

# A BODY-BUILDER'S PERSPECTIVE ON HEALTH

Body-building isn't normally associated with health, but if you're lucky enough to find a body-builder who does everything possible to nourish his body, you can learn a lot. **Paul Ehren** is such a man.

Indulge me for a few moments please and join me in a word association game: if I say "body-builder", what is the first image that comes to mind? Chances are that it will not be particularly positive – large, lumpy gentleman (and ladies), supporting huge androgenic drug habits, with inversely proportional IQ's!

I will not pretend to you that competitive body-building is a triumph of cutting edge poly-pharmacy; rather, I want to open up the true essence of pure body-building or "Physical Culture", as it was once described. I will also demonstrate my belief that a naturally obtained physique will benefit the owner with a strong, robust, functional body and physical and mental health benefits, which will last long into what we quaintly describe as middle and old age. In essence, we are looking to establish an optimum health base, while providing an environment for lean muscle tissue growth and reducing the amount of body fat.

What follows is a description of how I would assist and advise

any client seeking my advice; my philosophy is to leave the old paradigm of "performance at any cost" in antiquity where it belongs.

I recently found myself looking through one of the leading American muscle mags, in which many of the articles/adverts are apparently written by research scientists; with the latest themes being picked up, shaken and milked for all they are worth. Currently it appears to be supplements that stimulate the mTOR genetic pathways and not hard work and good food, as should really be portrayed. Sorry to be cynical, but to miss-quote a 1970's rock musician, the late Frank Zappa; "body-building journalism may be conducted by those who can't write for those who can't read, aimed primarily at those who can't think!"

First things first; we need to establish

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where we are health-wise and correct if necessary. Tools of the trade can start simply, with height-to-waist ratio and blood pressure, but can progress to full blood screens, showing red and white blood cell status, liver and kidney function, blood glucose levels, lipid profiles and enzyme activity. More specialised tests would be hormonal panels and genetic testing. These results give a snapshot of health and will then be taken fully into account when drawing up training, diet and supplementation programmes.

## HYPERTROPHY TRAINING

With regard to training for pure hypertrophy, I would generally recommend four resistance sessions per week; approximately one hour per session, 12–16 sets for large muscle groups, 8–10 for biceps and triceps, and 8–15 reps per set (this regime will vary dramatically depending on the experience of the trainee and the exact goals required). Hit it hard, get out and then recover! For fat metabolism, medium intensity cardiovascular work, such as power walking four times per week first thing in the morning in an overnight fasted state, is a good place to start. Remember training is there to stimulate muscle growth and fat metabolism; the true anabolic changes take place during recovery.

Your body works on priorities, the first of which are survival and reproduction: building a pair of 18" biceps is a long, long way down the list, which is why for those of us with average genetics, it's incredibly hard to achieve significant muscle growth. However, every biological organism will try to adapt to its environment. Give your body optimum health, optimum growth stimulus, optimum recovery and optimum nutrition to take advantage of that physical stimulus and things will begin to happen. Base your nutrition on the "Golden Arches" and subject yourself to excess outside negative stress and you will go backwards at a rate of knots! Another very interesting potential plus point for the health benefits of progressive resistance training was highlighted by Pete Williams during the recent Sports Nutrition Live! Conference: a recent paper\* shows that contracting skeletal muscles send a plethora of chemical messages to local and systemic tissues, providing a myriad of health benefits. Although further research is required, we seem to be at the beginning of a completely new way of viewing muscle tissue and the benefits of keeping those muscles actively working.

## EATING FOR HYPERTROPHY

Turning to diet and supplementation, the true thinking body-builder will consider these two standpoints: 1) what will make and maintain optimum health and 2) what will best aid the goal of muscle growth and/or fat reduction.

Any issues highlighted by the initial health checks will need to be



addressed and we will also need to provide the right environment for repair and growth. On the subject of repair, please do not start popping anti-inflammatories at the first sign of delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS); the disruption of muscle architecture that, at least in part, cause DOMS are another trigger for growth and should be embraced.

When drawing up diet and supplement programmes for a non-competition period, any body-builder should consider a number of things; amongst which are gut health and absorption, protective measures for both the liver and kidneys, adrenal support, minimising oxidative and free radical damage, immune system support and joint/connective tissue care.

A basic diet would consist of five to six meals per day, a variety of protein sources (white meat, lean red meat, white fish, oily fish, eggs etc), a selection of mainly medium to low-GI carbohydrates (brown rice, sweet potato, porridge oats, whole wheat pasta, quinoa etc), a large selection of vegetables (particularly of the leafy green variety) and large colourful salads. Added to this would be nuts, seeds, fresh fruit and natural live cultured yoghurt.

In terms of ergogenic supplements, my starting point would be to include whey isolate, creatine, glutamine, branched chain aminos and beta alanine. Health supplements must be specific to the individual's health challenges.

One final real biggie to finish with - stress management. You cannot live your life within your "fight or flight" sympathetic nervous system for very long before it has a detrimental effect on health, muscle mass and performance.

## TO FINISH

There, in an abbreviated form, is a template that many body-builders follow and hopefully many more will adopt: a healthy, performance-inspired diet that provides the framework for health, combined with physical improvement triggered by intense, but sensible training routines, all within a stress managed mindset.

We need to consistently maintain these guidelines while juggling work commitments, home life, some element of a social life and relationships. As a famous meerkat is fond of saying – "simples!!"

\*Pedersen B. & Febbraio M., (2012). Muscle, exercise and obesity: skeletal muscle as a secretory organ. *Nat Rev Endocrinol.* 8:457-465.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Ehren - After 15 years as a Master Personal Trainer & competitive body-builder, Paul's clients include successful executives, recreational athletes and national level competitors. Paul is a former UKBFF British over 50's champion (2010); he has held regional titles & represented the UK in Europe. In April of this year Paul reclaimed the NABBA South East Britain over 50's title.

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