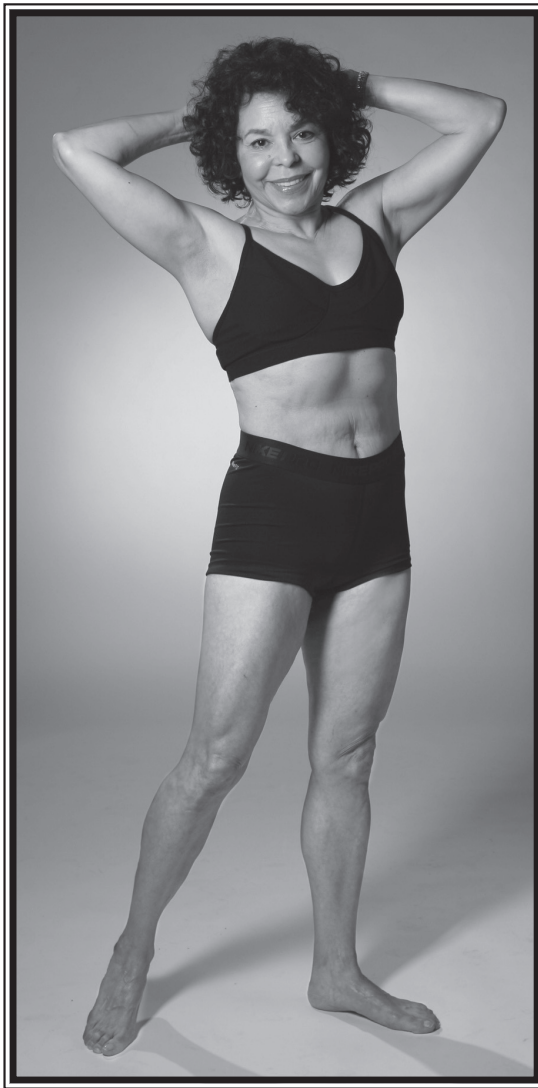


# **FOREVER FIT *and* FABULOUS:**

A Guide to Health and Vigor  
—Even at 70 and Beyond



**EMELINA EDWARDS**

**FOREVER  
FIT *and*  
FABULOUS:**

A Guide to Health and Vigor  
—Even at 70 and Beyond

*by*

**EMELINA EDWARDS**



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#### DISCLAIMERS

1. This book is written as a source of information only. This information is not to be considered a substitute for the advice of a qualified medical professional. Please be sure to consult your doctor before starting this or any other nutritional or exercise regimen. All the exercises in this book should be carefully studied and clearly understood before attempting them at home. The author and the publisher expressly disclaim responsibility for any adverse effects, damages, or losses arising from the use or application of the information contained therein.

2. Names and some characteristics of individuals portrayed in this book have been changed to completely protect the confidentiality of each.

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*To my sons,  
Daniel and Jacques:  
You are my inspiration  
for living the fit life.*



## *...and to All the Women*

**I** also dedicate this book to all the women—over the last 25 years—who have supported and inspired me.

One of you inspired me to write my very first article some 20 years ago. Aghast when I asked you to do 20 reps of a leg exercise, you responded saying, “That’s fine for you to say, how old are you anyway, 24?” I replied laughing, “That’s my youngest son’s age. I’m 51.”

“You’re kidding!” you said, excitedly curling up to face me, “Tell me everything, tell me what you eat, how much exercise you do, tell me everything!”

Your response planted the seed that sparked my courage to write when I didn’t believe I could, knowing how when I had spoken to groups that I shook with fright.

Just recently one of you emailed me the most touching message I’ve ever received about my work: “Your life 25 years ago,” you wrote, “is my life of today. I’m divorced, depressed, have no job and I can’t stand that I’m so fat. But I want to be the Emelina Edwards of my generation.”

I want you to know that you can be. That’s one of the reasons I wrote this book.

“I feel that I am on a journey and that God is leading me to the right people and places that I need to be in order to keep me on track to fulfill my life’s purpose,” another one of you wrote. I look forward to the publication of your book.”

We have been there for each other, as you can see. I have drawn as much from you as you have from me. Together, we have been traveling the same road, looking for health, happiness, peace and wellness. You could even say we have written this book of change and transformation together.

When I began writing this book, I didn’t intend for it to be so personal, but after all, what are we here for, if not to touch each other’s hearts?

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the creation of this book I have many people to thank, but especially my patient and encouraging editor, Catharine Clarke of Soul Garden Press, along with photographer Donna Matherne of Face-to-Face Photography.

I also wish to thank the ten clients featured in Chapter 8, “The Forever Fit and Fabulous Generation,” who patiently allowed me to photograph them and who shared their testimonials. I am forever grateful.

