Lifestyle Guide

This reference list is a working overview of the main principles of a sustainable fitness lifestyle. This list will include the best practices known through research, how to implement each practice, and brief explanation as to why it works. This list will likely answer many questions you may already have, but if you have more, ask away. I base my templates on the principles in this list, so you will gain insight into how I structured your program and what to expect in the future.

Also, Menno Henselmans has graciously allowed me to redistribute his own guides on Optimizing Biorhythm/Sleep Quality and Stress Management, which are included along with the rest of your Client-only content. Please read both guides along with this list that I'm presenting you here for a more comprehensive insight.

What: Respecting your Circadian Rhythm
How: Keeping your wake time, meal times, training time and sleep time as consistent as possible. They should all be kept within windows of an hour or so for your body to adapt.
Why: Your Circadian Rhythm (CR) is a daily cycle of biological activity that roughly follows a 24-hour cycle. Sleeping and waking is probably the most noticeable cycle of activity that follows this pattern. However, nearly every process, from going to the bathroom to weight training, has an "ideal" time of day to be performed relative to your CR.

To quote Menno Henselmans (also, read his article on the **ideal time to train**):

> *"Simply put, at different times of day your body is primed for different types of activities. When your biorhythm gets desynchronized from your daily agenda, your body does not function optimally. The results of this include a decreased metabolism, more cortisol production and less anabolic hormone production, lower insulin sensitivity, poorer recovery from exercise, a worse cholesterol profile, more hunger, impaired mental performance and lower sleep quality. Not to mention feeling worse. It's not an understatement to say that practically everything you do benefits from a stable, synchronized circadian rhythm."*

Hint: all of those things are bad. To avoid this, we must be consistent with what we do across days. This especially goes for waking up, meal times, training time and sleep time. Your body will adapt to what you continually expose it to so that it can better accommodate to the imposed demands. You don't have to meticulously watch the clock and nail everything to the exact minute, but you will be best served to keep these activities within a 60-90 minute window each day. Note that everyone's CR won't be exactly the same, and things like shift work will alter everything. If your block of time that you sleep differs dramatically from the general midnight to 8 AM, expect all of the other items on the clock to be shifted (clock diagram can be found in Menno's guide to sleep quality, mentioned above. Read it!).

What: Improving Sleep Quality
How: Sleeping 9+ hours a night when possible, restricting blue light exposure and caffeine to daytime hours, blacking out the room you sleep in, making the room cooler (~68 degrees), and supplementing with Melatonin (if necessary).
Why: Sleep is arguably the most important and most overlooked aspect of any fitness-focused lifestyle. Sleep is not only the premiere time for mental and physical restoration, it will also allow you to be your most productive in your waking hours.

Since the invention of artificial light, we've been able to strong arm Mother Nature and get away from our natural instinct to rise and fall with the sunlight. Most lights and electronic devices actually function as "artificial sun," meaning when we look at lights or phone screens, our body still thinks we are experiencing daylight. This is due to the blue spectrum of light being emitted by these lights and devices.

To counteract this, you'd be best served exposing yourself to real sunlight during the actual daytime. Novel, I know. Blue light isn't all bad, and is actually necessary to sync up your body clock and affirm that you are actually experiencing day time. But it's when we take our phones into bed with us or work on our computers into odd hours of the morning that we run into trouble.

Blue light reduces the production of Melatonin, which is a vital hormone for your body to secrete if you want optimal sleep quality. This is why blue light is important in the daytime, and the last thing you want to expose yourself to when it's dark outside. If you can't get outside in the daytime regularly, use an artificial light box (very inexpensive on Amazon) every morning upon rising. At night, you can invest in blue-light blocking glasses (think Blu-Blockers) and orange-tinted lights. Or, you can take the easy route and just turn lights and devices down/off in the hours leading up to bedtime.

A great program to help you out on your computer on nights that you just can't get away is f.lux. It will automatically remove the blue spectrum of light from your computer screen as the sun sets in your area. You can also dim the lights and rediscover simpler hobbies, like actually reading real books. You can even bust out the candles, just don't burn your house down.

Caffeine should be treated similarly: it doesn't block Melatonin production, but it binds to adenosine receptors in the brain. Typically, when adenosine binds to these receptors, you feel tired. With caffeine blocking the way, you're basically artificially circumventing sleep.

Caffeine has a half-life of roughly six hours, meaning half of the amount of caffeine you ingest is metabolized in six hours. That means if you had 300 mg of caffeine (a typical Starbucks coffee) at 4 PM, you'd still have roughly 150 mg caffeine present in your system at 10 PM.

