

The Metabolic Equation - Chapter 21

Chapter 21: The Exercise Starter Program

From Zero to Metabolically Fit: A 30-Day Movement Plan for Any Fitness Level

Let me tell you something that may reframe your entire relationship with exercise: the most important reason to move your body has almost nothing to do with burning calories.

I know. Every gym poster, every fitness influencer, every New Year's resolution frames exercise as a weight-loss tool. That framing is metabolically backwards. Exercise is not primarily a calorie-burning activity. It is a signaling activity ? it tells your body to build muscle, grow new mitochondria, increase insulin sensitivity, and produce BDNF for your brain. The calorie math never works out anyway: a 30-minute run burns roughly 300-400 calories, which your body can replace with a single muffin in 90 seconds. But the metabolic signaling from that same run persists for 24 to 72 hours.

We covered the full science in Chapter 14 ? why muscle is your body's largest glucose disposal site, how GLUT4 transporters work, why resistance training is non-negotiable, and why Zone 2 cardio builds the mitochondrial infrastructure you need. This chapter gives you the exact program to put all of that into practice, regardless of whether you are currently a seasoned gym-goer, a casual weekend walker, or someone whose most vigorous recent exercise was arguing with customer service on the phone.

Step 1: The Self-Assessment

Before we prescribe a program, we need to know where you are starting. Not for judgment ? for precision. A beginner who follows an advanced program gets injured. An advanced trainee who follows a beginner program gets bored and quits. The right program is the one calibrated to your current fitness.

Answer these five questions honestly:

1. How many days per week do you currently perform structured exercise?

- A) Zero -- I am completely sedentary
- B) 1-2 days of light activity (walking, casual sport)
- C) 3-4 days of moderate exercise (gym, running, classes)
- D) 5+ days of structured training

2. Can you perform 10 consecutive bodyweight squats to a full depth (thighs parallel to the floor) without pain?

- A) No / Unsure
- B) Yes, but it is challenging
- C) Yes, comfortably
- D) Yes, and I can add significant weight

3. Can you hold a plank for 30 seconds?

- A) No / Have not tried
- B) Yes, but barely
- C) Yes, 30-60 seconds comfortably
- D) 60+ seconds, no issue

4. Can you walk briskly for 30 minutes without needing to stop?

- A) No -- I would need breaks
- B) Yes, but I would be quite winded
- C) Yes, comfortably

- D) Yes, and I could run that easily

5. Do you have any current injuries, joint pain, or medical conditions that limit movement?

- A) Yes, significant limitations

- B) Some minor issues (occasional knee/back/shoulder pain)

- C) No significant issues

Scoring

- Mostly A's: BEGINNER track. No shame here. The transition from sedentary to active is where the largest marginal health benefit occurs. You are about to make the single most impactful change in your metabolic trajectory.

- Mostly B's: BEGINNER track, progressing to INTERMEDIATE by Week 3-4.

- Mostly C's: INTERMEDIATE track.

- Mostly D's: ADVANCED track.

If you answered A to question 5, consult with a physician or physical therapist before starting any exercise program. This is not a legal disclaimer ? it is genuine medical advice. Exercising through significant pain or injury is counterproductive and can make both the injury and your metabolic health worse through the cortisol stress response.

The Non-Negotiable Foundation: Walking

Regardless of which track you follow ? beginner, intermediate, or advanced ? there is one element that applies to everyone, every day, forever:

Post-meal walking.

This is not optional. As we covered in Chapter 14, the research is unambiguous: post-meal walks reduce postprandial glucose by 22-30%, and even 2 to 5 minutes of walking after eating makes a measurable difference. Walking activates muscle glucose uptake through a pathway that bypasses insulin entirely ? meaning it works even if you are insulin resistant.

Your daily prescription:

- 10-15 minutes of walking after dinner (the absolute non-negotiable minimum)

- Ideally, 10-15 minutes after every meal

- Total daily step target: 7,500-10,000 steps

If you are currently doing very little, every additional step counts enormously. The research shows that the greatest health benefit comes from moving out of the sedentary category ? going from 3,000 steps per day to 7,500 is dramatically more impactful than going from 10,000 to 15,000.

The Beginner Track: Weeks 1-4

This track is designed for the person who is currently doing little to no structured exercise.

