

EVERY RECIPE IN THIS BOOK IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU
BUILD MUSCLE AND LOSE FAT.

FEED YOUR MUSCLES

When it comes to seeing results from your workouts, there's nothing more important than your diet. You can pound the treadmill and lift weights from now to eternity and, at best, all that effort will contribute to only a fraction of the results you'll see. The rest comes from what you eat. Muscle fibers can't grow unless they're first broken down, so in essence, you lift weights to literally tear apart your muscles. To build them back up, you need nutrients. And the hows, whats, and whens of eating are crucial to making the sum of those two parts add up to 100 percent.

Believe me, maintaining a good clean diet—lean protein, nutritious fruits and vegetables, less sugary and salty junk food—is what separates the contenders from the pretenders. And that's what *Muscle Chow* is designed to do. Follow the plan, and this book will help you build the best body you can possibly achieve. It's that simple. When I eat the Muscle Chow way, I feel my best. I feel strong in and out of the gym. My mood is enhanced, which helps set the stage for killer workouts. I know I'm fueling my body well. Not only am I eating a diet that's designed to maximize my muscle-building potential, but I'm also keeping my body healthy. Study after study shows that diet plays a direct role in preventing heart disease, cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's—you name it. Eating for muscle gain and for general good health don't have to be mutually exclusive. Muscle Chow gives you both.

If you were to ask any bodybuilder what the biggest key to his or her success might be, there's no doubt in my mind that the answer would be "diet." Working out is the easy part. Eating clean on a consistent basis is the tough part. That's because it takes discipline, and that's where *Muscle Chow* comes in.

WHAT MAKES MUSCLE CHOW DIFFERENT?

Let's look at the meaning of the word *diet*. It's defined as the average consumption of foods a person eats throughout life. Simply put, a diet should adapt to each individual and flow in an organic *balance* that's aligned with your environment and goals. If not, it doesn't feel right, and therefore will always seem like an uphill battle. And that's no way to eat. Too many diets exist in a vacuum; they assume conditions will always be perfect for you to eat one way forever, which is very unrealistic. They're all about the goal—the moment you arrive at the beach, the wedding, the reunion—but they never consider what happens after you reach the goal. The Muscle Chow plan is flexible; it's built around life's ups and downs to help create a balanced atmosphere for you and your individual goals.

Think of a swinging pendulum—the farther it swings in one direction, the farther it has to swing in the opposite direction. Training at your highest intensity without any kind of a break will ultimately lead to burnout and overtraining. The result can be anything from suffering an injury to putting your body in a catabolic state where your muscles stop growing. You begin going through the motions (or stop training altogether), and then you're faced with a setback. The same holds true for diet. If your eating is too restrictive for too long a period of time, you'll inevitably fall off the wagon and stop eating right—maybe even revert back to junk food. That's when fat starts accumulating, and again you're faced with a setback. Balance is what makes the Muscle Chow diet so successful, because you never allow that pendulum to swing so far in one direction that it comes back to knock you off your feet.

And Muscle Chow is more than simply turning you into a slab of lean beef. Sure, looking good is important. But so is feeling good. After all, what's the point of building a perfect body if you keel over from a heart attack at age 55? In addition to being lean, clean, muscle-building food, Muscle Chow is also healthy chow—full of quality lean proteins, the right fats and carbohydrates, plus the vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants you need to keep every system in your body primed.

THE KEYS TO A MUSCLE CHOW DIET

Do you sit down to every meal with a calculator in hand? No? Me neither. Any diet that requires more than basic counting skills is a diet that is way too complicated and will ultimately fail. Nutrition is a science, but it shouldn't have to be an agonizingly precise one. I've found that it's best to approach your diet with a relaxed attitude and not get bogged down by exact measurements of nutritional content. Make protein the starting point for each meal and snack—then surround it with a supporting cast of carbs and fat—it's that simple.

The following eight easy-to-remember strategies help me eat clean and meet those average percentages, without a lot of number crunching. They'll help you too. Think about it: If you increase your protein intake, something else has to decrease to compensate. (There's that balance principle again.) So if you trade a serving of carbs for a serving of protein, you've just doubled your protein intake while cutting your carbs by 50 percent. No calculator needed.

These are the strategies I use to help keep my diet in line.

1. EAT ENOUGH FOOD

Calories are your body's basic unit of energy. Everything your body does, from breathing to squeezing out that last rep, requires energy.

Here's a basic, yet effective way to determine your rough daily average caloric needs. I use this method myself and find that it's pretty darn accurate. Just multiply your body weight by 15. The total reflects the average caloric needs of an active male doing three or four cardio sessions weekly for 20 to 30 minutes each, and intense resistance training four or five days a week. So, to do the math: A 180-pound guy would need roughly 2,700 calories a day to maintain his body's energy balance.

Now, let's say you're not content to simply maintain your mass. If you want to build more muscle, you have to eat more. That can be hard to comprehend in a world where the evening news blares dire obesity warnings. But if you're training hard, like I know you are, you have to consume enough energy to support the muscle mass you're building. You have to add 3,500 calories to your weekly diet in order to gain a pound of muscle. Divide those calories over a week, and you need to add about 500 calories each day. (The reverse holds true as well: If you're trying to lose weight, you have to shave 3,500 calories out of your diet in order to drop a pound.)

That said, I've never been one to count every single calorie that I consume throughout the day. Sure, I have a ballpark idea, but realize that you're bound to consume more calories one day and fewer another. Remember that it's just as important to pay attention to the food choices you're making. If you expect to achieve strides in health and wellness, you've got to look at the integrity of the calories you're consuming. Empty carbs like white breads, cookies, fruit juices, and chips can't come close to the nutritional benefits of whole foods like vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Which do you think will get you closer to your ultimate goal: chowing 600 calories of potato chips or 600 calories of broccoli? The way you choose to distribute those calories makes all the difference in the world to how your body will look and feel. By eating the Muscle Chow way, you can easily manage your weight to achieve the results you're looking for. Which brings us to the next strategy...

2. INCREASE YOUR PROTEIN INTAKE

If you're aiming to build muscle, you need more protein than the average couch potato. The people who know—such as the U.S. Olympic Committee and the American Dietetic Association—recommend 1.5 to 2.0 grams of protein per 2 pounds of body weight daily for athletes. That's more than double the U.S. government's recommended daily intake of 0.8 gram.

The reason? Exercise causes muscle damage. With every bicep curl you do, you're causing tiny tears in your muscle fibers. Protein helps repair those tears by providing the amino acids your body needs to form new cells—a process called protein synthesis. Amino acids repair the tears and fortify the fibers against future damage. The result: bigger muscles.