And to all others, who throughout my 25-year career, sought my advice and followed my teachings, my wish is for you to be well and happy.

God bless.



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**H**ow do you see yourself in 10, 20 or 30 years? Will you be healthy, fit and fabulous, with enough vigor to do all of the things you've always dreamed of doing? Will you be happy with yourself and treasure your body? Will you be living life with courage and passion? Will your pain-free body and zest for life be a source of inspiration to your loved ones?

If you answered “yes” to all of the above questions, congratulations! You have found the keys to aging with vitality and zest, and your life reflects it.

But, if you shook your head “no” to some or most of the questions, this book is for you. Through its motivation and essential, proven practices, *Forever Fit and Fabulous: A Guide to Health and Fitness—Even at 70 and Beyond* will calm your fears of aging poorly. When you make the commitment to your fitness, to caring for yourself and your future, you will no longer be afraid. You will no longer fear finding yourself in the not too distant future functionally infirmed, with rickety legs and torsos, unable to breathe in the beauty of life, eventually confined to a walker or wheelchair. You can forget that grim scenario. Your fate is in your hands, as you have the power to control whether you age fast or slow. Yes, you are that powerful!

You can welcome your 60s, 70s, 80s and even your 90s with a body stronger and a mind sharper than ever before. Join me on a journey of discovery to a world where rejuvenation is possible at any age because you will have found the keys to health and vitality.

Aging with strength and energy is not only possible, it can be

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glorious! Imagine yourself at 70, with a better body than you had at 40. Biologically, you can be 10, 20 or even 30 years younger than your chronological age. You can develop the strength and stamina of an athlete. You can look in the mirror with satisfaction, gratitude and confidence, as you see your reflection of beauty and personal accomplishment.

*Forever Fit and Fabulous* will teach you to welcome change. Inviting yourself to evolve is essential to maintaining a body and mind that operates at full capacity. Each new day is a precious gift that offers you an opportunity to transform any aspect of yourself that's holding you back or to simply improve on the previous day. As you well know, when you stop evolving, your body (and mind) slip into decay—and none of us want that.

Sometimes you meet someone at just the right moment who sheds light on a lingering issue or sparks a totally new way of thinking that you hadn't considered before. Or, you might read a passage that prompts an Ah-ha! moment and a ray of light brightens a dark spot.

Perhaps that's why you picked up this book. The words "forever fit and fabulous" may have attracted you. After years of putting off getting in shape, now you are ready! You're tired of feeling guilty for neglecting yourself. Or, maybe you're thinking that this book might help you recommit to the last promise you made to yourself to get fit once and for all. Now you're 10 years older and feeling worse than ever, expecting more physical decline as the years go by. But help is here. Trust that *Forever Fit and Fabulous* can guide you to create your new world of vibrant, optimum health—with the pain-free body of your dreams and the fearless mentality of a yogi.

First I want to share my own story with you. The fantastic

world of optimum health of body, mind and spirit has not always been mine. I created my new world after my old one fell apart.

Nearly 25 years ago, I was sickly and depressed, feeling powerless to change my dysfunctional life. Too long stuck and miserable had taken a toll on my health. I had suffered through a cancer diagnosis, was told twice I was going blind and had a spinal deterioration that would eventually need surgery. Making matters even worse, I ended up divorced and broke. I was only 46 years old.

All this may sound like more than anyone could bear, but, for me, these multiple misfortunes lit a fire whose flame still burns. The passion of this fire inspired and motivated me to take full charge of my destiny and to create the life I had always wanted but didn't believe I could—or deserved—to have.

Intuitively I knew that to create this new life, I needed both a new mindset and a rejuvenated body. A new mindset would help me make sense of my broken life so I could free myself from unresolved issues and emotional turmoil. So I set out to study psychology. I wanted to know why I had acted destructively and how I could change my limiting habits into productive ones. My second goal—a healthier body—would give me the strength, stamina and confidence to face whatever challenges came my way with courage to grow from each experience.

Throughout this journey I learned from many teachers, but I will mention the three who influenced me the most:

- ✓ **Rachel McLish**<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Olympia of 1980 and 1982, author of *Flex Appeal*, showed me that a strong, muscular body could be beautiful at a time when women considered muscles unsightly and gyms the domain of sweaty male bodies.

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<sup>1</sup> McLish, Rachel, *Flex Appeal* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1984)

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- ✓ **Drs. William Evans and Irwin H. Rosenberg<sup>2</sup>**, authors of *Biomarkers: The 10 Determinants of Aging You Can Control* taught me that the aging process can be reversed and slowed down no matter what your age. The doctors were researchers on the physiology of aging, sports performance and nutrition at Tufts University at the time of the writing of *Biomarkers*.
- ✓ **Dr. Deepak Chopra<sup>3</sup>**, leading expert on mind/body medicine and author of *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind – The Quantum Alternative To Growing Old* taught me that the body is at the service of the mind and that how we think about ourselves and the world not only effects our health but also determines how slowly or quickly we age.