Maybe you have not been inside a gym in years. Maybe you have never been inside a gym. Maybe the word "deadlift" sounds like something that should not be practiced outside of a hospital.

That is fine. We are going to build you up progressively, and by Week 4, you will be doing things that seemed impossible on Day 1.

Beginner Week 1: Just Walk

The entire first week is walking. That is it. No gym. No equipment. No excuses.

Day Activity Duration Notes

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Monday Walk after each meal 3 x 10 min (30 min total) Easy pace. This is habit formation, not a workout.

Tuesday Walk after each meal 3 x 10 min Same route is fine. Consistency beats novelty.

Wednesday Walk after each meal 3 x 10 min If weather is bad, walk in a mall, around your office, up and down stairs.

Thursday Walk after each meal 3 x 10 min Notice: you are building a daily movement habit.

Friday Walk after each meal 3 x 10 min

Saturday One longer walk 30-40 min Outdoors. Explore a new route. Bring someone.

Sunday Walk after each meal 3 x 10 min Gentle day. Enjoy it.

Why only walking? Because the transition from sedentary to any daily movement is the single highest-value change you can make. Research consistently shows that the biggest health gains come from moving out of the sedentary category. I would rather you walk every single day for 30 minutes than do one heroic gym session and then not move again for two weeks because you are so sore you cannot sit on a toilet.

Also, for many deconditioned individuals, a brisk walk is already Zone 2 cardio ? the specific intensity that Dr. Inigo San Millan's research at the University of Colorado has shown maximizes mitochondrial biogenesis and fat oxidation. You are not "just walking." You are building mitochondria.

Beginner Week 2: Walk More + Introduce Bodyweight Strength

Day Activity Duration Notes

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Monday Morning walk (fasted if possible) + post-dinner walk 20 min + 15 min Fasted walking promotes fat oxidation.

Tuesday Bodyweight Strength Session A + post-dinner walk 15 min + 10 min See exercise descriptions below.

Wednesday Morning walk + post-dinner walk 20 min + 15 min

Thursday Bodyweight Strength Session A + post-dinner walk 15 min + 10 min Same session repetition builds competence.

Friday Morning walk + post-dinner walk 20 min + 15 min

Saturday Longer walk or light recreational activity 30-45 min Hiking, swimming, cycling, whatever you enjoy.

Sunday Post-dinner walk only 15 min Rest and recovery.

Bodyweight Strength Session A (15 minutes):

Perform each exercise for the prescribed reps, rest 60 seconds, move to the next exercise. Complete the circuit twice.

1. Bodyweight Squat to Chair/Box 10 reps

- Stand in front of a sturdy chair. Feet shoulder-width apart. Push your hips back and lower yourself until your glutes touch the chair. Stand back up. The chair is your safety net and your depth target.

- Why: The squat pattern is the most fundamental human movement. It trains your quadriceps, glutes, and hamstrings the largest muscles in your body and therefore the largest glucose disposal sites.

2. Incline Push-Up 8-10 reps

- Hands on a countertop, sturdy table, or wall (higher surface = easier). Body in a straight line from head to heels. Lower your chest to the surface, press back up.

- Why: Trains chest, shoulders, and triceps. Full push-ups will come. For now, the incline

version lets you build strength without face-planting.

3. Dumbbell Row (or Household Object Row) 8 reps per side

- One hand and one knee on a bench or sturdy chair. Other hand holds a dumbbell (or a gallon jug of water, which weighs approximately 8 pounds and has a handle, making it the world's cheapest dumbbell). Pull the weight to your hip. Lower slowly.

- Why: Trains your back, rear shoulders, and biceps. Counterbalances the forward-rounded posture of modern desk life.

4. Glute Bridge 12 reps

- Lie on your back, knees bent, feet flat on the floor. Drive through your heels to lift your hips until your body forms a straight line from shoulders to knees. Squeeze your glutes at the top. Lower slowly.

- Why: Activates the glutes, which are often "sleeping" in people who sit all day. Strong glutes protect the lower back and drive every lower-body movement.

5. Plank Hold as long as you can, up to 30 seconds

- Forearms on the floor, body in a straight line from head to heels. Do not let your hips sag or pike. Breathe normally.

- Why: Core stability is the foundation of all movement. A strong core protects your spine during every other exercise.

