

A Personal Handbook:

Living The Fit Life

Integrating fitness, life and work in the 21st Century
and other important things...



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Living the Fit Life

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Important: If you have access to a printer, please PRINT this report. You'll get a lot more out of it if you're not reading it from a monitor. Take a few minutes to sit down in a quiet space and really absorb what's here. This is a start; but you'll want to make notes, edit and adapt what's here to create your own personal Fit Life.

Note that the web links included will only work in the computer version; but I still recommend you have a printed copy.

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"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."
-- Lao-tzu"

"Our life is frittered away by detail ... simplify, simplify."
-- Henry David Thoreau

0: Welcome, About You, Our Mission Together

You have officially taken the first step toward becoming a much improved endurance athlete -- feel better yet? You know as well as I do that it's not that simple. Despite constant marketing messages and stories to the contrary, personal experience shows that the best results come after periods of hard work and focus.

As an endurance athlete, you have likely organized almost everything you do in such a way that you can actively participate to your fullest. You need to exercise frequently, to eat properly, to manage your sleep, to balance recovery, and choose the right equipment. There are so many different areas where you can focus on improvement and find opportunities for growth and development that we all, at some point, become consumed by it.

Stories of mega training hours and the pro lifestyle seem alluring on the surface, but reality is much harsher. The message is clear: there is no easy way.

But there is a better way.

The Mission of Endurance Lifestyle Design

That super double top-secret protocol that the pros and elite age groupers take advantage of isn't the latest carbon widget or special coach – although those things can't hurt. The single unifying factor across all these individuals is far simpler: the relentless pursuit of physical excellence through incredible discipline, consistent training, and exhausting all avenues of learning.

The contents of this handbook are designed to help you transform your life at a macro-level. Tweaking workouts, buying gear, picking races...these are all minute changes that may or may not address the root cause of what's holding you back from achieving your potential. Besides, those decisions are highly individual and are best left in your hands.

Our goal in these pages is to go one better than the lopsided lifestyles of the phenomenally fit and fast: **We aim to provide you with a framework for improving key elements of your endurance lifestyle.**

Why Design A Fit Life?

Sure it's sexier to start with a race and a challenging training plan, plotting century rides and marathon greatness weeks and months ahead of schedule. Before you know it, you are plotting September's workouts...in January!

Your life and schedule will change so many times between now and September that your initial plan will probably have to be rethought several times...and you'll still only be able to fit in certain training regardless because of your other commitments.

That's where Endurance Lifestyle Design comes in.

Instead of getting lost in the details and ineffective dream-lining exercises, we can focus on aligning the big picture elements of your endurance goals and daily life. This integrated "lifestyle" approach creates conditions where you can exercise consistently and effectively without taking away from your other priorities.

What's The Catch?

I have to be honest here at the outset: this will not be easy, and it's not for everyone. We're going to try and cram a lifetime of "lessons learned" into a few pages. Not to mention a heavy-handed dose of the perspective that this is all just a game -- there are other things in our life that are simply more important than the sports we play.

The lessons and basic framework below are the result of over eight years of coaching triathletes, runners, adventure racers, and more. It's been tested, re-thought, overhauled and more...and it continues to help athletes looking for a better way than just doing "more."

Consider this your first step in the Endurance Lifestyle Design process. You'll more than likely need to take a few tries at constructing something that works for you, so be sure to save this handbook!

About Me

In writing this guide I am by no means claiming that I have all the answers. In fact I have made all of the typical mistakes (some more than once!) that I will cover in these pages. You can [learn more about me and my personal athletic journey here](#). Depending on the year and my focus, I could be raising money for charity through some crazy event, training for the Boston Marathon or trying to qualify for my fourth trip to Ironman Hawaii -- all while working from home and staying one step ahead of my two little girls.

I wish you the best on your journey and hope you stay in touch via [my blog](#) or [Twitter](#) so I can follow your progress and learn from you!

All the best,

Patrick

"Everyone has a plan until they get hit."
-- Joe Lewis

1: Plan From The Ground Up

Not too many years ago, my life was a mess. I was on a personal mission to qualify for Hawaii as it represented both a personal and a professional milestone. My wife and I were planning on starting a family soon and I knew it was do or die time to get serious about my training.

So I did what any avid triathlete would do. My knee-jerk reaction was to find an expensive coach with an impressive pro Ironman resume and I buried myself following his workouts. His training plan was just one week -- 25 hours a week. He told me to do for the next 10 weeks - no variation, same workouts - after which I could email him again for further guidance.

I worked out every day, typically 3 to 5 hours. I biked on the trainer in the AM, swam at lunch and ran at night. I fell asleep at my desk. I drank coke and coffee like it was water. I ate anything that wasn't nailed down. I eventually got better at doing the workouts, but after my taper and race, I still didn't make the big dance.

Hugging my proud wife at the finishline, it crossed my mind that I was physically out of options -- there was no more time in my life. Something had to change. My training plan looked great, but everything that went into it was so unbalanced, so poorly set up, that it was simply unsustainable.

