

THE ART OF LIFTING



BY GREG NUCKOLS & OMAR ISUF

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Foreword

by Mike Israetel, Ph.D

Knowledge is power, everyone knows that. The more you learn, the better you get at whatever you're learning. That's definitely true and the realm of fitness is no exception. In the quest to add muscle, burn fat, and get stronger, a greater understanding of the mechanisms and methods always yields better results. Alright so knowledge is good, got it. Let's get us some! But wait, where to look?

For perhaps the first time in history, humanity is producing knowledge at a rate many orders of magnitude faster than it can be consumed. Today there are likely more articles written about fitness in one day than the average human has time to read even if that's all he did. Just fitness articles from sunup to sundown, with maybe a short walk to liven up from the afternoon slump. MORE KNOWLEDGE! That's great, right? Definitely. But just as is supposedly the case with money, "more knowledge, more problems" may have some merit here. There are so many resources on knowledge about the best ways to get fit that

you'll definitely not have time to examine them all. The sort of bad news is that not all sources of knowledge are created equal ... some authors, books, articles, videos and posts get it wholly right, some mostly right, some partially right, and some barely right at all. In fact, some get it plain old backwards wrong a bit too often for comfort.

The dissemination of misplaced, misinterpreted, misapplied or just plain incorrect information on fitness is so prevalent that I dedicate a whole block of teaching in my Essentials of Personal Training class just to covering common fads and fallacies in the fitness industry, from wacky supplements to bogus bosu balls and INSANE fad workouts promising stellar results in no time at all. Not only can training and diet info be plain wrong or misguided, it may also be poorly prioritized. You have only so much time in the day or week to educate yourself about the best paths to fitness, so ideally you want the information that's going to make the biggest difference. The best info on training and diet for most people is the kind that describes the most fundamental and effective mechanisms and techniques. It's the kind that gives you the biggest bang for your reading buck, and not the kind that sends you on endless PubMed searches to see just how much ibuprofen you really need to blunt fractional synthetic rates by 57%.

Enter *The Art of Lifting*. Greg and Omar have managed to collect and present information on fitness that meets two essential criteria. First of all, every single piece of information in the text is concordant with theory, experiment, and best scientific and practical understanding. In other words, the methods, mechanisms, and explanations in this text are pretty much all correct. Secondly and perhaps just as important, this book gives you the most important information needed

for your fitness journey. Greg and Omar have not only amassed a great deal of correct information, they have assembled only that information which is going to have the most effect on your results, plain and simple. And you know what, they even threw in an extended conversation about elements of fitness enhancement which are not powerful in their ability to change your strength and appearance, which can save you a great deal of time by allowing you to avoid unproductive forays into mind-numbing and barely-relevant details.

This book is an eloquent distillation of the most effective interventions available in diet and training. It is presented without the overwhelming technical jargon that tends to bog down most other works of this scope, and will be accessible yet greatly informative to a wide range of readers, from layperson to fitness specialist. Now that I'm a professor of exercise science, I benefit in my own training from the knowledge on fitness I have accumulated through more than a decade of education and experience. But it wasn't always thus. When I was 16 and new to the fitness community, I knew barely a thing and it pains me to recall the sorts of materials I read to get "informed." On that note is my conclusion to this foreword and the only main critique I have of this book: that it didn't come out sooner. If only 16-year-old me could read it and benefit from its voluminous insight. I'd be bigger, leaner, stronger, and certainly carrying less injuries today. But such is life. Though, I am working on a time machine that could fix that problem. Until I finish that contraption and take over the world, enjoy this book and read carefully. If knowledge is power, this book is a nuke.

Stress

(Chronic/Systematic)

Why obsessing about the stuff that doesn't matter can mess you up.

Stress is a very huge, very important topic. If you're interested in it, I'd recommend you check out the work of Robert Sapolsky. His academic work is top-notch, but if you're not interested in wading through journals, his book *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers* is very accessible and a must-read.

Stress is important because it affects every part of your body and your life. It affects your perceptions, your nervous systems, your organs, and (the part you probably actually care about) your performance in the gym and how well you recover from exercise.

Stress can come from anywhere. It could be from training; it could be from your overbearing boss or how much homework you have; it could be a fight with your significant other; or it could be the jerk that just cut you off in traffic.

