

**HOW TO:**  
**BE THE BEST  
VERSION OF  
YOURSELF AND  
OPTIMISE YOUR  
HEALTH, FITNESS &  
MINDSET.**

**BY KIERON LYONS**

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After years struggling with my self-confidence, body image and my sexuality, and working in a toxic heteronormative environment where I had to hide who I was on a daily basis I finally decided that enough was enough and embarked on a journey of self-discovery that led me to change everything about me for the better.

I quit my job in engineering and turned a spark for improving my own health and fitness into a career where I now help other LGBTQ+ guys find their inner and outer strength.

It's been a real journey, but one that has been so rewarding. I've seen so much progress in my mind, body and spirit over years and now love nothing more than helping others on their journeys.

In this book you'll learn the basics to get your health, fitness and mindset in order to be the best version of yourself and make sustainable changes to your life.



Kieron Lyons - Founder & Coach at Lyons Training

# 1.

## FOUNDATIONS

It's easy to think that all you have to do to better your health and get fit is train right and eat well. This is all the health and fitness industry talks about - what training program you should be following, what diet works best for fat loss, how much protein you need to be eating to gain muscle.

These are all important factors don't get me wrong, but without first considering all the other aspects of your life and how they affect everything you do, think and feel, how can only your training and diet be important in your quest for a better you? Short answer: They can't.



# **“YOU’RE ONLY AS STRONG AS THE FOUNDATION YOU’RE BUILT ON”**

Without first creating a solid base you’re never going to be able to create a strong mind and body - and one that will last.

I’ve started and stopped so many times with my health and fitness. I had all the best intentions and all the motivation to try and create the body I wanted. I had the drive, I was heading to the gym 4-5x per week but this motivation soon dried-up and I soon became less and less interested and eventually gave up again. This actually happened a few times!

What was it that was making me start-stop and lose motivation? - My foundations weren’t in place. It’s as simple as that. I was in my mid-twenties and my lifestyle was erratic to say the least. I wasn’t getting enough solid sleep, I was suffering from low self-esteem, my stress levels and mood were all over the place and this led to too many highs and lows which eventually lead to a regression in the good habits I had formed and the bad habits just crept back in - back to square one.

There’s a lot of pressure to look and act a certain way as an LGBTQ+ individual, both from inside and outside of the community. What’s not often discussed is how this affects peoples confidence in their self-image and how they can combat these feelings to improve their well-being and overall outlook in life. Depression and anxiety are more prevalent in the queer community than any other and that’s why we need to pay more attention to self-care and building the right support network.

These are the 4 foundations to get right to set you up for success (sustainably).

# 1.Sleep

*“Sleep is the single most effective thing we can do to reset our brain and body health each day - Mother Nature’s best effort at contra-death.”*

- *Why we sleep - Matthew Walker*

Speaks volumes doesn't it? Sleep is the body's way of recharging. All of your rejuvenating processes happen when you're fast asleep. Instead of looking at the benefits of sleep though, let's look at what the impact of how not getting enough sleep can have:

Routinely sleeping less than 6-7 hours each night can:

- Demolish your immune system
- Double the risk of cancer
- A key determinate to developing Alzheimer's
- Disrupts your blood sugar levels leading to diabetes
- Increases the risk of cardiovascular disease
- Contributes to depression and anxiety
- Causes irritability
- Increased risk of obesity
- Decrease motor function
- Cause muscle aches and tremors
- Suppress growth

With all that said, it's easy to see how a lack of quality sleep can affect your health, both mind and body, yet a lot of the world's population routinely miss out on this vital basic human function. So much so that the WHO (not the band) has declared a sleep loss epidemic throughout industrialised nations.

The best thing you can do to counteract this is to make sure you're getting enough quality sleep each night. 7+ hours (ideally 8 hours) of actual sleep will drastically improve your health, your mood, your stress levels, your satiety and your well-being in general.



## 2. Lifestyle

The choices we make on a daily basis ultimately determine which direction we're going to go down. These behaviours when they happen again and again are what we call habits. Habits are ritualistic behaviours that a lot of the time we don't even think about, we just do them - biting your nails anyone?

There's also the habits we are more in control of like reaching for the cookies late at night or getting home from work and opening a bottle of wine. These are all behaviours we're fully conscious of but find it hard to control. They're ingrained in our psyche and they're what we call coping mechanisms.

When our days are full of these habits it's hard to form new ones, as there's only so much room for these behaviours. As we've discussed, habits aren't formed overnight, they can take years to develop. Studies have shown however that it can take anywhere between 7 and 63 days to break an old habit or form a new one. The sweet spot to seeing a change in behaviour or to break a pattern is 21 days - so it is possible.