What began then was a long process, one that continues today, of deconstructing my schedule and my goals and building them all over again from the ground up. You will need to go through this same process if you are to realize your true endurance potential.

Endurance Planning Is Broken

As an endurance athlete, chances are you are familiar with the annual planning process. Whether you are a beginner or a veteran, one of the first "a ha" moments you had was that you couldn't just roll out of bed on a Sunday and race to your best.

So you follow in the footsteps of your peers, targeting a race in the distant future and then begin the process of training for it across many months. You use software to measure your training, then draw a straight line between where you are now and where you want to be in three, five, or eight months. This is a massive undertaking, and when done poorly is little more than a guaranteed way to burn out, get injured, or worse. Are you excited yet!?

The Problem of Periodization

The most commonly accepted form of annual season planning is known as periodization. While the approach presupposes various phases of training designed to build fitness and create peak fitness, it's been regurgitated and copied so many times that all the plans begin to look the same:

Base 1, Base 2, Base 3, Build 1, Build 2, Peak, Taper & Race

Simply adding 10% more volume or distance each week, making sure to take every fourth week as recovery isn't a plan -- it's a scientific model.





This model assumes that your time is flexible and that training is your number one priority. Time flexibility is required as you'll be adding more and more each phase to build training stress and create fitness gains. The training as number one priority is a foregone conclusion; there is no other space on the template planning sheets where you can account for other parts of your life outside of training.

At the end of the day, you can spend several hours massaging data and numbers to create the dream training plan. It will look pretty, but chances are it will have absolutely no bearing on your personal reality. I can say this with such conviction because I have years of personal and professional experience trying to shoehorn my own life, and the lives of countless athletes, into a rigid training plan structure.

A Bulletproof Three-Step Planning Process

Your life, your job, your means, your goals, everything down to the work you need to do to achieve your goals...they all constitute critical elements of your plan. You now know that you ignore these elements and you risk creating a fantastic plan for a season that will only ever exist in a vacuum. Here's how you can beat the system:

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Step 1: Start Where You Are

Forget calculating 10% more than last year's annual hours. Instead, begin your seasonal journey by taking a 360-degree look at yourself both as who you are now, but who you want to be. Are you a mother? A CEO? Do you work full-time? Do you want to volunteer or spend Sundays at Church? Are you a vegetarian? Do you want to become one? There are so many complicated facets to our lives and who we are, that planning everything we do according to how we exercise and how we'd like to perform on a single day is almost laughable.

Once you have a bigger picture sense of who you are and where you want to be headed, break out your calendar / schedule and map your available time. Not the time you want to have, the time you actually have. Block out recurring commitments and "flex" time for other demands. Add in fun / family time, or whatever fits that category for you. Be sure to scan the last six to eight weeks of your calendar so that you don't miss any basic commitments.

Step 2: Outline Goals + Sketch Week

With your other time commitments defined and your big picture in mind, you can begin sketching out your basic week. We'll go into more detail on this later, but the basic week is essentially a training week that you can repeat, year-round, pretty much without fail.

Swims work on Monday and Wednesday because the pool is open and life says it's okay. Long bikes are on Sundays because of your Little League commitments. Runs are a lunchtime because you have an awesome boss who "gets" your fitness lifestyle.

However it works for you, when you're done you'll know that you have a schedule that you can actually complete. That's very, very powerful.

Step 3: Identify "Critical" Training Windows

The final step is to identify areas in your year when making your training a higher priority will have a significant impact on your fitness. These windows vary by event type and distance, but in general:

- 12 weeks out from your event it's time to "Get Serious" about making 95% of your workouts.
- 12 to 8 weeks out you can do one "volume" weekend or week, committing to significant time on the bike. Note this time is a good place to do a "B" or "C" level race as well.
- 8 to 4 weeks out you can do another "volume" weekend or week, committing to time in all three disciplines if possible.
- 4 to 2 weeks out you should plan for a race rehearsal workout where you complete anywhere from 100% (shorter events) to 66% of the overall race distance.
- 2 to 0 weeks out is time for tapering and recovery; plan on travel and being a bit "stressed".

Your Task: Re-think Your Annual Plan

Block out an hour sometime this week, and revisit your current training plan. If you can't rebuild it from the week up, how closely can you make it map to your current schedule. If you have a coach, make her/him earn the monthly coaching fee by converting the schedule to one that fits better into your life. Be sure to save the basic week you create as a template to either work from or to compare future training weeks with as a baseline.

Conclusion

It seems like a lot now, but it's easily managed when you focus on that single race and are actually working with your existing calendar. To be your best, everything about you needs to be in "sync" with your athletic goals. Forget calculating annual hours or pie charts dividing each week by discipline...these all pale in comparison to who you are today. Always remember: A plan you can actually do beats the plan you want to, but can't do, every time.

