

Secrets of Senior Fitness Stars

by Randall L. Eaton, Ph.D.

In addition to a professional life as a scientist, professor, author and lecturer, I have been a competitive athlete and champion power-lifter. At age 45 I took up body-building and for five years won physique contests against men half my age.

As a professional trainer and fitness director, my clients have ranged from NFL players and Ms Galaxy contestants to collegiate athletes and seniors.

At 32, I broke the end of my femur playing basketball. Leading orthopaedic sports physicians told me I would not be able to walk by the age of 50, but at age 69 I not only walk but also train vigorously 10 hours weekly without a knee replacement.

Like many older athletes, I have had to contend with other maladies including a lower back injury incurred in basketball. I have spondylosis, slippage of the lumbar spine where a disk has completely worn away. I also suffers from kyphosis, curvature of the upper spine caused by a compression fracture of the cervical vertebrae from body surfing in Hawaii.

These injuries are potentially crippling, but I have refused surgical intervention in favor of therapeutic exercise, proper attitude, nutrition, prayer and application of principles of sports psychology. I receive no therapy and use no prescription drugs for pain.

At 54 when I suffered a separation in my right shoulder, my bench press dropped from 365 to 45 pounds overnight. Refusing to go under the knife, I steadfastly employed corrective exercises to recover use of his shoulder and within a year was bench pressing 225 pounds.

I am convinced that attitude is the single most important factor in health and fitness, followed by exercise and nutrition. Our potential is limited most by the beliefs we hold. Older people especially succumb to the widespread belief that age is physically and mentally disempowering. Many stop exercising altogether or curtail the intensity of exercise in fear of injury.

Beliefs are powerful causes. Placebos work because of the power of belief which means that the real power lies in us.

Nine years ago I conducted questionnaire surveys and interviews of senior fitness stars including famous body-builders, swimmers and runners. The most remarkable was Larry Scott, the original Mr. Olympia, who at 65 looked exactly like he did at 27, and I mean exactly, from head to toe, even his face.

I also was impressed by Bill Pearl, former Mr. Universe, who at 71 was getting up at 2:30 every morning to train for two and a half hours.

Beside exercise, Eaton discovered only one common denominator among senior fitness stars: everyone of them believed in a higher power. Clearly, the faith of senior fitness stars empowers their success.

Pearl and former Mr. Olympia, Frank Zane, introduced me to Sri Chin Moy, a yogi living in New York City who was inspired to take up weight lifting in his 50s and who achieved the impossible.

A whimp by anyone's standards, this man exemplified the power of faith. He did a 2.5-inch calf-raise with 8,100 pounds! That's five times more than had ever been done by one of the strongest men in the world, a guy who was huge. Most incredible, he held up with one arm 7,900 pounds.

Officials from the British Weight Lifting Association scrutinized Sri Chin Moy and gave him a stamp of approval. So did the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons which invited Sri Chin Moy to their annual conference sure they would prove him a fake.

The conference was attended by Dr. Larry Pedagana, sports physician, who told me, "The only thing I can tell you is that we don't know how the man is still walking around."

When asked why he performs seemingly impossible feats of strength, Sri Chin Moy's explained that he was showing people there is an easier way.

When asked how he could lift so much his answer was, "I do not do these things with my ego, but with my heart. My faith in God gives me the strength."

Whether or not you believe in God, attitude is still number one. Positive thoughts and feelings lead to positive action and results.

I recommend that seniors envision themselves as they would like to be, vigorous, vibrant and energetic, active with a functional, healthy body and mind, enjoying life. He also says that envisioning the outcome they desire needs to be accompanied by the feelings they associate with that outcome.

The feelings we associate with the outcome empower the vision and help manifest it. This is an ancient form of prayer among the Essenes and Polynesians, practiced today in sports psychology and made famous by *The Secret* book and video.

When athletes visualize performing a task and mentally practice it by imagining themselves doing it, they are more successful. There is a well known experiment in which college students were divided into three groups. One group practiced shooting free throws, the second group sat in a classroom and imagined themselves shooting and making free throws, and the third group did nothing.

After an hour, all the groups were tested in their ability to shoot free throws. The group that performed best was the one that imagined themselves shooting and making free throws.

When I exercise at the gym I close my eyes and imagine myself lifting the weight a certain number of times, then actually lift it, and that is how I get stronger.

I am convinced that health and fitness is a game we play first in our head and heart. Imagination is the key to success. Someone said that if you can imagine it you can create it.

Without positive thinking in the form of faith, prayer, creative visualization or imagination, we may be defeated by doubt, fear and

uncertainty.

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For most seniors, its not quite as simple as “Just do it!” It helps to **know** they can do it. We all need role models at every age who inspire us to reach our potential. If I can stay fit and healthy despite four potentially debilitating injuries, imagine what you could do!