In order to break bad habits you first need to recognise them, understand when you do them and what the triggers are. Once you've understood this you can then take steps to manage it and eventually break the habit.

## **“CHANGING YOUR THINKING CAN CHANGE THE OUTCOME”**

Once you've begun to manage the negative habits that are controlling your health and well-being you can then start creating new ones that will benefit your health and well-being.

Consistency is key! It's important to stay focused when starting to form new habits, like a new exercise routine, eating healthy, or practicing meditation etc.

It's by creating behavioural changes that eventually leads to being in control of your mind and body and this allows you to make your own conscious decisions without letting self-sabotaging habits getting in your way.



### 3. Mindset

There is so much emphasis on nutrition and exercise in the health and fitness industry these days and not enough thought goes into the main factor that will determine whether someone succeeds on their fitness journey or not.

It's easy for a coach to give a client a training program and nutrition plan to follow and wish them luck, but what is missing from this is a person's mindset.

There are two mindset states - a '*fixed mindset*' and a '*growth mindset*'. A fixed mindset is shrouded in limited beliefs, that they are not able to change or try something new. This is the case for a lot of people and is usually based on negative past experiences. Take for example someone who has a fear of public speaking, this is usually because of one incident 20 years ago and they now always believe that they are bad at public speaking.

Having this fixed mindset, or a lack of belief that you can't do something because of past experiences is compounded by years and years of self-talk and irrational emotion and leads to default habits and behaviours.

What you need to do is change your way of thinking from a 'fixed' state into a 'growth' state. This is a state that is curious, interested, motivated and able to grow and form new behaviours.

In order to do this you must first regulate the emotion you get with the belief and rationalise it. Instead of thinking black and white, imagine a whole spectrum and this will make things seem less scary and intimidating.

Instead of thinking what's the worse that can happen think about the positive outcome that can come from the situation and keep this in mind when the negative feelings slip back into focus.



## 4. Stress

Stress is a big issue among millennials and the LGBTQ+ community alike. Modern-day stresses and strains can have a huge impact on our health and well-being and finding ways to control this can be difficult.

Before we look into the ‘whys’ surrounding stress we must first take understand what stress actually is.

Stress is a physiological response to a situation or experience we perceive as being dangerous, whether it be to our physical being or mentally. When this occurs our nervous system and adrenal glands send signals to the rest of the body to prepare it for a physical response. This ‘fight or flight’ reaction may have been necessary millions of years ago when we faced life-or-death situations regularly, but in modern times these situations are fairly rare and these physiological responses can affect our health negatively.

Stress these days is caused by a lot of things. Whether it’s pressure at work, trying to do too much, not prioritising tasks effectively or being glued to our screens all day everyday.

If we’re not taking care of our mind and dealing with stress effectively, it’s going to have a negative affect on our health.

**“THE GREATEST WEAPON AGAINST STRESS IS OUR ABILITY TO CHOOSE ONE THOUGHT OVER ANOTHER.”**

So how do we deal with stress?

Prioritise your life - plan your work > work your plan. Stay on track and focused on the tasks and habits that are going to give you the best outcome, whether that be health, wealth or pleasure. Let the little things wait.

Learn ways to manage and control stress without reaching for unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol, food, overthinking etc. Try relaxing techniques such as meditation or mindfulness, journaling, deep breathing techniques and of course - exercise.

Unplug - using your screens to distract from stress just exacerbates the problem. Instead, try to unplug from your screen at least 3x per day and take a short break to recharge your brain.

## **Conclusion**

If, like me in the past you struggle to either get motivated in the first place to change your health, fitness and confidence for the better, or you lack consistency and end up yo-yoing (it's a word) between diets and exercise, it's probably because there is a flaw in your foundations.

No-one is perfect and you don't need to overhaul your whole life to get things in the right order. You just need more self-care.

Have a deep look into the 4 pillars as mentioned above and see what areas need attention. Are you getting enough sleep? Are your habits and behaviours getting in the way of succeeding in whatever you want to be successful in? Are you in the right mindset to grow, develop and evolve to reach your goals? And are your stress-levels blocking you from progressing?

# 2.

## NUTRITION

**“OUR FOOD SHOULD BE OUR MEDICINE  
AND OUR MEDICINE SHOULD BE OUR  
FOOD.”**

*- Hippocrates*

### 1. It's Been Emotional

“You can't out-train a bad diet”. I've heard this said so many times by mentors and coaches of mine and for a while I never believed them. I was training 6x per week, lifting heavy, running far but one day I injured myself and was unable to train properly for a few weeks. My diet at the time was pretty erratic, I was basically eating what I wanted and although I had been training well and hitting goals in that respect I wasn't looking as lean or athletic as I had had hoped.