"If it's not fun, why do it?"
-- Ben & Jerry's Company Motto

2: Focus on Fun & Challenging Activities

If you look closely enough, you might notice that there was a critical element missing from the annual plans I described in section one. Ready? It's fun.

Go back and read that first section again. You'll notice from my tone and the description of my day that training had become a job. It was just another thing to schedule, suffer through, and repeat the next day. What was once an amazing sport filled with cool people had become my own personal aerobic hell filled with energy bars, caffeine and little else.

I am living testament to the fact that you can still train for an endurance event -- at a very high level -- without making incredible sacrifices.

Sounds almost too good to be true, right? Let's see what it takes...

Planning to Race

Very little of your training and hard work really goes into your race. It's really just the last twelve weeks, the last 84 days, that truly has an impact. Everything before that point is simply preparation for the training you will do for the race itself. We know this from research that has attempted to mathematically model the load-performance relationship (e.g. Banister, 1986, Morton, 1991), generating what's known as influence curves -- a representation of when the work you do will affect your fitness.

This critical knowledge allows us to take a very large step back from the pressures of annual planning. If we need to get serious with about 12 weeks to go, then it follows that everything before that point in time is really just getting our ducks in a row. Taking your race goals into consideration, of course, it's possible to outline a season where you have fun and get fit and are ready to hit it out of the park within your own race training window.



Identifying Your Cool Factor

Now that that the pressure is off, let's take a second to find out what you think is "cool." Maybe there's a 24-hour team running relay, or an annual epic bike ride. Maybe you've always wanted to do a particular race but never seriously considered it. Maybe you want to go out on your own and make up something entirely new.

Whatever it is -- do it.

It's just a simple fact: if something is cool and exciting you are way more likely to enjoy the preparation process and the event itself. Take a moment to stop geeking out about your season and instead reflect back on the times in your own past, or perhaps when you learned of what others had done, that made you say "Wow." That's exactly the spirit we want to capture.

Adding Events to Your "Real" Season

In some cases, these cool events are actually pretty massive undertakings. In general I recommend you start with the small and manageable, building your way up the cool spectrum. A 10 day backpacking trip to Patagonia is cool, but might overwhelm you a bit early in the cool process. The initial step here is much like brainstorming or building a bucket list...just write it all down and we can sort it out later.

Rule #1 Is Specificity: While anything prior to the last twelve weeks is fair game, it's safe to say that the closer you get to your event window the more specific these activities should be. So an epic cycling trip to California is cool, but it's cool and relevant when it's pretty close to the start of your Ironman race prep phase. Same way that a 5-day backpacking trip is very cool, but not so relevant, and perhaps best scheduled earlier in your year.

Rule #2 Is Fatigue: The only other real consideration for these fun and challenging events is the impact they'll have on your ability to train for your race preparation phase. So picking something like Western States 100 as your cool thing, while epic, isn't really an appropriate supplemental activity. Instead that's probably more of an "A" race in and of itself, and should be treated as such. Heck, think of all the cool things you could do in preparation for an event like that! So remember: cool is cool until it's not so cool and you are worn down from being so cool that you can't train when it matters. Definitely not cool.

Re-Thinking Post Race

The time of your season with the most potential for coolness actually falls after your big race. The pressure is off. You are wicked fit. You are most likely bored out of your mind and driving your family and friends insane. What better time to pick something fun and low-pressure to keep you occupied and make the most of the hard work you have done?

Anything is game here as long as (A) you are healthy enough to do it and (B) you can do so without seriously burning any bridges with your inner circle.

- Good Example: Xterra World Champs on Maui after the Ironman World Champs.
- Bad Example: Adding a Marathon to the end of a long Triathlon season.

Do your best to fight the planning blues by filling your calendar with regularly scheduled fun and cool activities. Outside of your sport, there are plenty of events that will keep you focused (athletically), test your abilities (physically) and force you to execute (mentally)...all without the perceived cost of the long-term event. Do your best to incorporate these events roughly six to eight weeks apart across your season. Whenever possible, try to involve others in your quest for fun and fitness.

Your Task: Find Three Fun & Challenging Events for your Season

You heard me, three events. Put on your thinking cap, email your friends, do some research online. Spend a week just thinking about it and adding to this list. Then sit down with a "cool" drink (I'd choose a manly beer or something), put your feet up and start plotting. The only thing holding you back at this point is your imagination!

"Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things."
-- Peter Drucker

3: Create A Basic Training Week

Building endurance fitness has very little to do with multi-colored charts, fancy gear, or high-dollar training camps. Your endurance fitness is earned day in and day out, across months and years of training. The natural inclination is to build five year plans that set goals and predict the future, but there is precious little connection to the actual lives we are leading right now - where the rubber meets the road.

Now that we have outlined a new approach to season planning and uncovered how research (and common sense!) has shown that anything done prior to the final 12 weeks of training doesn't positively affect your race fitness potential, it's time to take some concrete steps.

In this section I'd like to talk about a critical training tool that veteran endurance athletes use to maximize fitness in the real world: The Basic Week.