Your body is very well-equipped for handling acute stress. When a rabid dog jumps out from behind a tree and your heart pounds, your pupils dilate, and the world starts moving just a little bit slower, that's your acute stress response

Stress

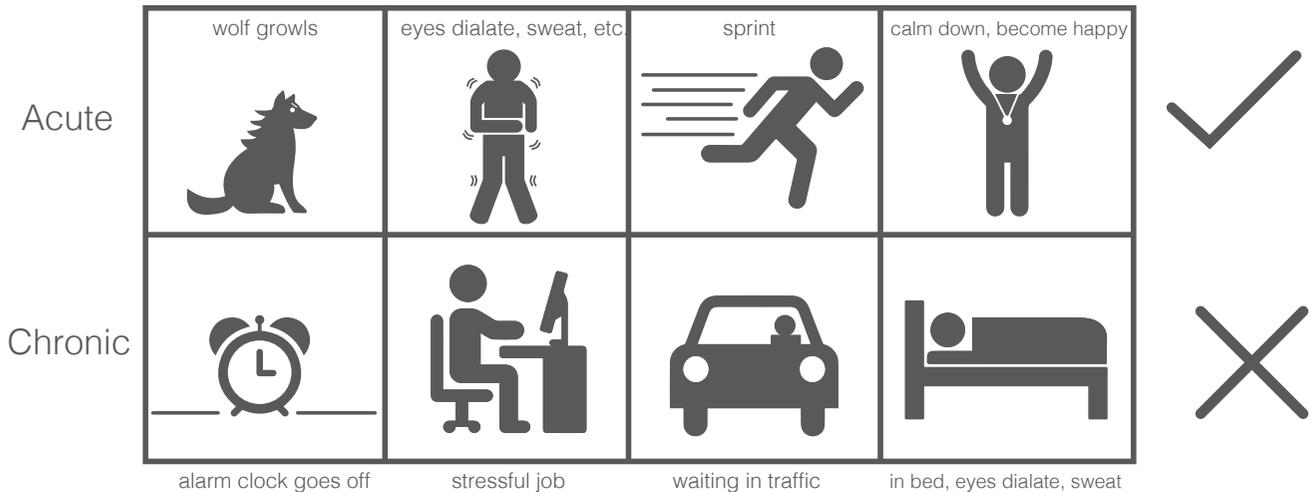


Figure 10.1

kicking in. It gives you the focus to deal with threats and kicks your metabolic systems into high gear to give you the energy to run away or engage in a fight to the death. After the stressor has passed, things go back to normal.

Your body is not so well-equipped for handling chronic stress. When your overbearing boss is criticizing and micromanaging you for 8 hours every day, you can't run away at full speed or engage in a fight to the death. Well, you can, but both responses are generally frowned upon. This chronic stress can affect your body in profound and negative ways. (See this concept illustrated in **Figure 10.1.**)

Stress is what signals your body that it needs to adapt to something. Your body sees something as a threat, the stress response kicks into high gear, and it causes adaptations that leave your body better equipped for handling that stress

in the future. As previously mentioned, that's what happens with training. Lifting weights is an acute stressor, your body senses the tension as a threat to the integrity of your muscles and connective tissue, so it adapts by making your muscles, bones, and tendons bigger and stronger.

However, in a situation of chronic stress, your body's ability to appropriately adapt to a stressor is compromised. In this instance, you stress your muscles in the gym, but they can't heal and grow as well as they'd otherwise be able to. It's not just what you do in the gym, how well you eat, and how much you sleep that determines how well you adapt to training and how recovered you'll be for your next training session (although those things certainly matter). Chronic stress from every other realm of your life matters as well.

This was illustrated in a [recent study](#) in which participants did 6 sets of leg press to failure. The group with low stress was recovered and back to full strength two days later, whereas the group with high stress took four days – twice as long – to recover and was sorer and more fatigued in the days following the exact same workout.

Minimizing stress in your life and finding productive avenues for venting stress is crucial for long-term progress in the gym and long-term health. **Figure 10.2** on the next page lists some tips for helping you do just that.

7 TIPS TO HELP YOU MANAGE STRESS

1. If at all possible, avoid stressful situations.
2. Minimize your time on social media, or just wasting time in general (i.e. TV).
3. Practice some form of meditation.
4. When you feel yourself start to get stressed out, close your eyes, take 5-10 deep, diaphragmatic breaths, inhaling and exhaling 5-6 seconds apiece.
5. Spend more time with your family and friends or engaging in rewarding hobbies.
6. Don't dwell on past mistakes and failures.
7. Get organized.

Figure 10.2