Beginner Week 3: Build Toward the Gym

Day Activity Duration Notes

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Monday Strength Session B (see below) 25-30 min We add exercises and equipment.

Tuesday Zone 2 Cardio 20-25 min Brisk walk, stationary bike, or elliptical. Conversational pace.

Wednesday Morning walk + post-dinner walk 20 min + 15 min Active recovery between strength days.

Thursday Strength Session B 25-30 min Same workout. Focus on improving form and adding 1-2 reps.

Friday Zone 2 Cardio 20-25 min Different modality if desired.

Saturday Longer walk or recreational activity 30-45 min

Sunday Rest + meal prep Post-dinner walk only

Strength Session B (25-30 minutes):

Use light dumbbells (10-20 lb for most beginners) or gym machines. Perform 2 sets of each exercise.

1. Goblet Squat 2 x 10 reps

- Hold a dumbbell vertically at your chest. Squat to parallel depth. Stand up. The weight in front of your body acts as a counterbalance that actually helps you squat with better form.

2. Dumbbell Romanian Deadlift 2 x 10 reps

- Hold dumbbells in front of your thighs. With a slight bend in the knees, hinge at the hips and push your butt backward, lowering the dumbbells along your legs until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings. Drive your hips forward to stand back up.

- Why: The hip hinge is the second most important movement pattern (after the squat). It trains your entire posterior chain hamstrings, glutes, and lower back. These muscles are critical for everyday activities and for preventing the lower back pain that plagues sedentary populations.

3. Dumbbell Bench Press or Push-Up 2 x 8-12 reps

- If using dumbbells: lie on a bench, press dumbbells from chest level to full extension. If doing push-ups: progress from incline to floor push-ups as strength allows.

4. Dumbbell Row 2 x 10 per side

- Same as Week 2 but with a proper dumbbell and potentially heavier weight.

5. Overhead Press 2 x 8-10 reps

- Standing, press dumbbells from shoulder level to overhead. Keep your core tight.

- Why: Trains shoulders and upper arms. Functional strength for putting things on shelves, lifting children, and maintaining independence as you age.

6. Plank 2 x 30 seconds (or as long as you can maintain good form)

Beginner Week 4: The Foundation is Laid

Day Activity Duration Notes

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Monday Strength Session C (see below) 30-40 min We progress again.

Tuesday Zone 2 Cardio 25-30 min Aim for conversation-pace throughout.

Wednesday Strength Session C 30-40 min Increase weight slightly from Monday or add 1-2 reps.

Thursday Zone 2 Cardio 25-30 min

Friday Strength Session C 30-40 min Heaviest session of the week. Progressive overload.

Saturday Active recreation 30-60 min Hike, swim, bike, play a sport. Make it enjoyable.

Sunday Rest + meal prep Post-dinner walk only

Strength Session C (30-40 minutes):

3 sets of each exercise. This is your gateway to the full training program.

Exercise Sets x Reps Notes

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Goblet Squat 3 x 10 Add weight from Week 3 if form is solid

Romanian Deadlift 3 x 10 Dumbbells; progress to barbell when comfortable

Dumbbell Bench Press or Push-Up 3 x 8-12

Dumbbell Row 3 x 10 per side

Overhead Press 3 x 8-10

Lat Pulldown or Assisted Pull-Up 3 x 10 Use a machine or resistance band for assistance

Farmer's Carry 2 x 40 yards Hold heavy dumbbells at your sides, walk with tall posture

Plank 2 x 30-45 sec

The Farmer's Carry deserves special mention. It is the most "real-world" exercise in any program. You pick up something heavy in each hand and walk. It trains grip strength (which is independently correlated with longevity and all-cause mortality), core stability, shoulder stability, and mental toughness. There is something deeply satisfying about carrying heavy things. Our ancestors did it every day. Your body is designed for it.

After completing the Beginner Track (Week 4): You are ready to transition to the Intermediate Track, or you can repeat Week 4 for another 2-4 weeks while continuing to add weight progressively. There is no rush. The program is a lifetime practice, not a race.

The Intermediate Track: Weeks 1-4

For those who already have a basic level of fitness and some gym experience. You can perform the fundamental movement patterns, you exercise 2-3 times per week currently, and you are ready to add volume, intensity, and structure.