Planning Is Sexy; Execution Is Progress

There are some really amazing software programs and web-based tools out there that let you graph with colors, 3-D effects and animation. These tools take the act of planning and make it into an art, or at least into an activity unto itself -- we plan because planning is fun and neat looking.

But the best plan in the world won't help you if you can't actually do it. In fact, any plan regardless of quality, who wrote it, or how much it costs, simply won't work unless you can follow it consistently.

At the end of the day, your body has no idea what your plan is. Your quads don't think, they just work and recover. You simply hit your body with workouts. The more frequently and consistently you can do this, the stronger and fitter you will become.

Basic Week = Basic Unit of Time

In real-world terms the vast majority of things we do happen on a weekly basis, it's just how we operate. Get gas on Mondays, food shop on Tuesdays, run with your girlfriends on Thursday nights, go to church on Sundays, etc. So why fight this natural flow by creating macro-level plans that we can't actually do? Veteran endurance athletes don't, and neither should you.

Managing Event Requirements & Your Life

The very act of creating a Basic Week means finding a common ground between your athletic goals and the rest of your real-world life. And since we start this at the weekly level, on a functional basis, we can be pretty well assured that it will work across the season (big picture) as well.

1. You start by mapping out your races for the year; and determine your upper level goals. Run a marathon? Survive a sprint? Try a new sport? In addition to ranking the races, be sure to put them in chronological order so you can focus on the next event.
2. Then you identify the basic workout blocks required: cycling? just running? cross-training?
3. Then you map out an actual week of your life, taking care to note recurring events/tasks, and then marking training availability.
4. To create your basic week, you return to step 2 and merge workouts with your weekly life as outlined in Step 3.

Integrate, Don't Balance

One of the biggest mistakes new endurance athletes make is assuming that their passion for training and racing can be offset, or balanced, with equal commitments in other areas of life. But life itself is a moving target; parts of it can be "weighted" differently at different times (work is more important in January than say in December). This is precisely why the Basic Week approach is so powerful -- by building up from your typical schedule, friction with existing elements of who you are and what you do is, essentially, minimal. Don't make the rookie mistake of trying to keep too many balls in the air at once. Integrate, don't balance.

Special Case Scenarios

Of course, some events require more than just the 8 hours a week you can allot to training. Life wouldn't be so exciting if we spent most of our time chasing really average goals! This is where the "12 weeks" concept comes into play; the Basic Week gets you through the other 40 weeks of your year, and is the foundation for the final event build -- but it's not the ultimate solution. As the event approaches you need to get more and more specific with your training.

In the case of a marathon, for example, your long runs need to get up into the 2.5-hour range. You'll need to be running four, if not five or six times a week depending on your goals and the actual proximity of the event. In other words, the final 12 weeks is when your athletic goals begin to take priority over some of the other elements of your life.

How this happens is up to you. It's a function of a confluence of factors, from goals and ability to health and motivation. Having the flexibility to add time, and the social capital to do so, are both critical outcomes from following a consistent training schedule. Your spouse, co-workers, friends won't mind the brief uptick in training so much if it isn't a constant source of tension.

Basic Week Example: The Marathon Runner

Monday: Off (life takes this day)

Tuesday: Tempo -or- Hills

Wednesday: Middle distance, aerobic run

Thursday: Track -or- Intervals

Friday: Off -or- Cross-train

Saturday: Long Run

Sunday: Speed / Skill run -or- Off

Life Is More Than The Sum of Your Days

It pays to not only know your personal big picture goals for life, but to create systems that allow you to achieve these goals on an incremental and effective basis. Athletics might seem super important to you right now, but is it worth sacrificing other relationships or your career goals? How do you think you'll feel about these decisions in 10 years? 20?

Regardless of where you fall on the planning spectrum, don't fall prey to letting a dream-lined annual schedule set weekly and regular expectations on life as you know it. Keep things as simple as you can for as long as you can...and you'll be both fit and happy.

Your Task: Outline your Basic Week

Sit down with a calendar and map out a basic week. If you use an online calendar or a decent piece of software you should be able to generate a weekly view with just a few clicks (and if you don't use a calendar, you should consider it!). With this in hand, begin plugging in your regular workouts (the ones you do now), and then your goal workouts (ones you'll need to start doing as the race nears). How do they map up? Where is there overlap? What can you do now to reduce friction or head off that impending head-on collision?

[>> Here is a Spreadsheet you can Download and Use.](#)

"Nutrition makes me puke."
-- Jimmy Piersall

"Those who think they have no time for healthy eating,
will sooner or later have to find time for illness."
-- Edward Stanley

4: Integrated Nutrition & Recovery Plans

One of the more fascinating elements of endurance sports is the importance non-athletic factors play in both training and on race day. Even the fittest person in the world won't win a 4+ hour event without the right fuel. This factor can level the playing field, or, in the case of the really savvy athlete, tip the scales in their favor. Regardless of how you train, everyone can eat a world class diet and care for their bodies like a professional.