I generally only advise people to consume caffeine shortly after waking up to help sync their body clock (much like light exposure). Excessive caffeine, as popularized in the fitness industry today, can not only detract from sleep quality, but also slow your adaptations to strength training due to **reducing your Testosterone:Cortisol ratio**. Caffeine also doesn't provide much (if any) performance benefit, so I don't recommend pre workout caffeine other than for morning trainees.

Blacking out your room and getting it to a relatively cool temperature are also positive improvements to "sleep hygiene." Blacking out the room should be obvious from the rationale above, but cooling the room down may seem counterintuitive. However, if you keep your body temperature too high, your core temperature won't be able to drop low enough to allow you to enter the more restorative stages of sleep.

Concretely, you can buy blackout curtains, cover or remove anything that emits light in your bedroom, turn of all screens in your room an hour or two before sleeping, rocking an old school eye mask with ear plugs, and turning the thermostat down to 68 degrees (YMMV).

Finally, if you make all of these changes and still feel that you didn't fully recuperate after a full night's sleep, you can experiment with supplemental Melatonin. Yes, it's the hormone that your body secretes at night, but it won't negatively impact your body's own production of it. It can make it easier to fall asleep and can improve sleep quality. Supplement with 1-3 mg within 30-60 minutes of sleep to find your sweet spot.

More tips to improve sleep quality can obviously be found above in Menno's write up (seriously, read it!) and from sleep expert Shawn Stevenson (**found here**).

What: Stress Management
How: Actively solve problems, meditate and foster positive social bonds.
Why: Did you know that exercise is actually a form of stress? While physical stressors differ from mental stressors, most stressors have the same negative hormonal implications when chronic exposure occurs. The most prevalent hormone implicated with chronic stress is cortisol. As you've seen in Menno's guide to stress management, chronically high cortisol has myriad negative health implications:

- *Reduced energy expenditure.*

- *Increased appetite.*

- *Carbohydrate cravings.*

- *Poorer carb tolerance and impaired nutrient partitioning.*

- *Up to twofold lower strength development.*

- *Up to twofold slower recovery post-exercise.*

- *Reduced muscle growth.*

- *A roughly twofold increase in injury risk.*

Not to mention, negative impacts on sleep onset and quality. To avoid this, you must make a habit out of minimizing, but not completely eliminating, stress.

One way to help this would be to actively confront problems in your life versus passively coping with them. It sounds stupidly simplistic… because it is.

Think of the one crush you had in your life that never seemed interested in you in return. Try as you might to win them over, they would never really change their mind, but they wouldn't give you a straightforward answer because they didn't want to "hurt your feelings." Newsflash: getting let down softly is Passive Coping 101.

Confront the issue, resolve it, learn from it, and move on. It's as simple (and as difficult) as that.

Meditation can be seen as a form of passive coping, but as you've seen in Menno's writeup on stress management, this form of passive coping makes active coping more effective. You don't

have to make it a spiritual practice, but it would be wise to incorporate a daily meditation practice.

Get in a quite, non-stimulating space and simply focus on your breathing. As easy at it sounds, it's actually very hard to get used to initially. But just like anything, you get better with practice. Meditation is essentially detraining you from the hectic, multi-tasking lifestyle encouraged by present day society. You've been living in that style of life for X number of years already, so don't expect to be a master of meditation after five minutes of your first session. When random thoughts pop into your head (and they will, in spades), simply discard them and restart the focusing process.

Start small and slowly expand you length of time, from five minutes all the way up to a half-hour, or even longer if time permits. Meditation will allow you to stay more present in the moment throughout the day and will make active coping much less daunting.

Finally, I have observed something entirely anecdotally that could also pay dividends in terms of well-being and stress management. Any lengthy endeavor will inherently come with sacrifices, especially something like pursuing a physique goal. It requires a level of commitment many people simply can't understand until they go through with it themselves.

Often times, people restrict their social life on purpose when trying to take on a complex task. This is somewhat understandable: sometimes when work or a project is your priority, you simply run out of hours in the day to allocate to things. But when it extends beyond simply a logistic issue into a cognizant choice, that's when problems arise.

In a way, avoiding social situations just to try to stay strict is a form of passive coping. You aren't addressing the problem at hand, which would be to find out how to navigate social situations effectively.

Make your goals known to friends and family so that they can respect your restrictions. In society today, so much interaction revolves around food. But there are ways around this. If you join your friends out for a meal, you can ask if a more customizable meal can be made for you (almost every restaurant has grilled chicken and broccoli that they would love to sell you). You can potentially skip the meal and just enjoy the conversation. Or you can restrict calories in the day before and after the big meal and indulge, so long as you plan ahead and fit the meal into your plan.

Simple steps can be taken to circumvent the societal norms of staying up late, partying, and hating the way you look as a result. Implement them.