So to fuel the muscle-building process, you need plenty of protein. And not just immediately after your workout. One meal isn't enough to supply all the amino acids you need. Researchers from the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston have found that your body is primed for protein synthesis for up to two days after exercise. Protein—at breakfast, lunch, dinner, and in between—helps keep you in an anabolic state, during which your body creates more muscle protein than it breaks down. When your body can't keep up with the protein breakdown and repair cycle, you're in a catabolic state—not a good place to be if you're looking to create your best body.

As with calories, your need for protein increases as you build muscle mass, and because muscle tissues are metabolically active, things are constantly happening in

SHAKE THINGS UP

Can you get all the protein you need from food? Well, yes, I guess you could, but you'd probably be doing grocery store runs three times a day. This is where protein shakes come in handy—they're a fast, simple way to increase both your protein intake and your daily calories.

Protein mixes come in a seemingly endless array, but here's all you need to know: Choose a whey protein, casein protein, or a combination of both. In a Baylor University protein-supplement study, the combination of whey and casein protein promoted the greatest increases in fat-free mass after 10 weeks of heavy resistance training.

Whey, the liquid skimmed off during the cheese-making process, is the most readily absorbed protein source you can feed your body. It's quickly digested, which means it delivers amino acids to your muscles faster. It's particularly high in leucine, one of the branched-chain amino acids that helps you build bigger muscles. Whey also helps keep you feeling satisfied by releasing gut peptides that promote satiety. When University of Toronto scientists presented 22 men with an all-you-can-eat pizza buffet, the guys who had consumed a whey protein shake 2 hours earlier ate less of the pizza. You may feel like you could eat a horse after an intense gym session, but downing a whey shake will keep you clear of the stables.

Casein, another milk by-product, is also a high-quality protein, although it delivers amino acids more slowly. According to a study in the journal *Human Nutrition and Metabolism*, protein synthesis is three times greater with casein than with soy-based protein supplements. Soy is converted far more readily into urea, a waste product, and is eliminated during protein synthesis.

them. Twitch your leg, walk across the room, or turn a page of this book, and you've mobilized muscle tissues. Bench-press 225 pounds, and you've mobilized even more. Fat cells, on the other hand, just sit around your body waiting to be called up for duty in the event of a long stretch without food. As muscle grows and begins to displace fat cells, you need more protein to sustain it. For every pound of muscle added, you can burn between 50 and 75 extra calories a day—and that's a very good thing. In essence, as you build muscle, you're also creating a fat-burning machine!

Protein comes in more than one form. Here's some basic nutrition: There are 22 total amino acids, divided into essential (meaning they can only be obtained from diet), conditionally essential (meaning that your body can't synthesize them under certain conditions and that they too are best supplied by diet), and nonessential (meaning that your body can synthesize them without help from diet). Complete proteins are called complete because they contain all eight of the essential amino acids your body needs to repair cells. They're found in all animal products—red meat, poultry, dairy, and eggs.

Branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs) are a subcategory of essential amino acids, so named for their chemical structure. Fully a third of the amino acids found in your muscles are one of the three BCAAs: leucine, isoleucine, and valine. Intense training can deplete these, creating a demand for replenishment. Today, pure BCAAs are widely available in supplemental form (capsules, tablets, and powders). You can also find them in some postworkout recovery drinks, and most protein powders boast added BCAAs. The more readily available BCAAs are to your muscles during their repair phase, the more effectively protein is synthesized into those ripped muscle fibers.

Lean proteins like shellfish and turkey also provide B vitamins—thiamin, riboflavin, folate, and vitamins B6 and B12—that are especially important to the Muscle Chow diet. Your body needs B vitamins to convert proteins and sugars into energy, and to produce and repair cells. According to research from Oregon State University, athletes with low B vitamin levels are less able to repair and build muscle.

3. EAT HEALTHY FATS

When you're trying to gain muscle, fat can help. First of all, fat is the richest source of calories in the diet. One gram of fat contains 9 calories, versus 4 calories from a gram of either protein or carbs. Secondly, without enough fat, your body can't effectively produce testosterone, one of the key hormones for muscle growth. Go too low, and the way you look will be the least of your problems. Low testosterone levels can affect your sex drive, energy, vitality, mental focus, and overall sense of well-being.

But the primary benefit of fat is to your overall health. Unless you've been living under a rock for the past 20 years, you know that saturated fat—the kind you find in deep-fat fryers and animal meats (specifically fatty red meat)—has been linked to heart disease, strokes, and obesity. A particular subcategory of saturated fat—trans fat—has made headlines in recent years because it's even worse for your health. Trans fats are made by injecting vegetable oils with hydrogen to make them solid at room temperature, giving the junk foods they're found in life spans that would make a 500-year-old sequoia tree envious. On a calorie-for-calorie basis, trans fats increase heart disease risk more than any other nutrient (and I use the word *nutrient* only as a technical term—there's nothing nutritious about trans fats). Researchers have found that dietary levels of trans fats as low as 1 percent can raise the risk of heart disease by 23 percent. What's more, trans fats have also been shown to worsen arterial inflammation, one of the major risk factors for cardiovascular disease.

Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats have the opposite effect on your health: They boost your body's production of HDL, the "good" cholesterol, while lowering the bad stuff, LDL. They also help extinguish inflammation and keep your cell membranes and arteries supple. This is important for cellular communication, improved insulin sensitivity, and circulation. Avocados, most nuts, olives, olive oil, canola oil, and peanut oil are all good sources of monounsaturated fat. Cold-water fish, like salmon especially, and safflower, corn, and soybean oils are good sources of polyunsaturated fat.

Managing your dietary fat is an excellent example of how the well-balanced Muscle Chow approach works. If you choose lean sources of protein—poultry, fish, and lean beef—instead of cheeseburgers, sausages, and super-sized T-bones—you automatically cut some of the unhealthy fats out of your diet. Then, if you get rid of the junk carbs—ditch the baked goods and fried stuff and add in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains—you've removed even more. In the end, you'll create a shift from unhealthy fats to healthy fats, without even trying.

4. CHOOSE GOOD CARBS

If calories are the basic unit of energy, carbohydrates are the power lines that deliver fuel to your muscles. When you eat a carb—whether it's something starchy, like a potato; something sugary, like a piece of fruit; or something full of fiber, like whole grain bread—your body breaks it down into its elemental form: glucose, a type of sugar. Your pancreas produces a hormone called insulin to help carry glucose to cells throughout your body. The glucose is then converted to glycogen and stored in your muscles and liver. But if your muscles are full, excess glucose can be converted and stored as another energy source that's much harder to get rid of: fat. What's more, while the liver's storage capacity for glycogen is approximately 100 grams of carbs, your muscles hold approximately 400. But here's the kicker—there's no capacity limit for fat. In other words, if you need more storage space, your body just creates more fat cells. This is why managing your carb intake is smart nutrition. I'm not saying you need to go on a super low-carb diet; just be mindful of the macronutrient balance we spoke about earlier when you grab something to eat.