It wasn't until this period where I was out-of-action due to my injury that I really noticed how my diet was affecting my body composition and confidence. I wasn't out-training my diet when I was injury-free, I was just putting off the inevitable.

So at this moment I knew I had to change my relationship with food. For me, and I'm guessing a lot of other people this all ties back into the first part of this book - foundations. I was using food and drink as a coping mechanism because my foundations weren't in order.

I realised that I was an emotional eater. I was 'rewarding' myself with food and drink when things got tough and in the short-term this made me feel better but then would leave me feeling much worse. I realised that it's this habitual behaviour that I need to change.

Snacking, over-eating, eating junk food - these are all markers of emotional eating which is driven not by hunger but by irrational coping strategies. What needs to be done to break this habit is to firstly, acknowledge the issue and find out the triggers that causes this and deal with it another way.



## 2. Quality

The biggest man-made disaster to human health in the West is the current state of the food cycle. We have turned away from consuming food to consuming food-like products. A lot of the food splayed across the supermarket shelves is highly processed, preserved, tinned, packed and sprayed with pesticides - and this is a huge problem.

What makes matters worse is that these 'foods' are usually ready to eat straight out of the package and cheap as chips. Uber convenient.

Wikipedia characterises the Modern Western Diet as "a modern dietary pattern that is generally characterised by high INTAKES of red meat, processed meat, pre-packaged foods, butter, candy and sweets, fried foods, conventionally-raised animal products, high-fat dairy products, eggs, refined grains, potatoes, corn (and high-fructose corn syrup) and high-sugar drinks , and LOW INTAKES of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pasture-raised animal products, fish, nuts, and seeds.

Doesn't that sound insane? Most of the food consumed in the West is highly refined and processed. So it's no surprise that there's an obesity epidemic, a heart disease epidemic and a cancer epidemic and a diabetes epidemic here in the West. The US for example has the highest percentage of people with a BMI >30 (which is categorised as obese) in the world and this is over 30% of the population.

So what should we be eating? Well, exactly what we're not, apparently - fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pasture-raised animal products, fish, nuts, seeds and NO sugar.

# 3. Quantity

This is also another reason why people struggle to lose or gain weight, by being aware of how much food you're consuming and portion control is an issue I hear a lot with my clients.

Once you get the quality of foods right then understanding how much of it t eat can have a huge impact on your health, satiety and energy levels.

There are 3 macronutrients in food - protein, carbohydrates and fat, and your body uses each of these in different ways and for different bodily functions. So they are all vitally necessary.

Carbohydrates are the primary source of energy for our bodies. Proteins are made up of amino acids which are responsible for building muscles among other functions and dietary fats are an essential source of energy and support cell growth.

As you can see, they all have a very important function in the body and we need to consume them all - in the right quantities.

An easy way to think about this is having the following quantities for each meal:

1. A palm-sized portion of protein
2. A handful of unrefined carbs
3. A fist-sized portion of veggies
4. A thumb-sized portion of healthy fats.

By following this portion guide and eating enough to sustain your energy levels you won't go far wrong.

# “WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS MANAGED”

Whether your goal is to lose weight, maintain or gain weight the easiest and most accurate way to ensure you hit your goal is to measure your food intake - not forever but until you're acutely aware of what you're eating and how it's going to affect your body composition.

Accurately tracking your food intake will help you to achieve whatever your goal is. It's far too easy to over and under-estimate on a daily basis, and even when you are 'good' during the week, the weekend blowout can send you right back to square one.

- Calculate your daily energy expenditure (calories out)
- Make sure your calories consumed reflects your ultimate nutrition goals (lose weight, gain weight etc)
- Be consistent with tracking your food until you reach your targets or become aware of what = what
- Remember both food and drink contain calories so track both
- This isn't forever - it's bringing awareness to your eating habits and patterns and will ultimately provide you with more knowledge around what you're eating.

## 4. The Diet Myth

All diets work and all diets fail. Reducing too many calories will promote weight-loss initially, but over time decreasing calories slows metabolism and energy expenditure to match the energy consumed, this triggers hunger leading to weight loss plateaus and weight regain. This is because the body has a set weight regulated by hormonal interactions, such as insulin and cortisol.

The 'Set Point Theory' is a theory that suggests we all have a set body weight and won't really deviate too much from that weight, give or take a few kgs.

Have you or do you know someone who's done a 'fad' diet in the past, maybe the Keto diet or extremely low calorie diet and lost a load of weight? Did they keep it off or did they put the weight back on again?

When we undertake a strict diet that we ultimately won't be able to sustain, like Keto and others we will initially lose weight but then quickly regain it once we go back to eating a more 'normal' diet as our bodies control our energy expenditure (metabolism) and hormones in order to stay within a certain range.