I began my quest for health with daily exercise, lifting weights and jogging. I lowered my intake of sugar and fat, and gave up alcohol. Within only a few months I began to feel and look better. In less than eight months I dropped two dress sizes and, for the first time in my life, had strength and energy. My depression lifted and my back strengthened, so I could straighten up instead of walking like an old lady. Amazed and excited by the impressive results I'd achieved in such a short time, I asked myself the question: Why isn't everyone doing this?

The answer came: Start teaching!

For the next 25 years I taught, wrote fitness articles, made TV and radio appearances and presented my innovative fitness program to business groups and conventioners. I produced a

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<sup>2</sup> Evans, William, Ph. D. and Rosenberg , Irwin H., M.D. with Thompson, Jacqueline *Biomarkers: The 10 Determinants of Aging You Can Control* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991)

<sup>3</sup> Chopra, Deepak *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind – The Quantum Alternative To Growing Old* (New York: Harmony Books, 1993)

## INTRODUCTION

home workout video, a cookbook and a relaxation tape. Wanting to also reach Latino audiences, I flew to Miami and on the “Cristina Show” on the Spanish network Univision urged Latinos to empower themselves by strengthening their bodies, which would have a positive ripple effect on their minds and their souls. When “The Home Shopping Network en Español” came calling, I went on the show, waking up sleepyheads at 7AM with my health and fitness message.

As passionate as I was then about my message, I am even more enthusiastic now, for I have not been sick in bed once in the last two decades! I train everyday with gusto for what it gives me, and for what it gives my two sons—a healthy, strong, happy and resourceful mother. I believe that my greatest legacy will be the example I have set for them and for my grandchildren. When Sophie, my first grandchild, celebrated her very first birthday, I gave her a miniature workout bench and weights! Growing up in a home of athletes, she couldn’t help but be inspired. At age eight, she realized her first dream, a junior black belt in Taekwondo.

When I thought about writing this book, I immediately knew what the title would be: *Forever Fit and Fabulous: A Guide to Health and Vigor—Even at 70 and Beyond*. Yes, you can erase almost half of your age by how you live your life. I call this “radical aging”. This book offers you radical ideas to slow, and, in many cases, reverse the passage of time. I’m not referring to the latest anti-aging cream or youth hormone, but time-proven, safe and practical methods to prevent and often reverse the ravages of time. You already possess everything you need to live life to the fullest with optimum health, vigor and vitality for the rest of your life.

Join me as we discover the marvel of your body and find new ways to take care of your most precious asset. As inspiration I offer

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you both my personal experience and the scientific information that gave me back my life. Read on and begin to realize your dreams.



# CHAPTER ONE:

## Muscles, Your Power Source

*“Muscle mass and strength can be regained, no matter what your age and no matter what the state of your body’s musculature before you start your exercise program.”*

—William Evans, Ph. D. and Irwin H. Rosenberg, M. D.<sup>1</sup>

(Authors of *Biomarkers: The 10 Determinants of Aging You can Control*. Dr. William Evans is professor of Geriatrics at Duke University and Dr. Rosenberg is Doctor of Internal Medicine in Boston, Massachusetts.)

If my Introduction has inspired you to begin working out right away, leave this chapter for later reading and go directly to Chapter 5, my Vibrant Health workout program. There’s not a minute to waste! Start pumping, sweating and breathing your way into the best shape of your life. But, if you need a bit more information and encouragement to get you going, keep reading.

In 1991, after working out for four years and witnessing the phenomenal transformation of my own middle-aged body, as mentioned in the Introduction, I read a recently published book

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<sup>1</sup> Evans, William, Ph.D and Rosenberg, Irwin H., M.D. with Thompson, Jacqueline *Biomarkers: The 10 Determinants of Aging You Can Control* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991)



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called *Biomarkers: The 10 Determinants of Aging You Can Control*.<sup>2</sup> Written by William Evans, Ph.D., and Irwin H. Rosenberg, M. D., the book described the results of their landmark study at the USDA Human Nutrition Center on Aging at Tufts University.

Evans and Rosenberg had put male senior citizens aged 60 to 70 through a 12-week program of weight training. After only 12 weeks, their strength had increased by almost 200%!<sup>3</sup> Their muscles got both bigger and stronger. The women in the study ranged in ages from 87 to 96, and they also showed remarkable results. Their strength levels tripled and they increased their muscle size by 10%! These impressive results proved that, contrary to popular opinion, muscle loss is completely preventable and reversible at any age, even 90.