The type of carbs you eat affects the speed with which your body turns them into glucose. If you eat a starchy or sugary carb, your body turns it into glucose faster, supplying quick energy. Chow down a whole grain or something with a lot of fiber, and the glucose-conversion process slows down, supplying sustained energy.

CAN THE SOFT DRINK HABIT

Sodas have an average of 40 grams of sugar per 12-ounce can. That's pure glucose. And it comes with no redeeming vitamins. Diet soda is sweetened with artificial substances that are surrounded by controversy. All soda contains phosphates that leach essential nutrients like calcium from your body. If you're a soda drinker, you're probably saying you just can't give it up. But if you really want to, you can do it. Need a little help? Chew, or drink, on this: German scientists found that people who drank ice water increased their metabolic rate by 30 percent for up to an hour and a half. So grab an ice-cold one—a bottle of water, that is.

This is where the glycemic index (GI) comes in. Developed by Australian researchers, the glycemic index measures the rate of absorption that a certain carbohydrate has in the body, which in turn influences the release of insulin. The glycemic index ranks food based on a scale from 0 to 100; the higher a food rates on the index, the more it causes blood sugar—and, in turn, insulin—to rise. Doughy white bread is the easiest example to illustrate the point because it scores more than 70 on the glycemic index. White bread is made with just bleached flour and water. This means your system converts it into glucose very quickly. And if your glycogen stores are topped off, then the carb is converted to fat. Now, if you were to trade that plain white bread for a piece of grainy whole wheat bread—you know, the kind with nuts and seeds crusted all over the top—the conversion process would slow down, meaning that wheat bread rates lower on the glycemic index. Proteins and fats added to a carbohydrate-rich meal also help slow this conversion process, which is why the Muscle Chow diet adheres to a balance between these macronutrients.

Aside from being transformed into body fat, an overabundance of fast-converting carbs can also wear down your endocrine system. Each time your glucose levels rise, your pancreas has to pump out insulin to restore the balance. After years of overwork, you can become insulin resistant. Or even worse, your pancreas eventually goes on strike and that's when your doctor might hand you a diagnosis for type-2 diabetes—no matter how lean or cut you are.

So you should avoid high-GI carbs like the plague, right? Not necessarily. Here's the trouble with relying exclusively on GI. First of all, it's not intuitive. Until you have it memorized, you have to keep a list handy to know that a pear is low GI while a watermelon is high. Second, sometimes you need starchy or sugary high-GI carbs for energy.

For example, Gatorade ranks nearly at the top of the GI list, with a score of 91 out of 100. But that's the whole point of Gatorade: After a workout, it supplies glycogen-depleted muscles with much-needed energy and restores electrolytes you've sweated away. Third, GI fails to account for the other stuff you eat. Sure, a slice of bread is high GI. But top that slice with peanut butter or flaxseed oil—or any source of fat, protein, or fiber—and you've automatically cut the bread's GI.

Finally, I've met too many guys who miss out on the benefits of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains because they've been brainwashed against them. That watermelon you've been avoiding because of its high GI score (72) contains a nutrient called lycopene—nearly 30 percent of the amount that current research suggests helps to prevent prostate cancer. Plus, the melon acts as a diuretic, ridding you of subcutaneous water (H₂O between your skin and your muscles) and allowing you to look more cut the next day.

Again, I take a balanced approach. The real carbohydrate troublemakers are foods you know you shouldn't be eating much of anyway. Junk carbs—cookies, crackers, chips, pretzels, french fries—have no place in your diet, no matter if you're an Olympic athlete, a bodybuilder, or just a normal guy who's trying to replace his spare tire with a six-pack. These are the kinds of carbs that provide a quick jolt of energy by elevating your blood sugar. Every time you eat them, your pancreas sends out more insulin to help balance the glucose. Over time, the system goes berserk and your body can't handle the seesawing levels.

Avoiding junk carbs isn't rocket science, and it doesn't require much memorization either. If you can't easily trace a food back to its source in nature, don't eat it. Oats grow in fields; Oreos don't. Any healthy diet should make room for good carbs, and you should too.

5. EAT AT LEAST SIX SERVINGS OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES EACH DAY

Unless they're baked into a sugary confection or breaded and fried in lard, fruits and vegetables are not the enemy. Do they contain carbs? Yes. Do you need to obsess about those carbs? No. If you expand your produce horizons beyond french fries and baked Idaho potatoes, you'll automatically help lower your meal's GI and cut out unnecessary fat. Plus, you'll gain a host of health and muscle-building benefits.

Your body is a complex system, and it can't run on protein and carbs alone. You

FORBIDDEN FRUIT

Juices sound like a healthy alternative when you're thirsty. Do yourself a favor, though, and check out the label next time you decide to have a tall glass. You might be surprised at the sugar it contains. The juice has been separated from the fruit's natural pulp, eliminating the fiber that slows your body's absorption of the food's sugar. So you're drinking a sugary liquid that your body quickly converts to glucose, sending your insulin levels through the roof. I'd much prefer that you drink bottled water and enjoy the full spectrum of a fruit's benefits by eating it whole.

need fiber to move food through your system, calcium to help fire the nerve cells that contract your muscles, potassium to help balance fluid levels and relieve muscle cramps, and a variety of antioxidants to help tamp down inflammation in your muscles after a tough workout. Fruits and vegetables contain vital nutrients not available in vitamin supplements. By eating these foods on a daily basis, you reap the benefits of all the naturally occurring nutrients they hold, helping lower your risk of cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and many other diseases.

Fruits and vegetables can also have a direct correlation to your ability to build muscle. Australian researchers found that men who cut their fruit and vegetable intake by just 1 serving for 2 weeks reported feeling they were exerting more effort when exercising. If you don't have enough B vitamins—like the folate found in leafy greens; the niacin found in bananas, peaches, and melon; or the full spectrum of Bs provided by avocados—you may lack energy and perform worse during high-intensity exercise.

Three servings of fruit and 3 servings of vegetables daily aren't that difficult to achieve. A single serving is equal to a medium piece of fruit, ½ cup of berries, 1 cup of raw leafy greens, or ½ cup of other veggies.