So how do we lose weight and keep it off?

A successful diet is the one you can stick to. The word 'diet' has earned itself the idea that it's temporary, that it's for a set period and this is the issue. Your diet is your normal everyday eating habits and patterns and should be viewed as a permanent function that allows you to function at your best.

I go into a lot of detail with my clients the importance of finding the right diet for them in order to create longevity with their weight-loss goals, energy and fitness. But here are a few ways to control your own diet in a sustainable way:

1. Track & measure food - what goes in = what goes out
2. Stick to whole foods
3. Skip sugar
4. Eat mindfully
5. Manage your sleep and stress
6. Intermittent fasting

The last one I'm a big advocate for. By reducing your eating window you're giving your body time to take the focus away from constant digestion, helps restrict food intake and lowers insulin levels among other benefits.



# 3.

## TRAINING

When we think about getting healthier and fitter we automatically just assume we need to do more exercise. Well, spoiler alert - this is false!

Without getting the above chapters in check first i.e. your foundations and nutrition, the exercise bit won't actually be much help and certainly not in a sustainable way.

Now I'm not pulling focus from exercise and training and as a PT myself this is part of my job! The point I am making is that while yes, it is a vital piece of the puzzle, it cannot be placed without all the other pieces in-place first.

### 1. Don't force it

There are many different approaches to exercise and these days the possibilities seem endless, which is great in some respects but can leave you wondering where to start, what program to follow, what type of training will be best for fat loss, which is better for improving speed and power etc.

The one that you should do is the one that you can stick-to. There is zero point in doing something you don't enjoy as you're never going to make it a habit and therefore it's unsustainable.

Instead, it's best to try a few different training approaches, see which ones work for you and you can see yourself forming a schedule around. Don't force it.

## **2. Make a plan**

This really is the key to success. Without a progressive plan in place for you to follow you're more likely to quit as you won't have anything to work towards and no way of seeing how far you've come.

Having a plan allows you to focus on your training, knowing you're working towards a specific goal and once you reach these goals it's easy to adapt and progress, striving further for new goals.

Creating a plan that is tailored to your strengths and weaknesses, your ultimate goals and one which fits into your schedule will allow you to get where you want to be 10x faster than doing random YouTube workouts or endless hours on the treadmill. It works because it's specific to you and the idea is to get you from A to B in the most efficient and sustainable way.

## **3. Be Smart**

In order to successfully reach your goals you first need to have one. "Losing weight" sadly is not a good goal to have although this is the one most of my clients come to me with.

You need specific goals that are S.M.A.R.T - specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-based.

If you want to lose weight for example, how much? Are we talking about body fat? Is it actually possible to lose this much weight in the set time frame? It is a realistic goal? When do you want to achieve this by?

Losing 5kg in 2 months or increasing your back squat by 10kgs in 6 weeks for example is a S.M.A.R.T goal, its specific, it's attainable and it's realistic.

## 4. Train Movements, Not Muscles

“Functional Fitness” is a relatively new term and one which get's banded around a lot these days which has earned it some skepticism, but it's nothing new.

*Functional training* is a term used to describe exercises that help you perform activities in everyday life more easily. This type of training uses whole body, compound exercises with a huge emphasis on strength and stability.

A lot of the typically 'old school' forms of strength training are still encompassed in the 'functional training' umbrella, deadlifts, squats etc because they are highly functional - they carry over into everyday life.

Picking up your carrier bags from the supermarket floor is basically a deadlift hip hinge movement. Walking up the stairs or walking up a hill is basically a lunge movement.

What's great about training this way is that you notice every day how much stronger and fitter you feel when you go about you day-to-day activities, and there's no better motivation than feeling like a better version of yourself and one who's more capable.

# “BEFORE YOU SAVE THE WORLD, GET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER”

## Conclusion

Making sure your foundations are solid is key to living a fuller life and will help with your quest to become the best version of you.

If you feel like you're in a 'fixed' mindset at the moment, think of ways to break out of this cycle of self-doubt and negative self-talk and embrace the unknown in order to grow, discover and become curious about the possibilities that are there waiting for you.

Once you are able to develop awareness of your stress, sleep, lifestyle, habits and mindset you will have a better chance of controlling them for the better which will enable you to become successful in other areas of your life.

Nutrition and exercise are secondary to this and the process will be much easier, more rewarding and most importantly - permanent.

If you have any questions on how to best tackle your own journey with your foundations, nutrition or exercise or would like to find out more about the programs I have developed for my clients then feel free to get in touch at [kieron@lyons.pt](mailto:kieron@lyons.pt)