Regardless of your body's physical condition when you begin, you can still make gains. The principal message of the *Biomarkers* study reveals: many physiological declines of aging can be reversed, or at the very least improved.

When we choose not to take action to improve our health, our bodies' deterioration as we age is as dramatic—in the opposite direction—as the results of the Tufts study. In our mid-20s we begin to lose muscle mass. In our 30s we begin to lose strength and stamina, and start gaining weight. In our 40s, the rate of muscle loss accelerates, shifting our body composition to fat over muscle. Over 50 and into our 60s, we have lost most of our strength and stamina and we've slowed down.

By our 70s many of us begin to consider what assisted living program we'll be able to afford, because we have come to believe that the deterioration of our bodies is inevitable and that chronic

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 14

conditions like heart disease, diabetes, cancer and fractures are a part of aging. Weak and decrepit, many of us will spend the rest of our lives complaining of ailments and comparing doctors.

The muscle loss and brittle bones that come as the result of not improving our health now set the stage for serious illnesses like osteoporosis. Life now becomes painful and difficult. We begin to move stiffly and to suffer chronic aches and pains.

But it's never too late to postpone disability and reduce your risk for chronic diseases. You can regain your muscular strength by developing muscle mass, the vital ingredient for the support of your entire body. As you “work” your muscles and other parts of your body, you can also learn to take care of your body, to appreciate and love it for what it does for you.

Imagine my surprise when I read *Biomarkers* and realized that while I had been training and teaching clients in my own little corner of the world, Tufts scientists Evans and Rosenberg had also been training people with results that scientifically proved what I knew intuitively: middle-aged spread has nothing to do with age, but rather with body composition. And who is responsible for the body composition lean toward fat over muscle? We are! It's our sedentary lifestyle that perpetuates our accumulated fat and loss of muscle.

I thought back on my poor eating habits of the past, stuffing myself with cheese, butter, cream, all kinds of meats, rich sauces and alcoholic drinks—all of which caused by body fat to skyrocket. Meanwhile, my stressful, sedentary living had eaten away my muscle mass. My body was in such shock that my digestive system wasn't working properly; I suffered from chronic constipation. Even though I was only slightly overweight, by about 20 pounds, I was obese due to my body composition.

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In addition to my dangerous body composition, my disuse and misuse of my body lead to a “deteriorating spine” diagnosis that I was told would eventually need surgery.

Gratefully, due to my weight training program and improved diet, I left that threat in the past. After reading *Biomarkers*, I knew for certain that as long as I lived I would never neglect my body. Getting to know my body through the process of restoring my health day in and day out has given me a new appreciation for my body. I now welcome the daily challenge of building strength, stamina and flexibility. My mantra became: *Learn to love what's good for you!*

The road to knowing, appreciating and loving my body has been long and hard. I still remember how I used to blame my body and want to punish it whenever I suffered a symptom. With a mind totally disconnected from my body, I treated it as a separate entity.

One particular incident comes to mind. I awoke one morning with red bumps all over my face and arms. Alarmed and scared, I hurried to see a dermatologist. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before. The doctor looked at my face, wrote a prescription and told me to apply the cream until the red bumps disappeared.

Every day I scrubbed the cream on my face and arms as hard as I could, as if to punish my skin for daring to displease me. A few weeks later I noticed that instead of red bumps, I now had white patches all over my face and arms. Again in a panic, I returned to the dermatologist and showed him the white patches. He looked at me with a calm and casual manner and said, “Oh, that’s just the side effect of the drug.”

Furious at the doctor for not warning me that the cure could be worse than the symptom, I vowed to scratch him off my list.

As for my ailing body, I still had not learned empathy for myself. I didn't realize that the stress caused by my chaotic life had also caused my skin to break-out. The rash on my face and arms was my body's message to look inward and make changes to restore her to balance and health.

Have you had a similar experience? What do you do when a symptom stops you dead in your tracks? Do you blame your body and want to punish it as I once did or are you kinder to yourself?

When you understand that the mind impacts the body and symptoms originate in the mind, you'll know where to look for a solution. Your body will ask (or demand) that you change an attitude, a habit or a behavior that has created the symptom.

As the chapters in this book unfold, you'll see how building strength, stamina and flexibility will awaken within you a deeper appreciation and love for your body and you too will intend to never neglect it again.

### **Ten Determinants of Aging You Can Control**

The Ten Determinants of Aging You Can Control reveal how your daily choices control how your body ages, and what you can do to slow and reverse its inevitable functional decline. You are not a victim of your aging body; rather, your aging body responds to your decisions.