In my opinion, the two very best fruits and veggies are apples and broccoli. Apples satisfy your appetite any time of the day because they're high in both soluble and insoluble fiber. Insoluble fiber helps to move bulk through your system, while soluble fiber (pectin) helps to reduce cholesterol levels and slow down digestion. Try having an apple before a meal, like an appetizer (an apple-tizer!), to keep you from chowing too much in a single sitting, or have one as a snack between meals to help control your appetite.

Broccoli is the wonder veggie. Chewing and digesting broccoli consumes more calories than the veggie contains. A single stalk boasts about 3.5 grams of both fiber and

protein, with as little as 6 grams of carbs and 350 milligrams of potassium. Since it's from the cruciferous family, broccoli is high in cancer-fighting indoles. It's also high in calcium, a mineral that helps to break down fats, and vitamin C to aid with recovery from a hard workout.

6. EAT LESS SALT

As a rule of thumb, I rarely add any salt to anything. According to the USDA, we don't need more than 500 milligrams daily. Most people get more than that amount for breakfast! Seriously. A slice of bacon can contain 1,000 milligrams. Read labels and notice the serving sizes—you might be floored by the amount of sodium some of your favorite foods contain. Too much sodium in your diet causes edema (water retention) and can make you look puffy. If that's not enough to make you limit sodium in your diet, consider this: It can also lead to high blood pressure and heart disease.

About 75 percent of the sodium we eat comes from processed food, not from the salt shaker. Frozen foods, canned foods, cured meats like bacon and sausage, fast foods, and sauces are some of the usual suspects. But even healthier foods like cottage cheese can contain high levels. You'll find that whenever possible, the Muscle Chow recipes call for low- or no-sodium ingredients, to help you avoid the excess.

When I do use salt, I use sea salt. Sea salt is obtained by the simple process of concentrating seawater under the sun. Up to 5 percent of sea salt is composed of naturally occurring potassium, calcium, and magnesium, the minerals that are responsible for the salt's mild flavor and good taste. Because sea salt is naturally occurring, your body can readily assimilate its minerals—they're just like the nutrients from food. Table salt, the salt most people use, is mined from inland salt deposits, heated to extremely high temperatures, and refined with chemicals. Potassium iodide or sodium iodide is added to create iodized salt. Dextrose (sugar), sodium bicarbonate, and sodium silico-aluminate are often added to keep the salt white and easy to pour.

7. TIME YOUR MEALS FOR MAXIMUM RESULTS

Muscles don't automatically inflate to Schwarzenegger-esque proportions just because you work out. Heck, that's only part of the equation. The other component is feeding

the machine. You might spend an hour or two in the gym training hard to work your muscles and tear down muscle tissue, but then your body needs 48 to 72 hours to fully recover and heal. Part of that recovery—a big part—is paying attention to when you eat. When it comes to stimulating muscle growth, increasing mass, and ramping-up your metabolism, timing is everything.

Conventional nutritional wisdom has shifted from the three square meals a day that you probably grew up with to a series of smaller meals. So, instead of skyscraping peaks and rock-bottom lows, your body receives a steady stream of energy throughout the day. This lessens the burden on your endocrine system too. Since you're not ingesting huge floods of food at once, your pancreas doesn't have to pump out as much insulin to convert the food to glucose.

Multiple small meals also encourage your body to use calories rather than hoard them. When you go for long periods of time without food, you're sending a signal to your brain to start conserving energy. It's like turning down your body's thermostat. Your metabolism slows down. In this conservation mode, the system stores the nutrient yielding the highest calories per gram—fat. Fat yields 5 more calories per gram than either protein or carbs. So, by chowing every 2 to 3 hours, you keep your body in a state of liberation and your metabolism cooking.

The smaller-meals-more-often approach has other important Muscle Chow implications. First, there are those extra calories you need to consume in order to build muscle. Eating more often helps you get these calories effectively. No need to cram a side of beef down your pie-hole just to keep up with your caloric demand. Second, by avoiding energy deficits, your body stays anabolic longer. Make protein the centerpiece of those small meals and snacks, and you keep the pool of amino acids full and available for muscle repair. Your body needs those amino acids around the clock. Remember, the muscle repair process takes 48 to 72 hours.

Here's what I've found works the best: Make your main meals—breakfast, lunch, and dinner—smaller. Think two-thirds of a conventionally sized meal, then add snacks in between. I eat again approximately 2 hours after each meal and 3 hours after each snack. The lists on the next page give examples starting with breakfast at 7:00 a.m. If you're still hungry at 10:00 p.m., you can have a late snack that includes a slower-digesting casein protein to keep you anabolic longer into the night. (For ideas, check out some of the simple recipes using cottage cheese, in "Snacks" on page 23.)

WORKOUT DAY

7:00 a.m.: Breakfast
10:00 a.m.: Midmorning Snack
12:00 p.m.: Lunch
3:00 p.m.: Midafternoon Snack
5:00 p.m.: Preworkout Snack
6:30 p.m.: Postworkout Snack
8:00 p.m.: Dinner
10:00 p.m.: Evening Snack

NON-WORKOUT DAY

7:00 a.m.: Breakfast
10:00 a.m.: Midmorning Snack
12:00 p.m.: Lunch
3:00 p.m.: Midafternoon Snack
5:00 p.m.: Late-afternoon Snack
7:00 p.m.: Dinner
10:00 p.m.: Evening Snack

Schedule your meals and snacks around your workouts. Eating about 30 minutes to an hour before a workout gives you the energy you need to lift. You wouldn't expect your car to run if the gas tank was empty, would you? This is your chance to not only set the stage for optimum muscle gains but also enhance your fat-burning potential.

If you work out in the morning, make time for a quick breakfast before you hit the gym. A protein shake mixed with water (my choice) or fat-free milk will break your fast and ensure your body stays anabolic by feeding your hungry muscles with the amino acids they need to grow on. The best choice here would be a fast-digesting protein (like whey) with little to no added fat, carbs, or sugar. The lack of carbs will allow your body to target fat much quicker than if you had fully plumped glycogen stores. If you still need energy to help motivate and drive you into the gym, have some caffeine. A cup of coffee will help raise your metabolism, increase your energy levels, and support your fat-burning potential as well.

People who, like me, find that their hunger pangs can get in the way of a solid workout need to chow something beforehand. For those individuals, having some fruit can be the answer. Eat an apple, a pear, a peach, a couple slices of cantaloupe, or a handful of strawberries, raspberries, or blueberries. The carbs in the fruit will help give you extra energy for your workout.

