

Strength is Never a Weakness

By: Public Safety Committee, WNC

“Strong people are harder to kill than weak people, and more useful in general” – Mark Rippetoe, author of Starting Strength

We’ve been bombarded by the scientific reports, the independent medical studies, and even CDC data demonstrating that obesity, along with its related afflictions of diabetes and heart disease, increases the risk of developing severe responses to COVID-19, and in many instances death due to several negative outcomes converging on an exposed patient. Some of the negative outcomes from obesity at play during the present pandemic include restrictive biomechanics (*excess abdominal fat pushes the diaphragm into the direction of lungs impinging on function and airflow*), negative physiology (*obesity increases the blood’s tendency to clot*), decreased immunity (*obesity causes the body to produce and store fewer immune cells*) and chronic inflammation (*fat cells secrete inflammatory cytokines, and the resulting chronic and overactive inflammation has been linked to severe COVID-19 symptomatology*).

Yet the current pandemic seems to force us into the behavior patterns that ultimately result in an obese diagnosis. We are required to remain indoors for other than essential activities, leading to more sedentary lifestyles, which itself tends to encourage excessive consumption of alcohol and intake of less nutrient dense foods; the proverbial three-punch knockout. At this point, you might be self-reflecting over the many stressful nights you’ve had over the past sixteen months, staring at the news stories flickering on the television and wondering if you are going to have a job in the coming days or weeks or months – all while cradling a pint (*or quart? Hey, no judgments here*) of Ben & Jerry’s in one arm and gulping down a glass of wine with the other like you were a main character from Game of Thrones. I get it, times are tough, and they seem to keep getting tougher. It also doesn’t help that the unending negative news cycle seems to follow us everywhere, from home, to work, to the grocery store, to the coffee shop and so on, and is, quite frankly, enough to knock even Jenny Craig off her diet.

Well, what should we do? Should we seek assistance from a therapist? Should we meditate? Should we update our resumes and engage in career counseling? Yes, do all those things if they are options to you, and engage in all positive steps forward that are within your power – but don’t forget what Mark said, “Strong people are harder to kill...” Sounds a bit cliché and generic, I know, but since the beginning of our evolution stronger species have outlasted, outran, and outperformed their counterparts, as well as the species above them on the chain, to survive and thrive. Stronger cavemen survived because they were more capable of outrunning danger (*humans have evolved to be better at endurance running than any animal in the world*) and had the strength to make them more successful at hunting, fishing, and fighting other humans. That concept of strength and being strong, while having evolved to become more civilized, is still valid today. Strength is in our genes.

Accordingly, if you are generally inactive, do a little more today than you did yesterday in terms of physical output. Go for a walk. After a few days, go for a run. Add in body weight squats (*just sit down on your couch and stand up for multiple repetitions if you are unfamiliar with the squat exercise*). Try to see how many pushups you can do in one minute. Can’t do pushups? Try them with your knees in

contact with the floor. Still too hard? Try them against a table, and increase the resistance by standing further and further away from the table after a few sessions. Having difficulty picturing the exercises as I am writing them? Try searching on the internet for exercises that you are physically and mentally capable of performing. One such website that provides functional exercises in the home setting is CrossFit.com and their specific “At Home > Workout” online archive. If you are capable of handling more volume or resistance then all you need is access to the internet and YouTube to search out a veritable treasure trove of training material that you can modify to implement to your specific training objectives. The point here is simply to form a base of strength, then get strong (*relative to your capacity and capabilities*), then work to get even stronger. It will break up the monotony of sheltering in place and staring at endless Zoom meetings. Additionally, along the path of your journey to greater strength, you’ll likely reduce your biomarkers for disease, by reducing your blood sugar levels and increasing insulin sensitivity, decreasing your risks for heart disease and failure, and increasing your immune system function. While you can’t completely avoid all exposure to the coronavirus, by developing a stronger (*and fitter*) version of yourself you will be a much more difficult victim for COVID-19 to take from this world.