The ten physical aspects of aging or “biomarkers” that you can control through lifestyle changes are: your muscle mass, your strength, your basal metabolic rate, your body fat percentage, your aerobic capacity, your blood pressure, your insulin sensitivity, your cholesterol HDL ratio, your bone density and your body temperature regulation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 42

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*Your muscle mass.*<sup>5</sup> Scientific studies have shown that we begin to lose muscle mass in our mid-20s at the rate of 6.6 pounds every 10 years. That's roughly one half pound per year. This rate accelerates as we enter our 40s.

Several of my 70-something clients have come to me with complaints about struggling to get out of the car or the bathtub. I immediately have them focus on their leg workout and start them on squats if they are not already doing them. I believe it is essential to develop strong leg muscles and a strong hip area by working the muscles used when bending at the knee. Each of my clients eventually learns how to do squats, the king of exercises that strengthen legs and hip areas. Squat mimics the act of sitting, getting up from a sitting position, and then going down again. Every time we squat, we fortify the joints, muscles, nerves and ligaments in the leg and hip area.

If you cannot squat due to knee, ankle or hip problems, you can do Donkey Kicks (see page X), an alternative exercise that strengthens the same muscles as the squat.

*Your strength.*<sup>6</sup> is totally dependent on your muscle mass. If you increase muscle mass, you increase strength.

Muscle plays such a huge role in reversing and retarding the aging process because building and maintaining muscle tissue affects not only the “strength” biomarker, but also all the other biomarkers as well.

After my first son Daniel was born, I had 20 pounds of extra weight that I could not lose. I decided running could be my last hope. So I went to the track and started to run, but my legs wouldn't do what I wanted them to. They felt like lead. Unable to breathe properly, I gasped for air and a painful cramp caught

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 44

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 46

in my side. Feeling frustrated and defeated, I swore never to run again because it was not for me. Fast forward 46 years—today, at age 70, after 25 years of training, with strong muscles, fit lungs and a well-hydrated body, I can run without difficulty.

**Conditioning** made the difference between these two scenarios. My body, at 70, is better prepared for any challenge, than it was when I was in my 20s.

Have you ever had a similar experience? Did you at one time attempt an activity but when unsuccessful gave up, angry and disappointed at your failure?

If so, you too can revisit and triumph over a past experience that left you dissatisfied. It's never too late to prove to yourself you can do it. Conditioning your body is key. You too can build strength, stamina, breathe deeply and hydrate your body, preparing it for any activity you wish to undertake. For more inspiration, read the stories in Chapter 8, "The Forever Fit and Fabulous Generation".

Your **BMR, or basal metabolic rate**<sup>7</sup> measures the rate at which your body burns energy at low exertion. The more muscle you have, the more calories you burn. The less muscle you have, the fewer calories your body will burn.

Beginning at age 20, BMR drops two percent per decade. By the time you're 50, your BMI has dropped by eight percent and reduces your body's ability to burn the calories from your food intake. Unless you stop this decline by taking up weight training to increase your lean muscle mass, *your body will continue to accumulate more and more fat.*

After I graduated high school I weighed 140 pounds. I couldn't stand myself and wanted desperately to lose the 25 pounds that I

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 52

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had gained. When I told a friend of my misery, she handed me a cigarette and told me smoking would keep my hunger away. So, I started to smoke. For weeks I lived on cigarettes and coffee and lost ten pounds. One day I woke up on my bedroom floor without any memory of how I had gotten there. My malnourished body had gone into shock and overdosed during the night on cold medicine. If I had been eating a healthy diet and not smoking, my body could have withstood the extra dose of medicine.

Women of all ages complain that their bulging waistlines create their greatest source of dissatisfaction with their bodies. Starvation diets or smoking offer no solution and can be extremely dangerous. Eating a nutritious diet (see Chapter 6, Nutrition: You Are What You Eat) and increasing your metabolism (see Chapter 5, the Vibrant Health Workout) allow you to burn calories even at rest.

*Your body fat percentage.*<sup>8</sup> Unless you train like an athlete, getting older means gaining body fat. Even if your body looks relatively the same and you haven't gained much weight, chances are that your lean body mass has decreased and your fat increased. Evans and Rosenberg have estimated that the average sedentary 65 year-old female consists of about 43% fat. This bears repeating. *The average sedentary 65 year-old female is about 43% fat.*<sup>9</sup>

Do you know your BMI? Your Body Mass Index calculates your weight in relation to height. This figure assesses your risk for developing the chronic diseases associated with aging. It also helps you determine your risk for dying prematurely and shows you how much weight you must lose to prevent all of the above. To find out your BMI, Google BMI, and on the BMI calculator

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 53

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 53

page, fill in two blanks, one for height and the other for weight. You will get an instant BMI reading. Compare your BMI to ideal ratings for your age, also found on the same page. If your BMI is 20 percent or more above ideal values, you are obese, and your weight problem can place you at risk of dying younger than necessary.