If you train later in the day (like I do), chances are you'll have already eaten several times by then, so your glycogen stores will be nice and full. Since you probably don't need to fuel your system anymore at this point, stick with a protein shake mixed with water or fat-free milk. For more preworkout snack ideas, see "Pre-Pump Foods" on

page 201. If you're still lacking motivation to hit the gym, swing by a coffee joint to down a shot of espresso or chug an energy drink.

Eating after a workout is a touch more complicated because it involves manipulating one of your body's most powerful hormones—insulin. Immediately after your last rep, muscles are primed for a glycogen infusion. Their glycogen stores are empty, and it's a green light to chow. Eat carbohydrates, especially fast-converting carbs like bread or a high-carb energy drink, and your muscles will suck them up like a sponge. That's because those high-GI carbs trigger the release of insulin to help carry glucose directly to muscle cells, where it's socked away as glycogen. This is a window of opportunity I never miss, and it lasts for about an hour, then diminishes every minute thereafter.

Replenishing your body with high-GI carbs postworkout can also help enhance the effects of certain supplements—notably creatine, which you'll learn more about on page 16. Carbs are the engine that drives creatine directly into the muscle cells. They also aid in protein synthesis, especially after exercise when amino acids are in high demand and your muscles are looking to begin the process of rebuilding. Based on my own experience and all the well-documented research, I can't emphasize enough the importance of providing your muscles with these lost nutrients as soon as possible after you work out. For postworkout meal ideas, see “Recovery Foods” on page 224.

8. KEEP A LOG

I use a food journal every day to keep track of exactly what and when I need to feed the beast. This accomplishes three things:

1. You can quickly determine when you should (or can) eat your next meal or snack. Remember, eat snacks 2 hours after each meal and meals 3 hours after each snack.
2. You become accountable for everything you eat. If you have to write down every bite in your food journal, you'll think twice before you chow on something that isn't good for you.
3. You also can quickly calculate ballpark figures of total protein and carbs for the day, using the nutrition info that accompanies each Muscle Chow recipe or the

SAMPLE DAILY FOOD LOG

TIME	FOOD(S)	PROTEIN	CARBS	CALORIES (OPTIONAL)
7:00 a.m.	Toast with whole fruit preserves	11 g	45 g	250
	90% Shake	50 g	10 g	216
10:00 a.m.		-	20 g	70 g
Totals:				

Nutrition Facts panel on labels of packaged foods. Again, you don't need to be exact in your calculations, so long as you have a basic idea.

I've provided a sample log page above and on page 278. Just run off some photocopies and you're all set!

CYCLING THROUGH PHASES

At the beginning of this chapter, I briefly spoke about the Muscle Chow plan and how this book will help you build the best body you can possibly achieve. Sure, the recipes alone will get you leaner and help you build muscle, but here's where it all comes together. Using the eight strategies we just outlined as a general guideline, I maintain

my dietary strategies within 2-month cycles. These cycles are the secret to my success. They help make setting and reaching goals very accessible, plus they help maintain consistency—a key component for success. Each cycle starts off relaxed, and as the cycle progresses, dietary restrictions are tightened. (Think of it like a good book or movie with a beginning, middle, and end.) Each 2-month cycle is divided into three phases: a Relaxed Phase, a Lean Phase, and a Ripped Phase.

The Relaxed Phase lasts 1 week and is the least restrictive. Basically you're off your diet and taking a break. The Lean Phase (I also call this my maintenance diet) adds some restrictions. It lasts 5 weeks and is a “clean” diet with lots of lean protein, complex carbs, and healthy fats. The Ripped Phase kicks it up another notch, with fewer calories and starchy carbs. It lasts the final 2 weeks before falling back into a Relaxed Phase. The Ripped Phase is the most restrictive portion of a 2-month cycle and can really set you apart as you zero in on your goals. Once you string a couple of these 2-month cycles together, you'll see how maintaining a well-balanced diet becomes easy. There are no hard falls because you never allow the pendulum to swing too far in one direction.

RELAXED PHASE: 1 WEEK

While any of the recipes in this book are perfectly acceptable for the Relaxed Phase of a diet cycle, this is your opportunity to indulge your craving for foods that are outside the parameters of Muscle Chow. Treat yourself to pizza, a fast-food meal, or just more carbs than usual—like cereal, granola and fruit bars, breads, and pasta. On average, calories are at their highest in a Relaxed Phase.

RELAXED SPECS

Drink one protein shake daily. The morning hours from breakfast to lunch, when your muscles are primed for replenishment, are a great time for a whey shake. You can mix this shake with water, fat-free milk, or soy milk—it's up to you.

Begin a creatine-loading cycle (optional). If you're not ready to use supplemental creatine, that's okay, but the benefits of creatine are well known. I don't believe any other sports supplement has as much proof to support its use. In countless studies, creatine has been shown to increase gains in muscle mass and strength by providing more energy to your muscles during exercise. It also helps hydrate muscle cells, giving you more muscle volume. In fact, some creatine products can increase muscle volume

and total body weight by as much as 7 to 10 pounds in as little as a week. I know that sounds crazy, but it's true.

Today, there are so many different creatine products on the market that it can make your head spin. New forms of creatine and creatine products seem to emerge on a monthly basis. And one thing's for certain: They'll continue to do so as long as this product sits atop the muscle-building mountain. Most of these new creatine products—creatine ethyl ester (CEE), creatine alpha-ketoglutarate (AKG), Kre-Alkalyn, creatine gluconate, and dicreatine malate—claim better absorption than basic creatine monohydrate, while causing less water retention. Numerous studies show that consuming creatine with a simple carbohydrate (instead of water) enhances the absorption by 20 percent to 40 percent. That's why many creatine products come premixed with dextrose (a form of sugar) or some other kind of carbohydrate. You can also mix plain micronized creatine monohydrate into sweetened tea, sport drinks, or applesauce to achieve the same effect.

Usually a creatine cycle starts with what's called a loading phase. This is designed to saturate your muscles with creatine. How much is a loading dose? That varies on the creatine you buy, but the average is 20 to 30 grams per day.

Creatine supplements are much more efficient than trying to get creatine from food. Most animal proteins contain approximately 2 grams of creatine per pound. When you think about it, a pound is a lot of fish, beef, or fowl to be choking down just to get a couple grams of creatine. It's easier to pop creatine into a shake. Plus, supplements may be easier to time. I've gotten my best results by consuming creatine mid-morning on nontraining days and immediately postworkout on training days. You want to supply creatine to your muscles postworkout, when they are starving for glycogen replenishment.