Weekly Template

Day Activity Duration

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Monday Resistance Training Upper Body 45 min

Tuesday Zone 2 Cardio 40-50 min

Wednesday Resistance Training Lower Body 45 min

Thursday Zone 2 Cardio + Mobility 30 + 15 min

Friday Resistance Training Full Body 45 min

Saturday Active Recovery or Recreational Activity 30-60 min

Sunday Rest + Meal Prep Walking only

Daily non-negotiable: Post-meal walks (minimum after dinner, ideally after every meal).

Intermediate Upper Body Day (Monday)

Exercise Sets x Reps Rest

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Dumbbell Bench Press 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Barbell or Dumbbell Row 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Overhead Press (barbell or dumbbell) 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Lat Pulldown or Pull-Up (assisted if needed) 3 x 8-12 90 sec

Dumbbell Curl 2 x 12 60 sec

Tricep Dip or Pushdown 2 x 12 60 sec

Face Pulls 2 x 15 60 sec

Intermediate Lower Body Day (Wednesday)

Exercise Sets x Reps Rest

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Barbell Back Squat or Goblet Squat 3 x 8-10 2 min

Romanian Deadlift (barbell) 3 x 8-10 2 min

Walking Lunge (dumbbell) 3 x 10 per leg 90 sec

Leg Press 3 x 10-12 90 sec

Glute Bridge (weighted or hip thrust) 3 x 12 90 sec

Calf Raise 3 x 15 60 sec

Plank 3 x 45 sec 60 sec

Intermediate Full Body Day (Friday)

Exercise Sets x Reps Rest

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Deadlift (conventional or trap bar) 3 x 5-8 2 min

Incline Dumbbell Bench Press 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Cable Row or Seated Row 3 x 10-12 90 sec

Bulgarian Split Squat 3 x 8 per leg 90 sec

Arnold Press 3 x 10 90 sec

Farmer's Carry 3 x 40 yards 90 sec

Zone 2 Cardio Guidelines

Zone 2 is the intensity where you can hold a conversation but would prefer not to. Nose breathing is a good proxy ? if you can breathe exclusively through your nose, you are likely in Zone 2 or below. For the full science on why Zone 2 specifically builds mitochondrial density and metabolic flexibility, see Chapter 14.

Heart rate target: 60-70% of your estimated maximum heart rate (220 minus your age is a rough estimate; a lab test is more precise).

Modalities: Choose whatever you will actually do consistently. Cycling (stationary or outdoor), incline treadmill walking, rowing, swimming, elliptical. Cycling is ideal because it is low-impact and easy to control intensity. Incline walking is excellent because it adds Zone 2 demands without requiring any skill or coordination you literally just walk uphill.

The Advanced Track: Weeks 1-4

For experienced trainees who exercise regularly and want to optimize their programming for metabolic health alongside performance. You are comfortable with compound barbell movements, you understand progressive overload, and you are ready for higher volume and the introduction of HIIT.

Weekly Template

Day Activity Duration

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Monday Resistance Push + Quads 55-65 min

Tuesday Fasted Zone 2 Cardio (AM) + Post-dinner walk (PM) 45-60 min + 15 min

Wednesday Resistance Pull + Hamstrings/Glutes 55-65 min

Thursday Zone 2 Cardio + Mobility Work 45 min + 15 min

Friday Resistance Upper Focus (moderate weight, higher volume) 55-65 min

Saturday HIIT Session 20-30 min

Sunday Active Recovery: long walk, yoga, or easy swim 45-60 min

Advanced Push + Quad Day (Monday)

Exercise Sets x Reps Rest

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Barbell Back Squat 4 x 6-8 2-3 min

Barbell Bench Press 4 x 6-8 2-3 min

Leg Press 3 x 10-12 90 sec

Incline Dumbbell Press 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Walking Lunge 3 x 10 per leg 90 sec

Lateral Raise 3 x 12-15 60 sec

Leg Extension 2 x 12-15 60 sec

Advanced Pull + Posterior Chain Day (Wednesday)

Exercise Sets x Reps Rest

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Conventional Deadlift 4 x 5-6 3 min

Weighted Pull-Up (or heavy lat pulldown) 4 x 6-8 2 min

Barbell Hip Thrust 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Barbell Row 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Nordic Hamstring Curl or Leg Curl 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Face Pull 3 x 15 60 sec

