

Over 50 – Lean vs Mass

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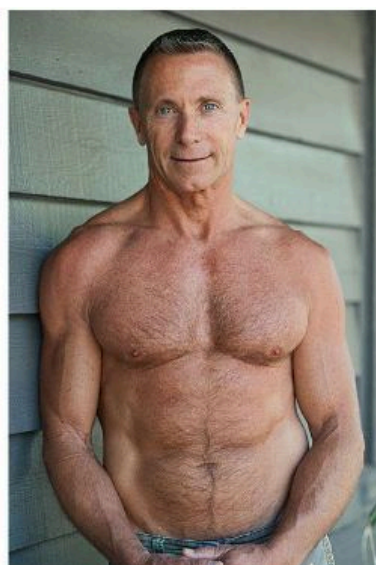
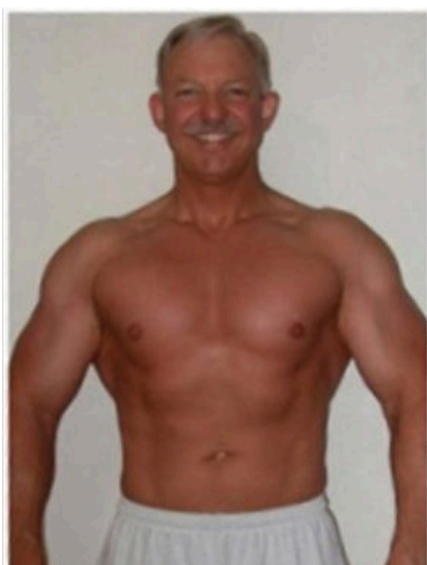
LEAN V'S MASS – WHY & HOW?

This article looks at two broad aspects of training, one the concept of gaining muscle mass and second is trying to get lean (lowering body fat levels).

The typical approach to muscle mass building is to overdose on protein and train your backside off!! The gym that I attend is full of 20+ year olds (mainly men) who have put on significant muscle mass but have equally increased their body fat levels so that they are big but soft looking.

This is not the approach I would recommend when 50+ (not any age actually!!). The reasons for this view will become obvious throughout this article.

An example of 50+ physiques below highlights the guy on the left with quite a bit of mass but is still overweight compared to the guy on the right who is smaller but also much leaner making him look in better shape (IMO).



If you have been following my blogs – you may have read my 50+ articles on [sarcopenia \(muscle loss with aging\)](#) and [hormonal status](#) making it tough to put on any discernible muscle without a massive effort of training, nutrition, recovery protocols, etc (this sort of commitment is largely out of reach of 99% of the population).

What I have been trying to convince my older clients is that carrying lots of muscle shouldn't be the goal, getting a well toned/balanced musculature combined with a low body fat level – that is where the true "Fountain of Youth" elixir is at!!

Assume you believe me that this is the approach you would like to take, then there are just two aspects you need to focus on:

1. Train as hard as you can in the gym (but don't get stressed about "bulking up" or taking pre and post protein shakes, etc). This will ensure that your muscles are toned and you are developing all parts of your body (amazing how many of these above photos are just from the torso upwards – There is quite a high percentage of even my younger cohort at my gym that look like Roger Ramjet (the older readers of this blog will understand that reference!!).

I strongly recommend a total body workout – not just upper body/arms!!

2. Nutrition – Unfortunately there is a lot of misinformation published daily on the internet and of all topics, this one is probably the most confusing to understand – My philosophy is as follows:

At the most basic level – to lose weight:

CONSUMPTION < EXPENDITURE

If you consume 2000Kcal and you burn 2100Kcal per day – you will lose weight. Of course if you reverse this equation:

CONSUMPTION > EXPENDITURE

You will gain weight.

I know there are all sorts of ways you can manipulate this equation (Paleo, Caveman diets, etc) but take this as a general rule.

The insidious thing about weight gain is that it very cleverly sneaks up on everyone – No one gets fat overnight, the process can take many years to decades and then crazily we try to reverse what we have adapted to over years (weight gain) in a matter of weeks or months and we wonder why we can't maintain this weight loss (I wrote about this in an article about [Set Weight](#)).

There are libraries full of books on how to lose weight – and for a time almost all diets will lead to weight loss. This article covers the key advice I give to my clients – I hope you find it useful?

It is a fallacy that you lose weight in the gym (or cardio room, etc). You never burn that many calories making this an effective strategy. The gym/training is for muscle tone and cardiovascular fitness, the nutritional change is for weight loss.