Take a multivitamin/mineral. This one's simple. Taking a multivitamin/mineral is like having an insurance policy for your body. It gives you blanket coverage just in case your diet isn't 100 percent perfectly calibrated to deliver all of the vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants you need. In fact, I don't know too many people who get all their daily nutrients from foods alone. Unless you're cultivating your own fruits and veggies, and making everything from scratch using whole grains and unprocessed ingredients, taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement is a good idea.

Now what does a good multi do for us guys who train hard? After all, this is Muscle Chow. First, vitamins and minerals are involved in every metabolic contraction, exertion, and dilation that takes place in response to each movement you make. Let's go another step and talk about those last few burning reps associated with muscle fatigue.

That burning sensation is a buildup of lactic acid in the muscle, the by-product of your muscles converting glycogen to energy—a process called glycolysis. This causes an increase in circulation to help flush lactic acid from blitzed muscles and aid in recovery between sets. That, along with the cardio aspect of training, produces an increase of oxygen in the blood. In turn, this also increases the opportunity for oxidative stress and the formation of free radicals, unbalanced molecules that can mess with the DNA in your cells. Whew, you still with me? In a nutshell, antioxidants help get rid of those free radicals before they can cause harm. So you can see the importance of a multivitamin containing essential antioxidant vitamins like C, E, beta carotene, and selenium.

I recommend that you take a multi that's specifically formulated for men. Guys don't need the excess iron and vitamin A that can be found in generic multis.

Training suggestion: Train with moderate to high intensity 3 to 4 days this week. Cardio is an option in the Relaxed Phase.

LEAN PHASE: 5 WEEKS

Here's where you get in the trenches and really pay attention to diet and training—a combination that increases lean body mass and strength while reducing unnecessary fat. When you hear the term *eating clean*, this is it. Just about every recipe in this book (and foods with comparable nutritional values) are appropriate for the Lean Phase. However, the comfort foods that you've been chowing in the Relaxed Phase—like pizza, for instance—will have to wait for another 7 weeks.

LEAN SPECS

Concentrate on protein intake. As your training intensifies, so does your body's need for protein. It's important to get a serving of lean protein (in the form of food or a shake) at every main meal and snack.

Drink two protein shakes daily. Because the Lean Phase emphasizes macronutrient balance, you're chowing protein all day long. That means you can pick any time of the day to down a shake in place of eating protein. You may choose to have your shakes when you want quick assimilation, like pre- or postworkout, but it's up to you.

Eat one higher-carb meal per week. This helps satisfy cravings, helps keep your metabolism ramped up, and makes your muscles look nice and full. An extra serving of pasta, brown rice, or sweet potatoes are all great choices.

Add 5 grams of L-glutamine supplement twice daily. L-glutamine is one of the most important amino acids for guys who are physically active and want to keep themselves in peak condition. That's because it's one of the most abundant amino acids found in every muscle in the body. Upon extreme physical activity, your body draws large amounts of L-glutamine from the most abundant source you have—muscles. Therefore, a lack of this important amino acid can lead to muscle breakdown (aka catabolism).

Glutamine is best used throughout the day in small doses, rather than in one big dose. Many of the Muscle Chow foods you'll consume daily, like salmon, spinach, and cottage cheese, help replenish glutamine. For example, a 6-ounce can of tuna and a cup of cottage cheese contain around 3 grams of L-glutamine each; a handful of almonds contains about 1 gram; and whole grain toast contains about ½ gram (500 milligrams) per slice. By consuming a balanced diet of fresh veggies, lean meats, fish, and dairy, you'll ensure you're getting a good dose of natural L-glutamine from those foods to help with muscle recovery. Muscle Chow recipes that are chock-full of L-glutamine include Loaded Spinach Salad on page 174, the salmon dishes in Chapter 8, Loaded Soup on page 153, and the beef recipes in Chapter 4. If you're looking for an added boost, protein shakes and L-glutamine powders are widely available. Supplementing with L-glutamine can help maintain muscle integrity, support immune function, and aid in muscle recovery—all the things needed to build a better body. To ensure my body has the glutamine it needs, I take 5 grams of glutamine 30 minutes pre- and postworkout. If it's been a hardcore training day, I'll have another 5-gram dose before bed.

Take 1,000 milligrams of an essential fatty acid (EFA) supplement twice daily. There are two subcategories of dietary fat that are essential: omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. *Essential* means that they cannot be produced by the body and therefore need to be supplied by the diet. Studies show that the average American consumes more omega-6s than omega-3s, from foods like grains, breads, poultry, and eggs. Maybe that's because omega-3-rich foods take a little more effort to chow. I'm talking about fish like salmon, tuna, and sardines; flaxseeds and flaxseed oil; nuts; soybeans (edamame) and other legumes; and olive oil. It's important to get a balance of these two essential fatty acids in your diet for proper health, so increasing your intake of omega-3s becomes a priority. The Muscle Chow recipes can help, but it's still a good idea to take a good EFA supplement to ensure you reap all the health benefits these amazing fats have to offer.

The types of omega-3 fatty acids you need are called eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Don't worry, you don't have to spell them—just eat them. These are the two principal fatty acids found in fish, and they're the most readily available omega-3s used by the body. Recent research has linked them to everything from

reduced risk of heart disease to increased intelligence. When scientists compared the IQ levels of 300 people tested in 1947 with a 2001 follow-up, they found that those who had consumed fish oil supplements outperformed earlier tests by 13 percent. Not only do these fatty acids help your brain's processing speed, they have a host of Muscle Chow benefits. Researchers from the University of Western Ontario have found that omega-3s help you shed body fat while gaining muscle. They help you handle insulin more efficiently, stoke your metabolism on a cellular level, reduce inflammation, discourage your body from storing fats, and help keep your hormones optimized. They also lube your joints, which is helpful when you're on that third set of squats and your knees are feeling the pressure. Since many health-conscious guys try to achieve the perfect six-pack by maintaining low-fat diets, supplementing with EFAs is especially important.

You can easily find EFA supplements at any health food store in flavored liquids for palatability or in gel capsules. Because omega-3 supplements are made from fish oil, they can sometimes make you belch a fishy aftertaste. To avoid it, be sure to consume them with food.

Reduce your creatine supplementation to a maintenance level. If you decided to start taking creatine in the Relaxed Phase, it's time to decrease your dosage to between 5 and 15 grams daily. This maintenance dose should last throughout the entire 2-month cycle. If you decide to continue taking creatine through the next 2-month cycle, don't do the loading phase again—rather, continue with the maintenance dose. At the end of a second consecutive 2-month cycle, take a break from creatine supplementation for a full 2-month cycle before starting again (beginning with a loading phase).