Farmer's Carry 3 x 50 yards (heavy) 90 sec

Advanced Upper Focus Day (Friday)

Exercise Sets x Reps Rest

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Overhead Press (barbell) 4 x 6-8 2 min

Chest-Supported Dumbbell Row 3 x 10-12 90 sec

Dips (weighted if possible) 3 x 8-10 90 sec

Cable Pullover or Straight-Arm Pulldown 3 x 12 60 sec

Barbell Curl 3 x 10 60 sec

Tricep Overhead Extension 3 x 10 60 sec

Dead Hang 2 x max time 60 sec

HIIT Protocol (Saturday)

Choose one of the following protocols:

Option A: Sprint Intervals (cycling or rowing preferred to reduce joint impact):

- 5 min warm-up (easy pace)

- 6 rounds: 30 seconds all-out effort / 2 minutes easy recovery

- 5 min cool-down

- Total time: ~25 minutes

Option B: The 4x4 Norwegian Protocol:

- 10 min warm-up

- 4 rounds: 4 minutes at 90-95% max heart rate / 3 minutes active recovery

- 5 min cool-down

- Total time: ~40 minutes

HIIT is the most time-efficient way to improve VO2 max, but as we discussed in Chapter 14, it comes at a significant cortisol cost. Limit HIIT to once per week for most people and twice per week maximum for well-recovered advanced trainees. The 80/20 rule applies: 80% of your cardiovascular training should be Zone 2, and only 20% should be high intensity.

The Exercise Library: Form Cues for Key Movements

Good form is not optional. It is the difference between building a stronger, more resilient body and building a collection of injuries. Here are the form essentials for the movements that appear across all three tracks.

The Squat (Goblet, Barbell Back, or Bodyweight)

- Feet: Shoulder-width or slightly wider, toes turned out 15-30 degrees

- Initiation: Begin by pushing your hips BACK, as if sitting into a chair behind you

- Depth: Descend until the crease of your hip is at or below the top of your knee (parallel or below)

- Knees: Track over toes they should push outward, not collapse inward

- Spine: Neutral (not rounded, not hyperextended). Chest up, eyes forward

- Drive: Push through your full foot (not just toes) to stand up. Squeeze glutes at the top

- Common errors: Heels lifting (indicates ankle mobility limitation elevate heels on small plates or work on ankle flexibility), knees caving inward (cue: "spread the floor with your feet"), excessive forward lean (indicates weak quads or tight ankles)

The Hip Hinge (Romanian Deadlift, Conventional Deadlift)

- Setup: Feet hip-width apart, soft bend in the knees
- Movement: Push hips STRAIGHT BACK while maintaining a flat spine. The movement is in the hips, not the lower back.
- Bar/dumbbell path: Stays in contact with or very close to your legs throughout
- Endpoint: Go as low as your hamstring flexibility allows while keeping your back flat. For most people, this is mid-shin to just below the knee.
- Return: Drive hips forward, squeeze glutes at the top
- Common errors: Rounding the lower back (the cardinal sin ? reduce weight or range of motion until you can maintain a flat spine), bending the knees excessively (this turns it into a squat ? keep the knee angle relatively fixed)

The Push-Up

- Hand position: Slightly wider than shoulder-width, fingers pointing forward
- Body line: Perfectly straight from head to heels. Your body is a plank with arms.
- Descent: Lower until your chest is 1-2 inches from the floor (or touches lightly). Elbows angle back at approximately 45 degrees ? not flared straight out to the sides
- Ascent: Press the ground away from you. Full arm extension at the top
- Scaling: If floor push-ups are too difficult, elevate your hands on a bench, countertop, or wall (higher surface = easier). Progress to lower surfaces over time. This is infinitely better than doing "push-ups from the knees," which changes the movement pattern and does not translate as well to full push-ups.

