vice versa. I would advise against training a muscle that is still sore – if you're scheduled to go to the gym, go anyway but switch your session around to avoid that body part or muscle group.

RECOVERY

If you imagine a triangle, Diet is one corner, Training is the second, and Recovery is the third. They're all equally important, but recovery is the one that people tend to neglect – probably because nobody can sell you sleep or write interminable magazine articles about it.

You must rest sufficiently to allow your muscles to repair themselves – after all, it's all the microscopic tears in them that gives you DOMS and the healing of them that gives the muscle the capacity to get bigger.

How to recover effectively? The first and most obvious is sleep. Try and increase the amount of sleep you habitually get. If this means going to bed earlier, so be it – if you're training hard you'll be more tired anyway. The quality of your sleep is important too so make sure you've got a decent mattress and that your room is at a comfortable temperature.

Also – I'm a strong believer that **food is medicine**. A clean diet high in protein gives the body exactly what it needs to repair itself, so try not to lapse into old habits just because you're tired and sore.

You might also want to experiment with heat and cold therapies such as ice baths, but I'm hoping you're not going to be training to injury so any extreme rehab shouldn't be necessary. Enjoy your hard-earned muscular soreness. When people say "How did you get arms like that?" I usually say "I traded them for pain". Or "I traded them for hair" which is funnier but less scientifically accurate.

A FEW GYM TIPS

Let me just add a few quick tips for when you're at the gym. You'll thank me for these in a few years when you look back:

- **Is it sunny in your gym? No? Then don't wear a fucking baseball cap.** Or turn it backwards when you're doing preacher curls. You look like a cock. A beanie is acceptable only if your gym is so hardcore it doesn't have heating, and it's winter.
- **Don't throw weights.** It's dangerous and marks you out as being a twat. If you can't put them down safely, don't pick them up, tough guy.
- **Be respectful.** You're a guest in someone else's business. Don't leave your shit everywhere, put the weights back where you found them, let people finish their set before talking to them or moving heavy equipment near them.
- **Don't offer advice unless it's asked for.** There's always one smart arse going around telling people they're doing it wrong. Don't be that guy. That guy is always 9 stone wringing wet.
- **Keep yourself to yourself.** A majority of people are there to train, not chat. It's not a social club. Don't try and pick up chicks/dudes.
- **Get your tunes on.** I heartily recommend getting a playlist together of motivational music – EDM, metal, whatever gets your blood pumping. Usually if it makes you want to dance, it'll make you want to lift – and it can make a big difference.
- **Leave your phone at home.** Unless you're a heart surgeon on call, there is no need for you to have your phone in the gym. The only exception being if your phone is also your mp3 player
- **If you're spotting, spot.** If you're spotting your gym buddy, stay awake – his/her safety is in your hands, so don't use their set as an excuse to check out the gym bunny on the cross-trainer.
- **Use the equipment for what it was designed for.** Never – EVER – curl in the squat rack.
- **You will never be the strongest guy in your gym, or the weakest.** Don't compare your lifts with the guy in the next rack – it's futile. All you should care about is lifting more than you did last week. You only compete with you.

FINALLY – THE SECRET TO GETTING THE BODY YOU WANT

Are you ready? Here we go.

CONSISTENCY AND DEDICATION

That's it. In all truth, there is no secret. The people you see with the body that you want just want it more than you do. The beauty of weight training and proper nutrition is that you do it for you, and beyond medical concerns, nobody else really cares. If you have a busy life, a demanding boss, a family that needs you, you can spend those 2-3 hours a week in pure solitude – pure 'you time'. And the very best thing about it is – the results you get belong exclusively to you. Nobody's ripped torso has a 'thank you' list at the bottom of it.

You must be consistent. Form the new habits we've talked about above, and stick to them. Every time you feel like skipping a gym session – don't skip it. Every time you're going to eat a Mars Bar – don't eat it. I'm making it sound simple because it is. **But it's not easy.**

Getting the body you want is simple. But it's hard work, and nobody can do that hard work for you. So despite the title at the top, there are no 'cheats' to be had.

What a twist!

RESOURCES

Here are a few websites you might find useful:

- <http://www.Bodybuilding.com> – good forums to ask questions or just browse, the same queries come up time and again so there are often ‘sticky’ threads right at the top to read through
- <http://www.T-nation.com> – good site for articles and new research on topics pertaining to weight training and nutrition
- <http://www.exrx.net> - contains (among other things) detailed lists of exercises and animations showing you precisely how they should be performed
- <http://www.marksdailyapple.com> – author of ‘The Primal Blueprint’, usually revolving around the Paleo diet but there are some good thoughts on exercise too
- <http://www.fitday.com> – great diet and activity tracker. Try inputting everything you eat for a week, it’s a real eye-opener

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Thanks to Jim Andrews for being a great gym buddy, when he can remember where the gym is.

GET IN TOUCH

If you want me to expand on anything in this document, or if you think I’ve got something hopelessly wrong, please drop me a line:

Email: hbc@alexanderking.co

Web: www.alexanderking.co

If you’ve found this information useful, please feel free to send it on to whoever you like!