Continue taking your multivitamin/mineral. Once you're in the Lean Phase, you may find that you want to stick with it all the time. Theoretically, you could—but let's not get carried away. "All the time" is a very long time. Eating just one way forever is a strategy that can set you up for failure. I always suggest you begin with a complete 2-month cycle in the proper order—start with the Relaxed Phase and have some of those foods you might be craving, then move into the Lean Phase where you maintain a clean diet, and finally go into the Ripped Phase to get super lean.

After one full cycle, you might decide to forgo the Relaxed Phase for your next 2-month cycle and start directly back into a Lean Phase diet. That's okay if you choose to do so, but consider enjoying a Relaxed Phase the next time it comes around (8 weeks later). The idea of eating in phases is to maintain balance and to keep that pendulum from swinging too far in one direction. It's just like changing up your workout—it keeps your body guessing and adapting, while also keeping things fresh and interesting.

Training suggestion: Train with high intensity 4 to 6 days a week. Do cardio 3 to 4 days a week, at moderate to high intensity.

RIPPED PHASE: 2 WEEKS

I consider these final two weeks of a 2-month cycle to be a pre-photo-shoot diet, although it doesn't require you strap on a slingshot bikini and stand in front of a camera. Here's where you tighten the diet and punch up the intensity of your training a notch. On average, calories are at their lowest because the food choices are so clean. Use this phase to get ready for any situation where you want to look your absolute best: a beach vacation, cruise, wedding, reunion, or just to achieve a personal goal and feel your best. To accomplish this, you'll need to stick with the recipes in this book that have a Ripped Phase icon (or foods with comparable nutritional values) during these final two weeks. The good news is that you can also eat any of the Ripped Phase recipes at any point during an entire 2-month cycle.

Some people might find the Ripped Phase too restrictive. If so, you might decide not to go into a Ripped Phase on your first cycle, but don't give up on it. I believe this final phase can be your crowning moment that proves you can achieve your ultimate physique. If you choose not to go into the Ripped Phase, continue the Lean Phase for another two weeks until you've completed a 2-month cycle. At that point it will be time to fall back into a Relaxed Phase (and grab a cheat meal or two) as the next 2-month cycle begins.

RIPPED SPECS

Drink three protein shakes daily. The extra protein helps replace some of the carbs you're cutting. Midafternoon and evening snacks are good times to chug a shake because they will help you feel satiated as your overall calories are reduced. Post-workout is also an important time—it's your window of opportunity to feed hungry muscles.

Prepare only recipes that have a RIPPED PHASE icon (or foods with comparable nutritional values). Note that a few recipes require tweaks to make them suitable for a Ripped Phase. Look for the "Ripped Tip."

Eat only lean white-meat proteins such as chicken, fish, turkey, and eggs. This

RIPPED RECIPES

The following recipes carry a Ripped Phase icon designating them as appropriate meal choices during a Ripped Phase of a 2-month Muscle Chow diet cycle.

Breakfast

- Toast with Whole Fruit
Preserves page 43
- Protein Oats page 50
- Apples 'n' Oats page 52
- Oat Peaches 'n' Cream page 53

Chicken

- 2-Minute Chicken Salad Pita page 73
- Grilled Apricot-Chicken
Skewers page 78
- Bamboo-Steamed Chicken
and Veggies page 81
- Ripped Chicken page 85

Turkey

- Oven-Baked Turkey Meatballs page 93
- Prewrite Turkey Sandwich page 96

Eggs

- Clean Fried Eggs page 99
- Dirty Eggs page 100
- Matzo Brei page 106

- Hard-Cooked Eggs
by the Dozen page 109

Seafood

- Quick-Bake Fish page 112
- Poached Salmon
with Steamed Veggies page 113
- Bamboo-Steamed Fish
and Veggies page 115
- Fix 'n' Eat Sardine Sandy page 117
- Swordfish on the Grill page 121
- Grilled Ahi Tuna
and Vegetables page 122
- Foolproof Grilled Fish
Packets page 124
- Grilled Salmon Bulgur
Packets page 125

Pastas & Grains

- Protein-Rich Quinoa Salad page 151

Soup, Veggies & Sides

- Loaded Soup page 153
- Classic Steamed Veggies page 154

helps minimize your saturated fat intake to help get you ripped, while still providing high-quality lean protein. None of this book's beef recipes, in Chapter 4, carry a Ripped Phase icon.

Eat one—and only one—pasta meal during this 2-week period. Do this in the second week of a Ripped Phase to help fill muscles with glycogen. Glycogen is stored via water, so it helps muscles become nice and full. This action also pushes subcutaneous veins

Green Protein.....	page 156	Postworkout Tuna Salad	
Veggie Kebabs.....	page 158	Sandwich	page 208
Baked Asparagus		Tuna in Celery Stalks	page 209
with Sea Salt	page 161	10-Minute Lime-Glazed	
Oven-Roasted Zucchini	page 162	Chicken.....	page 210
Superhero Sweets.....	page 167	Cottage Cheese, Fruit	
Rosemary-Rubbed		& Glutamine.....	page 211
Sweet Potatoes on the Grill	page 168	On-the-Go Cottage Cheese	
Grilled Sweet Potato Rounds.....	page 169	and Preserves	page 216
No-Prep Iceberg Wedges	page 172	On-the-Go Cottage	
Creamy Dressing	page 180	Cheese 'n' Bananas	page 217
Creamy Honey-Mustard		On-the-Go Yogurt	
Dressing	page 181	and Cottage Cheese.....	page 218
Green Salsa Salad Dressing	page 181	Protein Yogurt and Fruit	page 219
Protein Shakes		Cantaloupe with Strawberries	
90% Shake.....	page 190	and Mint.....	page 220
Malted Muscles	page 191	Greek-Style Yogurt.....	page 221
Nighttime Anabolic Elixir	page 192	Fiber-Rich Oatmeal 'n' Wheat	
Breakfast in a Blender	page 196	Bran	page 222
Snacks		Metabolic Salsa.....	page 223
Postworkout Egg Salad		Green Salsa.....	page 334
Sandwich	page 205	Balsamic Dip	page 226
Postworkout Enzyme Blast.....	page 206		

to the surface of your skin, so you look more vascular—especially in the final stages of a 2-month cycle. For this meal, you may choose from any of the Pastas & Grains recipes (Chapter 9), though only one of those recipes, Protein-Rich Quinoa Salad, features a Ripped Phase icon.

Avoid baked goods. None of the Biscuits & Muffins recipes (Chapter 11) are appropriate for a Ripped Phase.

Desert dessert. Desserts (Chapter 14) are devoid of Ripped Phase icons. There are plenty of Ripped Phase snacks to indulge in, however.