The Row (Dumbbell, Barbell, Cable)

- Setup: For dumbbell rows, one hand and one knee on a bench. For barbell rows, hinge at the hips with a flat back, barbell hanging at arm's length.
- Pull: Drive your elbow toward your hip, squeezing your shoulder blade toward your spine at the top
- Lower: Control the descent. Do not just let the weight drop.
- Common errors: Using momentum ("heaving" the weight up by rotating the torso), not pulling to the hip (pulling to the chest targets different muscles), rounding the back

The Overhead Press (Dumbbell or Barbell)

- Start position: Dumbbells at shoulder height, palms facing forward. Barbell resting on front of shoulders.
- Press: Drive the weight straight overhead until arms are fully extended. The bar or dumbbells should finish directly over the center of your foot.
- Core: Tight throughout. Do not arch your lower back to help the weight up that is a sign the weight is too heavy.
- Common errors: Excessive back arch (reduce weight), pressing forward instead of straight up, not achieving full lockout

The Farmer's Carry

- Setup: Heavy dumbbell or kettlebell in each hand
- Posture: Stand tall. Shoulders down and back. Chest up. Core braced.
- Walk: Take controlled, even steps. Do not lean to one side. Do not rush.
- Breathing: Normal in through nose, out through mouth
- Why this exercise is crucial: It trains grip strength, core stability, shoulder health, and walking posture simultaneously. Grip strength, as measured by hand dynamometer, is one of the strongest predictors of all-cause mortality in the research literature. This is not a

coincidence ? grip strength is a proxy for total-body muscle mass and neuromuscular function. The Farmer's Carry is how you build it.

Progressive Overload: The Only Rule That Matters Long-Term

Every exercise program in the world eventually stops working if you do the same thing forever. Your body adapts. The stimulus that challenged you in Week 1 becomes trivially easy by Week 8. The only way to continue building muscle, improving insulin sensitivity, and gaining strength is progressive overload systematically increasing the demand on your muscles over time.

Here is how to apply it practically:

1. Add reps. If the plan calls for 3 x 8 and you completed all 8 reps on every set with good form, aim for 3 x 9 next session. When you hit 3 x 12, it is time to add weight.
2. Add weight. Increase by the smallest increment available (typically 5 pounds for upper body, 5-10 pounds for lower body). Drop back to the lower rep range (e.g., 3 x 8) with the new weight and build reps again.
3. Add sets. If you are handling 3 sets well, add a 4th set.
4. Slow the tempo. A 3-second eccentric (lowering phase) dramatically increases the metabolic demand and time under tension of any exercise without adding external load. Excellent for joint health and muscle growth.

The specific method matters less than the principle: do a little more this week than you did last week. Over months and years, small increments compound into enormous change. A person who adds 5 pounds to their squat every two weeks for a year adds 130 pounds to their squat. That is transformative, and it starts with 5 pounds.

Deload Weeks and Recovery

Every 4-6 weeks, take a deload week: reduce your training volume by 40-60% and intensity by 10-20%. Same exercises, fewer sets, lighter weights. This is not laziness. This is strategic recovery.

Your body does not get stronger during exercise. Exercise is a stress. You get stronger during recovery, when your body repairs and adapts to the stress. Deload weeks prevent the cortisol accumulation, joint wear, and central nervous system fatigue that lead to overtraining syndrome.

Signs you need a deload (per the overtraining research compiled by Bikman and others):

- Persistent fatigue not relieved by a day of rest
- Declining performance despite consistent training
- Elevated resting heart rate (5+ beats per minute above your baseline)
- Declining heart rate variability (HRV)
- Sleep disturbances
- Increased illness frequency
- Persistent soreness
- Loss of motivation to train

If you experience three or more of these simultaneously, take a full deload week. If they persist after the deload, reduce training volume for 2-3 weeks and prioritize sleep, nutrition, and stress management.

The Metabolic Case for Muscle: Why This All Matters

Let me bring this full circle to the metabolic framework that underpins this entire book.

As we covered in depth in Chapter 14, the research is unequivocal: more muscle means less insulin resistance, and the relationship is dose-dependent. Resistance training reduces

hemoglobin A1C comparably to diabetes medications ? except this "medication" has no negative side effects and improves virtually every other health marker simultaneously. Training increases GLUT4 transporter content by 20-75%, making your muscle a dramatically better glucose sponge.

This is why resistance training is not optional in this program. It is not about aesthetics (though you will look better). It is not about ego (though you will feel more capable). It is about building the single largest determinant of your metabolic health for the next 40, 50, or 60 years of your life.

Pick up the weights. Walk after dinner. Show up three times a week. The rest takes care of itself.

"Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths." Arnold Schwarzenegger, who also said "Milk is for babies. When you grow up you have to drink beer." So perhaps take his nutritional advice selectively, but the strength quote stands.