Why do we care so much about eating and recovery?

On the most basic level, every workout or event completed has a cost associated with it. Some workouts are light, with minimal or no cost. Others are off the charts difficult making 48-hour (or longer) recovery windows mandatory. The harder the workouts are, and the more frequently they occur, the more likely it is that you will begin to wear your body down.

More importantly, we can't ignore the fact that your endurance lifestyle is deeply connected to how you work, play, and socialize. In order to be at your best across the full spectrum of your life, what you do must be supported by smart food decisions.

Your overarching goal as an endurance athlete is to train both consistently enough to maintain fitness and hard enough to force adaptation. It's easy to focus on the "work" component of this as the numbers are sexy and alluring, but without a commensurate focus on the other 80% of your life, you will eventually begin to underachieve, possibly even break.

Nutrition

Within the realm of endurance sports there are two type of nutrition -- what you eat during activity (in training and on race day) and what you eat the rest of the time. For the sake of staying focused, and recognizing that personal preference often dictates what any one athlete can eat while in motion (regardless of what the science says), this piece will focus on the "other" nutrition.

Eating for Performance: You Are What You Eat

Food is little more than fuel for our bodies, for our athletic exploits. This is true all the time, but is perhaps never more apparent then when you try to run after a generous helping of hummus or one too many beers. Even without going to extremes, it's important to note that making poor food choices means that you'll be challenged to perform at peak fitness, from how you feel all the way down to the cellular level.



What Are "Poor" Food Choices?

Let's be clear that I am talking macro level stuff here, and the vast majority of endurance athletes don't require insanely detailed portion sizes or regimented eating times. 90% of the time, you know when you are making a poor food choice. You ask for a second soda at dinner; you have that late night serving of ice cream right out of the container instead of a bowl; you eat 3-4 heaping bowls of cereal every morning (sometimes at night) as a meal; your only servings of fruit come from juices and flavored energy bars. Here are some of the bigger traps that endurance athletes fall into:

Over-Eating During & After Exercise: Most athletes grossly over-estimate how many calories they can eat after exercising. Studies have shown that some active groups, admittedly gym goers, will actually take in more total calories on a workout day than a non-workout day. You can solve this by closely monitoring the work you do; most exercise devices these days give a reasonably accurate calories burned number; match any additional calories you might take in on a workout day to that number and you'll at least stay the same weight!

Food As Reward: Similar to the over-eating dilemma, some athletes position themselves for nutritional self-destruction by using food as the reward for completing exercise. Perhaps a long run or brick session earns you a dinner "hall pass." Maybe you are more likely to eat junk food after a quality workout than otherwise. While this isn't so bad in and of itself, it's only one step removed from restricting food during workouts as a complementary strategy: fast now, reward later. This is an insanely bad idea, so please be careful!

Chronically Dehydrated: The chronic endurance athlete most likely uses ergogenic aids / stimulants -- such as caffeine -- to stay awake or "focused" during their non-training hours. Only pro athletes have the ability to sleep off the training of an epic day, the rest of us are left to suffer and make do. Increased exercise requires increased 24-hour hydration, and replacing drinks with coffee, soda, or other juices is not adequate. In fact, many of these aids actually have diuretic affects. Remember that a chronically dehydrated state not only affects your ability to exercise, but also to digest. Not to mention that your brain often misinterprets the thirst signal for food...so always try a glass of water first if you think you "shouldn't" be hungry!

Trying To Fix Food During Peak Exercise: I don't know whether it's because we like to do difficult things or because we don't know better, but I am amazed by the number of athletes who begin to focus on their diet and eating habits only after the miles have started to pile up. Just when your body needs increased calories and the right foods, your brain decides to start tinkering with everything from fuel sources to recovery supplements...or worse yet, actual dieting. Do yourself a favor and get the nutrition stuff dialed in when training hours are low and there is minimal pressure for performance.

Here are some basic guidelines to help you manage your nutrition, in no particular order. Try them all; your personal mileage may vary.

Avoid White, Processed Carbs as well as Most Dairy

Cutting out these carbohydrates can have a significant impact on the quality of your daily diet: bread, pasta, rice, cereal, potatoes, etc. The only time I consider this type of food is either just before or just after a workout. By workout I mean exercise of 45 minutes or more in duration; with longer and/or harder efforts requiring more calories to for recovery, although not all of them should be from carbs (see below). Dropping dairy is a bit edgier, I know, but understanding that dairy has high calories per serving of nutrients has driven me to find similar consistent sources of vitamin D and calcium elsewhere. Milk might not have a high glycemic load, but I find it doesn't satiate me. Dropping cheese wasn't a problem, but I miss my yogurt. One of my "treats" is a cup of organic plain yogurt with a scoop of vanilla whey protein stirred in.