Drink eight (16-ounce) bottles of water a day. When you work out more, you sweat more, so the extra H₂O keeps you hydrated.

Continue to:

- Take a multivitamin/mineral daily
- Take 5 grams of L-glutamine supplement twice daily
- Take 1,000 milligrams of essential fatty acids (EFAs) twice daily
- Supplement with creatine daily

Training suggestion. Train with high intensity 4 to 6 days a week, while trying to increase the amount of weight you're lifting (pay attention to proper form). Do high-intensity cardio 3 days a week.

Unless you're a seasoned veteran in health and fitness and you already maintain a clean diet, jumping headlong into the Ripped Phase without moving through the first two phases is something I don't recommend. The Muscle Chow formula is one that I've been doing for a long time, and I have found that the best results are achieved through patience and consistency. Switching from a carefree diet to a highly restrictive diet overnight will be more difficult than you think. Start slow and work your way up.

As for staying in the Ripped Phase for longer than two weeks, again keep in mind that this phase is very restrictive, so you can become extremely burned out if you do it for too long (remember the swinging pendulum). It's great to look your best today and into next week, but it's just as important to look your best four months from now and into next year. No doubt—a Ripped Phase type diet will give you dramatic results. Just don't climb to the top of the hill without realizing how far down the valley might be on the other side.

THE CYCLE IS OVER—NOW WHAT?

At the end of a 2-month cycle, it's time to begin the next cycle, starting again with the Relaxed Phase. Enjoy yourself; after 7 weeks of consistency, you've earned 7 days to kick back a little. It's important not to fall off the wagon completely by super-sizing

every day at the local fast-food joint and sucking down 40-ounce milkshakes. Opt for a few cheat meals and snacks here and there, while still trying to maintain balance in your diet. In other words, don't completely abandon fruits, veggies, whole grains, and protein. That way, it's not such a chore to get back on track when it's time to start the Lean Phase again (the next level of dietary restrictions).

You may decide you're not ready and want to stick with the Relaxed Phase for another week. That's okay; just be sure not to let an extra week turn into three weeks or a month. For this reason, I suggest marking your Lean Phase start date on a calendar with a highlighter (see "Getting Started" on page 26). If you make the commitment and write it down, you'll be accountable.

You can choose to set a new goal for each 2-month cycle, but it's not necessary. It's true that the most effective strategy for progress and growth is setting strong goals, but that doesn't mean you've got to change it every two months. A goal could take as long as a year to attain (six back-to-back cycles), while another might take four months (two back-to-back cycles). The key is having a strong vision—so strong that it motivates you to pursue your goal all the way to the end, no matter how long it takes.

HOLD ON A SEC . . .

Before you launch into a total diet overhaul, take a minute. Success in anything—whether it's a job, a hobby, a workout, or an eating plan—boils down to three words that I call the Big 3: **commitment**, **dedication**, and **consistency**.

The first—**commitment**—is your decision to make a change. The choice to better yourself, and your commitment to that choice, are big responsibilities. So often people float through their days, their weeks, their lives, afraid to make a commitment. The possibility of failure looms over our heads, and in turn, our willpower weakens. Sure, I've had my share of hard knocks—we all have. But I learned from those mistakes and picked myself up. Through it all, there is one thing that I never did—I never gave up. It's as simple as that.

Once you make the decision to change, emphasis shifts to the second component of the Big 3: **dedication**. Here you set the wheels in motion and dedicate yourself to a goal. This means getting rid of old habits and implementing new, more inspiring ones that will immediately start making a difference in your life. It takes perseverance to stick

to new changes, especially when things get tough. Ultimately it's your choice: Push forward to new ground or fall back on old, comfortable habits. The consequences of that choice will either drive you closer to or pull you farther away from your goals.

When it comes to realizing your goals, the last of the Big 3 is probably the most important: **consistency**. When I think back over the years, this has to be the one that helped me the most. You know when your training is subpar, because you lack energy and motivation. You feel it the moment you enter the gym, during your workout, and walking out of the gym. You might rationalize, "Oh well, tomorrow's another day, the gym was crowded, I couldn't get on all the machines I wanted, my mind just wasn't into it, work was tough..." Yeah, and don't forget high gas prices, pollution, and global warming! The truth is that there's just no room for excuses. You can find a million reasons why you should skip the gym or put off eating a Muscle Chow diet until Monday, or next week, or even next month. But if you want to be your best, you've got to commit yourself to that cause and stick with it. Most people can't or won't maintain this level of consistency. It's not easy, and if it was, everyone would be doing it, right? That's why it feels so great when you put forth the effort and begin seeing results.

GETTING STARTED

You'll find that once you make a commitment and dedicate yourself fully, it will change your world. You've got to start by realizing you have the power to wipe the slate clean and become the architect of your future. There are no boundaries to your potential, no limitations to what you can achieve. Here's a three-step road map to achieving your best body.

Step 1: Have a vision. Create a clear picture of what you want out of your 2-month cycle. This simple task will set a point of reference to show you exactly where you're headed. This is one of the biggest issues for most of us. We lose sight of our vision too easily and end up falling off the wagon, only to beat ourselves up over it later.

The key is to find something that inspires you. It can be your high school football picture, when your body was at its best, a magazine photo of a physique you admire, or even a picture of the cruise ship you'll be vacationing on. Whatever it is, whoever it is, get a picture and tape it where you're going to see it every single morning (like on the

inside of the kitchen cabinet where you keep the coffee mugs). When you see it, see yourself and restate your goal.

Step 2: Get a map. If you don't know where you're going, how the heck are you going to get there? Some people don't worry about that part. They jump in with both feet and deal with the details later. That's a formula for disaster. Each 2-month cycle is the framework—now you need a map to fill in the plan that will help you reach your goal. In my case, a calendar is my map. It's easy to print off a couple months from the computer (that's what I do), or just buy a calendar. Using a highlighter, mark a box around the first week in blue (Relaxed Phase), the next five weeks in yellow (Lean Phase), and the final two weeks in orange (Ripped Phase), until you've got it broken down into three blocks of time.

Step 3: Get started. You've got your vision, your goal, and your map—now it's time to get started. Two-month cycles are a formula that works—they've worked for me over the years, and they will work for you. These cycles ease you into the idea of eating a clean diet on a consistent basis. If you go balls-to-the-wall, you're going to set yourself up for a binge-eating blowout. The Relaxed Phase gets you ready, the Lean Phase helps you build consistency to achieve the best possible results in a relatively short period of time, and the Ripped Phase can help you reach that ultimate goal. Sure, the changes to your diet and a new training regimen might be tough at first, but you're embarking on an inspiring journey in the right direction.