To lose weight, you just need to be willing to under-eat on a regular basis to change your calorie equation from one of excess to deficit.

LEAST PAINFUL WAY TO LOSE BODY FAT:

The feeling of hunger is what results in us regularly overeating – if there was a way of being able to under eat and not feel hungry then we could regularly lose weight and not binge as much.

There is an excellent method that has worked with many people whom have tried this nutritional approach.

A form of Intermittent Fasting:

It doesn't matter if you train in the morning or the evening – it is during the night (when you are asleep) that much of your body regeneration and rebuilding takes place.

When you are asleep at night the body starts the rebuilding/repair process and this process needs significant energy/calories to conduct this activity. If you have eaten a full meal before you go to sleep (typically dinner) then the body is pretty efficient at releasing the required calories from the dinner the night before to provide all the energy required to complete the repair work – so effectively none of the energy comes from your fat stores.

BUT, if you go to bed hungry (1/2 meal, no meal if you can do it) – then the body still wants/needs to go through the repair process and will have to find the energy from somewhere else – this will then be provided in the form of fat mobilisation (fat mobilisation works best when in a rested state – so another reason why night time is a great time for weight loss).

The benefit is that there is limited/no hunger issues because you are asleep (I have only had a couple of clients who have woken up famished and hit the fridge!!), you will have all the energy you need from your fat stores that are easily accessed when you are sleeping and when you wake in the morning if you are hungry then you can have a great breakfast which is a good time to have a full meal.

BEST OF ALL, YOU WAKE UP WEIGHING LESS AND WITH LOWER BODY FAT LEVELS!!!

I don't suggest you do this every night of the week – I have suggested a modification of 2-3 days of light or no dinner in the evening and when done correctly, clients can lose up to 0.5kg/week.

Once they have gotten to the weight (leanness) that they desire, they just decrease the number of low dinner days and their body plateaus out. Making it easy to regulate bodyfat/bodyweight levels over time.

MEALS PER DAY:

Eat 6-8 times per day and lose weight!!! This is another furphy that is strongly promoted by many Instagram fitness influencers worldwide – Unless all you do is train and try to look good for your daily/weekly photo shoot – this type of eating plan will likely result in you putting weight on (and not the good sort of weight!).

I can't tell you the number of clients I have worked with who stated their number one goal was to lose weight and when I asked them about their eating habits, they say they eat/snack multiple times per day (saw some Youtube clip highlighting this) without the concurrent lifestyle changes to offset this amount of calorie input.

Also if you have read any information on the many forms of Intermittent Fasting, you will understand that it is important for your gut health and blood sugar levels (Insulin) to have periods of no food passing through your digestive tract.

The first thing I tell all my clients is to go back to 3-meals per day (nothing in between). This tip alone has lead to great losses in weight without having to do anything extreme.

FAT LOSS:

Another error most clients make when I first speak to them is how much "weight" they think they should lose to look good (whatever their view on good is).

What most clients don't realise is that fat isn't just subcutaneous, ½ or more of your total fat storage is deep within the muscles & around the viscera (organs) of your body. It can be quite demotivating to believe *"If I could lose 5kg I would be in great shape"* to lose that weight and still seem to be holding too much fat around your stomach and back region for example.

When you start to lose body fat you will lose similar amounts of external fat to internal fat so when you lose that "5kg" that you think is all you need to start looking good – in reality you might have only lost 2.5kg of external (under the skin) fat and 2.5kg of internal fat so you actually don't look as lean as you might have thought. Some of this weight loss may also be muscle, that is a discussion for another time.

This is tough on the motivation, but you need to consider that you may need to lose twice as much weight/fat as you initially thought to start looking like how you want!!

An example of how this internal/external fat situation can trick you with your weight loss goals.

These two photos below illustrate this internal/external fat loss issue. The photo on the left is a client at 87.0kg and the one on the right at 80.0kg.



There is a 7kg different in this client's weight but nowhere near the amount of external fat loss that they expected from losing 7kg!!

Realistically this client needs to lose another ~5-7kg to be as lean as they would like to be.

SUMMARY:

- If over 50 yrs of age – strive for good muscle tone and leanness over mass.
- At the most basic level, as long as calorie consumption is less than calorie expenditure, you will lose weight.
- Get back to three meals a day and skip all these "snacks" as they are just adding calories to your daily intake which in turn is creating a perfect environment for fat gain.
- Try going to bed hungry 2-3 times per week – a great way to start losing weight/fat (whilst you are asleep!).