

# BECOMING A LIFE ATHLETE

by Peter Shmock & Carly Jefferson-Dow

**T**here are two questions I ask myself when defining how I want to live my life: How do I want to feel in my body for the rest of my life? What am I willing to do to ensure long term physical health?

I believe that becoming a Life Athlete is about making a choice. A true Life Athlete makes daily choices that aid in maintaining physical well being. Health and fitness are a commitment. They are not awarded after one cathartic spout of exercise. It is something earned through consistent physical and mental effort.

Lately our culture has become especially immobile. Our sedentary habits are destroying our health. As you know, obesity is at an epidemic level. I don't want you to go down that path. I want you to choose healthy, vibrant lifestyles, and it all starts with the choices you make now.

I know the task seems daunting and sometimes impossible, but I know you can do it. I've seen it happen over and over again. People make little changes in their lives and their health dramatically improves.

Doing two very simple things can get you started: eat less and exercise more. No doubt, you have all heard this before. I know that this advice seems painfully redundant, but being able to function comfortably on a day-to-day basis is a reality that everyone can achieve. Yet to achieve true health, you must start now.

My advice does not involve a savvy diet plan or an extreme boot-camp workout regimen. Rather, I suggest a simpler route to reform health. It can begin simply by walking briskly for 30 minutes most days of the week. In addition to this, eat smaller portions of better foods.

For beginners, start exercising by walking the dog around the block. Walk around Myrtle Edwards Park or Discovery Park, two of my favorite places, or pick out a downtown destination to explore. If you have kids, walk around the track at your kid's soccer prac-

tice. Be creative in where you choose to walk. Exercise does not necessarily mean gallons of sweat and strained muscles. Instead, walk a bit, watch how your body responds, and notice how much better you feel. Gradually build on this feeling and incorporate more challenging activity, and you will begin to increase your cardiovascular strength.

As for better nutrition, the answer is also simple: quality, not quantity. We need to learn how to eat whole foods rich in nutrients. Similar to the way exercising makes our bodies feel good, foods high in nutritional value also create healthy feelings in the body. It is important to watch how your body reacts to certain

foods; being vigilant is key. Unhealthy foods will make you feel bloated, grumpy, groggy and gassy—you name it. The fact is, the body speaks the truth, and when you over feed it, or load it full of fast food, you will be sick. You are what you eat, so eat well.

For me, health is less about body image, numbers on a scale or clothing size. I gauge my physical health by how I feel, not how I look. By paying attention to how my body feels, I am more aware of my appetite and energy levels. Without

such awareness, I might easily over eat or exercise too strenuously. Paying attention is key to achieving and maintaining good health.

In reality, all people can achieve the feeling of good health. Lugging around extra weight is a burden that can cause serious health problems. Your emotional and physical health depends on the choice you are about to make. Don't gamble with your life. Instead, become a Life Athlete; make the choice to feel good! ♦

— *Peter Shmock* is the founder of Belltown health club ZUM. A two time Olympic track and field athlete (1976, 1980) and former Director of Strength and Conditioning for the Seattle Mariners, Peter has been recognized as a leading trainer and fitness educator for over 25 years.

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