I know how tough it can be to face this truth, but we cannot change what we don't acknowledge. If you want to feel better, look better and have more energy than ever before, you must know where you stand. Then you can begin to look forward to the dramatic changes you can create in the years to come, as my client Carolyn did.

Carolyn shares her story in Chapter 8, "The Forever Fit and Fabulous Generation." She lowered her BMI from 37 to 29 by losing 45 pounds—now close to ideal for her age. Carolyn is no longer at risk for heart disease, diabetes or cancer. To reverse her high-fat/low-muscle ratio, Carolyn began lifting weights and changed her diet to include more high-fiber, low-fat, and low-sugar foods. Her added muscle has helped her speed her metabolism and her improved diet has helped her burn fat.

*Aerobic capacity*<sup>10</sup> implies the capacity to bring oxygen into the lungs, and deliver blood to the heart where the bloodstream can effectively pump blood to all parts of the body.

If you have led a sedentary life, as I did until I was 46 years old, your aerobic capacity has declined. If you're 65, it's been reduced by 30 to 40 percent! Your heart cannot function to full capacity if you're aerobically unfit. Your heart needs strong, healthy lungs to process oxygen throughout your whole body.

When I started jogging at 46, my aerobic capacity had been

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 60



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severely compromised. At first I could barely jog a few yards before I had to stop to give my chest a rest. I then walked a few paces and a few minutes later picked up the pace again. I continued walking and jogging until my lungs got used to the new level of exertion. I struggled for weeks, but eventually I was able to double and then triple the distance, until I could finally jog a whole mile.

Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper (the father of aerobics) says that for minimal aerobic benefit, 20 to 30 minutes of aerobic activity (walking, jogging, cycling), three to four times per week is sufficient. He also recommends that the aerobic activity be performed continuously, uninterrupted, rather than breaking it up into segments throughout the day.

Be patient with yourself, but start walking, jogging, climbing stairs, riding a bike, jumping rope or whatever suits you—the key is to do it! Don't wait until barely a wisp of air travels through your lungs, hampering blood flow to the rest of your body. Give your heart and lungs the aerobic activity they need.

*Your body's ability to process blood sugar*<sup>11</sup> is, like most of the other biomarkers, negatively affected by your elevated fat level and reduced muscle mass. Elevated blood sugar levels increase the risk of developing Type One diabetes and in turn raise the risk of heart disease. After age 70, 20 percent of men and 30 percent of women become at risk for developing diabetes.

I grew up eating a very unhealthy diet: fried meats and fowl, vegetables cooked in lard and fruits soaked in sugar. Fat or sugar or both coated everything I remember eating. As an adult, I continued to eat the same way I had as a child, unaware that my diet could eventually kill me.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 67

And it almost did. A combination of poor diet, chronic stress and anxiety, psychic suffering and sedentary living no doubt caused the cancer I contracted in my early 40s. My decision to get fit and change my diet put a halt to my deteriorating health. If I hadn't made these changes, I would now be among the millions of Latinas suffering from diabetes.

According to The Federal Office of Minority Health<sup>12</sup>, 73 percent of Mexican-American women are overweight or obese, as compared to 61 percent of the general female population. Hispanic children have a 1:2 (one in two) chance of developing diabetes in their lifetime, as compared to 1:3 (one in three) for the general population.

A prevention campaign developed by the National Diabetes Education Program and the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention<sup>13</sup> highlights some good news: by losing a small amount of weight, limiting fat and caloric intake and exercising 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, the risk for diabetes can be reduced by *more than half!*

***Your cholesterol ratio.***<sup>14</sup> Our body produces some cholesterol naturally (blood cholesterol) and other cholesterol comes from the foods we eat (dietary cholesterol). High amounts of cholesterol in the blood can create cholesterol deposits in the bloodstream known as atherosclerosis that contributes to the development of heart disease.

When I changed my diet from animal-based to plant-based, I drastically reduced my cholesterol level. Cholesterol is found only in animal-based foods. Today the only animal-based food I eat is an occasional serving of fish or egg or a tiny piece of cheese.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/content.aspx?lvl=3&lvlIID=537&ID=6459>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/jun2004/niddk-29.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 71

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If your cholesterol level is dangerously high, consider reducing your intake of animal-based foods. Eat more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, seeds and nuts. For more information on a plant-based diet, see Chapter 6, complete with recipes.