Eat Sensible Amounts of Good Food, aka Roughage Isn't The Answer

I like to eat a lot of food, and it's predominantly a behavioral issue -- I like to take lots of food and spend time eating it...frequently. Changing what you eat, and eating tons of low-calorie foods, taking supplements or even eating lots of "good" foods isn't the answer. Ideally you will give your body what it needs so it doesn't need lots of food. Identify good sources of lean protein and built them into effective, easy-for-you-to-prepare quality meals that are filling because of the content and not because you had three pounds of romaine lettuce.

Make Recovery Into A Meal

Partly to save time and partly to get the protein my muscles need after a tough workout, I have been making a recovery shake (1 cup Almond Milk, 1 banana, 1 scoop Whey Protein). To make the impact of the shake greater, I add ice (6 cubes) and almost another cup of water. This gets my body what it needs after a tough workout, helps to hydrate me and fills me up pretty quickly. I am only doing one workout session a day right now in the OutSeason, so the rest of my day is spent eating as well as I can.

Define Eating Times & Develop Portion Control

The concept of grazing has always been a challenge for me...I just like to eat and I have a sweet tooth. But the incredible results from making these two basic changes have really transformed how I approach eating.



The first part is as simple as it is tough: No Food After 7pm. I don't watch TV, but I do spend a lot of time working at night. Snacking was part thinking crutch, part staying awake for these marathon sessions of work. Without thinking, I could easily plow through a ton of high calorie food and just before bed! Now I eat a really solid dinner and wrap up all eating by 7pm. If I am really hurting I might have a glass of wine or a diet coke, but that's it. The first few days were tough but now it's just what I do.

The second part, portion control, is also critical. Even good food can add up to have a high metabolic cost if you eat unlimited amounts of it. If you have a self-diagnosed portion problem (think: you like to eat ice cream out of the container, not a bowl), this should be your top priority. Put all snacks in small Tupperware containers; serve dinner/full meals on a salad plate. Many times we want to keep eating when we don't need to; our brain hasn't gotten the "full" message from the stomach and sometimes just having some water and waiting a few minutes will do the trick.

Tricks, Tweaks and an Eating Holiday

I am no angel with what I do eat, consuming too much coffee and chewing enough gum to power a small generator. Here are the things that help me when my brain wants to eat but my body doesn't need to.

Hunger Testing Protocol: Two glasses of water. If you think you might be hungry, try two 8-oz glasses of water and wait five minutes. If you are still hungry, then consider a small healthy snack.

Behavioral Hunger Issue / Oral Fixation: I use chewing gum and/or hard candy to keep my mouth busy when I am not eating. I am not starving myself, but I know very well when I do or don't need to eat. These little treats get me my sweet fix without compromising my diet goals.

One Binge Meal A Week: On this day you can eat anything you want. Yes, anything. First it's good for your body to have nutritional variety (even the bad kind), and mentally this makes "staying good" with your food that much easier. Besides, if you are anything like me, lean you will be excited to eat badly but will quickly tire of just pounding food. And you can't do that much

Recovery

We don't get stronger from exercising; we get stronger after we have recovered from exercise. Think about it...the second you put down those dumbbells after curling your biceps to exhaustion, you aren't stronger. Your arms feel like jello! But after a day or two off, the next time you hit the weights, you are ready to move up. While swimming, biking and running might not seem like it, they are essentially different versions of that same weight room experience. Not allowing your body to recover means you are really reducing the effectiveness of all the hard work you are doing. Your best possible program will balance work with recovery.

Planning to Fail...Unspectacularly

Your training program is designed to push your body. If it works properly, you will, at some point during your season, hit a wall. You will fail in a workout, or several. You will feel the mojo is gone and will eventually come around to understanding that you'll need to change the training program. Don't let this get you down...if it's hard, then your plan is working! We want to avoid having a chronically hard program, but learning where your personal line in the sand exists is a powerful tool.

Learning To Listen

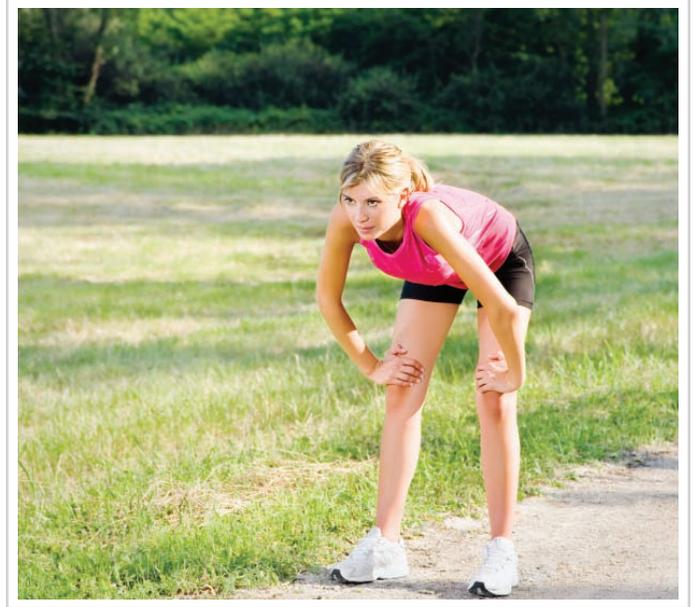
Of course, running into a brick wall is easy. Learning what you can do to avoid it, and continue training, that's the tricky part. Take really good notes on what your personal cues are for overdoing it. Could be that you are falling asleep during the day. Or getting snappy with your co-workers. Or that you just don't want to work out. Whatever it is, learn the signs so you can take early action. This is one of those cases where the cagey veterans have a serious advantage over most other athletes...they've got years of experience!