***Your blood pressure.***<sup>15</sup> Abnormally high blood pressure called “hypertension” has multiple causes: genetic predisposition, obesity, a salty diet, excessive alcohol consumption, smoking and a sedentary lifestyle. Hypertension is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke.

I have a genetic predisposition for hypertension, but I control it through exercise, meditation and diet. I exercise every day and meditate twice daily. It’s amazing to experience how meditation can lower heartbeat, pulse and respiration. The body actually rests in space, completely still, in perfect balance.

If you suffer from hypertension, you must eat healthy, exercise vigorously and meditate on a regular basis. For tips on meditation, see Chapter 7, Managing Your Stress.

***Your bone density.***<sup>16</sup> Over the course of a lifetime, the average woman’s thighbone that joins with the hip decreases by 55 percent—a primary reason that older women fall and break bones.<sup>17</sup>

Whenever I see someone walking hunched over it reminds me of my old self. If I had not started lifting weights when I did, I would now be crippled with osteoporosis. My spine, already deteriorating in my early 30s, would not have been able to support my upper body.

Osteoporosis is not a normal consequence of aging. It’s a preventable disease. When you weight train, you exert pressure

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 75

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 77

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 78

on your bones and make them stronger. Other weight-bearing exercises that prevent bone loss are walking, running and cycling.

Regardless of your age, you can prevent osteoporosis, broken bones and nursing homes—by getting serious about lifting weights to strengthen your bones and the muscles designed to protect them.

***Regulating your internal temperature.***<sup>18</sup> Your body's ability to regulate its own internal temperature diminishes with age. If you are aerobically unfit and sedentary, you may have lost the ability to sweat. When we don't sweat, blood flow to the skin diminishes. Heat build-up in the body would normally escape as sweat. With heat trapped inside the body internal temperatures can soar to dangerous levels.

Before I changed my lifestyle, I was always hot. I could not stand the heat and humidity in New Orleans. I complained constantly and dreaded summers. Today, summer is my favorite time of the year. I can walk comfortably in 90-degree weather and hardly need air conditioning. My lifestyle made the difference. Today I drink plenty of water and sweat every day. My meditation practice also lowers my body temperature.

By drinking lots of water, engaging in regular exercise and also meditating, you too can increase your body's ability to release heat through sweat and maintain a lower body temperature. Exercise, drink water and meditate to enjoy a cool body.

So there you have them—the ten key physiological factors associated with aging *that are, each and every one of them, under your control!* As you can see, muscle and strength are at the top of the list, because when these diminish, your over all functioning will be at risk. You will then lose your independence and your

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 81

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ability to move at will. Beyond that point, life as you know it will never be the same.

When I read *Biomarkers* soon after its publication 20 years ago, I felt truly blessed. Elated, I wanted to fly to Boston and personally thank the two men who had scientifically proven the basis of my lifework: lifting weights as essential to fitness, health, and longevity. Or, as I would say to my clients: build muscle or get fat, weak and frail!

*Biomarkers* affirmed and acknowledged my intuition and faith that restoring muscle restores health. During my early years of personal training, naysayers considered weight lifting a passing fad. When I shared what I did with others, some laughed, saying “And people actually *pay* you to train them?” or “You make a living doing *that*?”

*Biomarkers* removed those doubts and offered scientific proof to the naysayers. With *Biomarkers* as support for my gut feelings, my career carried new meaning as an avid advocate of weight lifting. I knew from experience that weight lifting could change lives but now I had the expertise of renowned scientists at a prestigious institution substantiating what I had known all along.

With the publication of *Biomarkers*, the value of weight training shifted from recreational to medical. Up until the early 90s, only bodybuilders pumped iron, training their muscles for size and definition and competing for titles and prizes. But the good work of Tufts University scientists, William Evans, Ph. D. and Irwin H. Rosenberg, M. D., gave building muscle an essential new purpose: preserving muscle function and vitality and staying young longer.

In 1998, some seven years after the publication of *Biomarkers*, Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper, founder of the Cooper Aerobic Center

in Dallas, Texas, published *Regaining the Power of Youth at Any Age*<sup>19</sup>. His book concludes that after his evaluation of scientific data and his own experience with aerobic and strength training over more than 30 years, that the percentage of aerobic work versus weight work needs to be adjusted by different age groups. For example, 51 to 60 year-olds need 60 percent aerobic work and 40 percent strength; 61 and older (my category) need 55 percent aerobic and 45 percent strength. This adjustment reflects his current belief that aerobic and muscle needs vary with age.

Dr. Cooper emphasizes that both aerobic and strength training are essential to slow down the physical deterioration of aging and to regain some of the energy and youthfulness of our younger years.

So what kinds of gains can you expect to make once you begin your exercise program?

Dr. Cooper cites a 1989 report (*Journal of Applied Physiology*, Vol. 66, No. 6, pp. 2589-94) on a study by University of Florida researchers. A group of 70 to 79 healthy, untrained men and women were split into three groups: one group performed aerobic type exercises (cycling, treadmill-walking), another group did resistance (weight lifting) work and the third group did nothing. Their physical training consisted of three sessions per week for 26 weeks.

At the end of the study, the aerobic training group increased their oxygen uptake by 22 percent, and the resistance-training group increased their lower body strength by 9 percent and their upper body strength by 18 percent

The researchers concluded that healthy men and women in

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<sup>19</sup> Cooper, Kenneth H., Dr., *Regaining the Power of Youth at Any Age*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005)

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their 70s can reap positive benefits by engaging in prolonged and challenging exercise training. And, says Dr. Cooper, what the study proved to him is that if older people are willing to train, they can *regain the power of youth!*

In 2010, Dr. Walter M. Bortz, II, M.D., eminent gerontologist, passionate promoter of exercise and a lifelong marathoner—he ran his 40<sup>th</sup> marathon at 80—published *The Roadmap to 100*.<sup>20</sup> He believes that inactivity is the single leading cause of health issues. He cites several studies, each more compelling than the other, that prove time and again that to live a life worth living, exercise is key.

In his book, Dr. Bortz cites a particular longitudinal study by a team of Harvard researchers.<sup>21</sup> The participants were several thousand 70-year-old men who were in basic good health. The scientists hoped to find the key to a healthy long life aside from genetics. The study showed that regular exercise resulted in a nearly 30 percent lower mortality risk and that those who lived a healthy lifestyle (did not smoke, were not diabetic, obese or hypertensive, and exercised), had a 54 percent chance of living to 90 or beyond. In addition, they enjoyed better physical function, mental well-being and lower incidence of the chronic diseases associated with aging.

Dr. Bortz emphasizes that lifestyle, not genetics is the key to longevity.

In discussing the impact of lifestyle on health, such a discussion is incomplete without emphasizing the impact of

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<sup>20</sup> Bortz II, Walter M. M.D. and Stickrod, Randall *The Roadmap to 100: The Breakthrough Science of Living A Long and Healthy Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010) p. 31, 33, 41

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71

physical neglect on our brains and its functioning.

The Alzheimer's Association describes Alzheimer's as a progressive and fatal brain disease. As many as 5.3 million Americans are living with Alzheimer's, and some 500,000 people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s have Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia.

In *The Roadmap to 100*, Dr. Bortz quotes Dr. Ronald Petersen, director of the Alzheimer's Research Center at the Mayo Clinic: "Regular physical exercise is probably the best means we have of preventing Alzheimer's disease today, better than medications, better than intellectual activity, better than supplements and diet."

Dr. Bortz also points out that Columbia University Medical Center found in physically active volunteers that the risk of Alzheimer's decreased by a third. Those who combined exercise with a healthy diet high in fruits and vegetables lowered their risk by 60 percent! He adds that these recent findings have received little public attention because perhaps most of that attention focuses on pharmaceutical efforts.

Short-term memory loss is one the most common signs of Alzheimer's and typically can be the kind that disrupts daily life. We've all heard that to keep our brainpower from deteriorating we must regularly challenge, train and use our brains just as we should our bodies if we want to remain vital and energetic. Through lack of use, our brains can atrophy, blocking and breaking down the connections that aid in memory. Fortunately, there are several things we can do to prevent such devastation—for one, we can exercise!

Exercise can strengthen nerve cells by increasing blood and energy supply to the brain. This stimulates the release of growth factors and BDNF, a substance that promotes branching of neurons, inducing nerve cells to grow, branch and make



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connections with one another, and, in some cases, produce new nerve cells.

In his book entitled *Spark*, John J. Ratey, M. D., clinical associate professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and also author of *The User's Guide to the Brain*, states that the central message of *Spark* is to convince the reader to exercise, because exercise is *the single most powerful tool available to improve brain function*. Dr. Ratey bases this statement on evidence he has gathered from hundreds of recent research papers. He notes that not only neuroscientists, but also kinesiologists and epidemiologists, concur that the more fit we are, the better our brain works. Ratey goes on to say: "The research consistently shows that the more fit you are, the more resilient your brain becomes, and the better it functions cognitively and psychologically. If you get your body in shape, your mind will follow."

As you can see, the science in favor of exercise is overwhelming. The choice is now up to you. How you choose to live your life, caring for or ignoring your health, will determine how you will function in your later years. Your choices now will impact your body for the rest of your life. Give your body the extra muscle it needs to support your longevity. Make a promise to yourself to begin now! Don't waste another day!