The RAP Sheet

The best thing to do is to develop a Recovery Action Protocol (RAP, or a series of steps you can follow after specific workouts, or on a daily basis, to ensure that you are as close to running on all cylinders as possible. Workouts are easy to execute because you have detailed instructions and guidelines; but the guidance stops as soon as the warm down ends...and your body still needs more attention.

There are many different recovery options, but here are a few to consider:

- Feet Up: I recommend 1' of elevated legs for every mile run, but also do this after bigger bike workouts. Sometimes I also include compression socks depending on the day.
- Recovery Shake: Whether you use a special mix or just chocolate milk, your body needs some serious TLC (and some protein!) after a hard workout.
- Get Clean & Dry: After super hard workouts, a quick rinse and change of clothes can make you feel like a million bucks.
- Get Your Gear Clean: Nothing is worse than going to ride or run and discovering your clothes are still in the hamper or your bike still has a flat tire. Things don't get done on their own. Remember that preparation for your next workout begins right after your last workout ends!
- Commit to eight hours of sleep a night in season. Sleep is the great healer...don't neglect it!



Your Tasks:

#1 -- Clean Out Your Fridge and Pantry

One of the easiest ways to stop eating less-than-ideal foods is to simply not have it around you. If it ain't there, you can't eat it! So take a nice big garbage bag and start with the pantry, then the fridge, then finally the freezer (yes, nothing is sacred!). Pull out all the stuff that doesn't jive with the guidelines above and get rid of it. Then head out to the supermarket and load up on fruit, vegetables, nuts and lean meats. A totally clean slate, plus you get to go "out" on all the binge days to have some serious fun (banana split anyone?).

#2 -- Build Your Personal R.A.P. Sheet

Based on your training volume and personal schedule, outline some simple steps you can follow to stay on top of your game. Please use the bullets above and feel free to include your own best practices!

Conclusion

Learning to live "lean" and recovered is as much habit and repetition as it is hard work. Properly managing your food intake is definitely not easy, but the incentives are high. Faster speeds and better workouts all lead to better race day performances -- and the best part is this stuff doesn't cost a ton of money. Now that's incentive!

"The factory of the future will have only two employees, a man and a dog. The man will be there to feed the dog. The dog will be there to keep the man from touching the equipment."

-- Warren G. Bennis

5: Well-Organized External Commitments

Adding an endurance sport to your list of "to do" items is no simple task. Suddenly everything you do is placed under a microscope as you try to find extra time to exercise and spend previously productive hours recovering from big workouts. It's no secret that the best age-group athletes among us are very organized, very focused, or both!

We've already discussed how realizing our athletic potential in any endurance sport is a long-term, sometimes life-long endeavor. Done properly, this type of focus will complement the other areas of your life building a positive cycle of influence.



Our goal in this section to simplify our commitments and constructively delegate (or outsource) the unimportant tasks. Both steps will allow us to focus on the things that really matter (including your training). Know that the real challenge is not in identifying the work. It's in letting that work go by either passing responsibility on to someone else or by simply letting something that's not "mission critical" drop.

The Personal Sphere

We'll start here as this is the easier space in which to affect change. Setting things up to run automatically in your personal life might seem strange, but remember that the world around us is a system: every task you can push out of your personal circle, that's more time you have to invest elsewhere.

Put Your Life Online: We spend so much time surfing and playing online that it's easy to miss some of the real benefits of the Internet. Take a break from Facebook to set up online bill pay for your accounts, sync your bank and checking to a personal accounting website. Instead of surfing the news all day long, set up a feed reader and tune in once daily for the latest.

Batch Irregular Tasks: Whether it's checking mail or doing laundry, there are somethings that simply don't need to be done daily...even if you do them that way now. Take a good look at what elements of your life you can let pile up and then get done in one fell swoop.

Outsource the Unimportant: There are many things you do on a daily/weekly/monthly basis that you personally don't need to do. These things range from dry cleaning to cleaning your house to lawn care to renting and returning movies. You could go as far as to say you don't need to be cooking your own meals and instead search for a personal chef. The sky is really the limit here; it's more a function of finding trusted people to take over these responsibilities and ensuring they happen on schedule.

Schedule "Focus" Periods: Build periods of time into your routine where you can accomplish or handle important home related tasks. Something always needs to be done, whether it's a chore, an errand, a task or the bills. Whatever it is, make sure you have a weekly slot available to handle all these random items.

The Professional Sphere

It is decidedly harder to implement changes here, as much of our work is run by commitments to other people or institutions. That said, even incremental changes can have a massive affect if properly implemented. Some of the suggestions outlined below will not be feasible, and that's okay. Do what you can, or create your own personal flavor to fit your current situation.

Before we dig in, just a quick note on something I call the "rule of reciprocity." This rule states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite workplace reaction. Send an email -- get an email (or many). Call a meeting -- get invited to more. Take on extra work instead of delegating -- you'll get more work. If you want to stop something from happening in the workplace, your actions are more effective than words...simply start working by example; everything else will begin to fall into place!



Avoid Meetings: Some folks literally can spend entire days in meetings, based on their job. Yet the vast majority of meetings are ineffective time sucks that drain productivity and mojo. Do your best to avoid meetings and certainly don't call any of your own unless absolutely necessary.

Seize Control of Email: Stop checking email like a gerbil on crack. Yes, you. You do it, and you know you do. Checking email frequently is one of the biggest work time sucks in all of history (aside from photocopier antics). More importantly, email means you are on the hook managing other people's requests, input and advice...which means less time for the stuff that matters to you. Put your email on a schedule, checking it only 2 or 3 times a day and that's it. There rest of the time you can...

Focus on Work and/or Creating: Gasp! Do work AT work? Are you kidding? Seriously, thanks to technology, work is simply a part of how most people live their lives in the 21st century...and it ain't right. Take control of your job by blocking out time to actually work on the things that matter most to you and your boss / division / department. Start crushing work and your co-workers will quickly forgive your eccentric email and meeting habits.

Everyone has their own tolerance and ability to reshuffle their lives. Know that incredible time gains are possible, but you have to invest yourself in making them possible. Any change likely will involve others, be it your boss or your spouse, and as such will not happen automagically. Do things right and you could have more time to train, be a more effective worker and spend more quality time with the people who matter.

Your Tasks:

- Identify three weekly tasks that you can "batch" and accomplish in one fell swoop.
- Set up your grocery shopping online; consider setting up auto bill pay for as many of your recurring payments as possible.
- Consider connecting to an online personal finance site like [Mint.com](https://www.mint.com) to aggregate and manage all your money in one place.

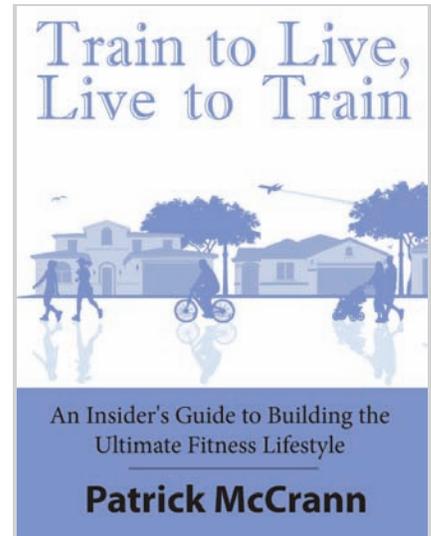
6: Continued Exploration, Further Reading & Additional Links

For further reading and information on the topics contained in this ebook, please order a copy of my book, [Train to Live, Live to Train: An Insider's Guide to Building the Ultimate Fitness Lifestyle](#). It contains many more tips about building an integrated endurance lifestyle, including managing work/home life, optimal training schedules, automation & outsourcing and more.

Below is a list of other resources you might find useful in your quest to build a Fit Life.

Good luck!

Patrick McCrann



[PatrickJohnMcCrann.com](#) -- This is my blog where I explore the concept of a Fit Life on a regular basis. Follow the ups and downs and help guide the online discussion here.

Section 1:

- * [Annual Planning Exercise](#)
- * [Big Training Weeks](#)
- * [Seven Habits of Highly Effective People](#) (Stephen Covey)

Section 2:

- * Go Ultra with this list of many events, found via Google: <http://www.angelfire.com/electronic/ultramentor/eventlinks.html>
- * Top Ten Endurance Races (Forbes): http://www.forbes.com/2005/03/30/cx_ns_0330feat_ls.html
- * Go Local: Keep it simple and look for a local running race on Cool Running: <http://coolrunning.com/engine/1/index.shtml>

Section 3:

- * [Fixed Schedule Productivity: The Blog of Cal Newport](#) (just a good one to read)
- * [Consistency Decoded: A Basic Week](#) (an oldie but a goodie)

Section 4:

- * Mark's Daily Apple: <http://www.marksdailyapple.com>
- * Fitness Spotlight: <http://www.fitnessspotlight.com/>
- * Paleolithic Nutrition: <http://www.paleonu.com>

Section 5:

- * [RescueTime](#) - A web-based tool for tracking and reporting on your computer usage. Insanely insightful.
- * [43folders](#) - A life-hacking and time management site run by Merlin Mann.
- * [Mint.com](#) - A fantastic personal finance management tool.