

## Gurus for Life

Why change your diet when you can change, well, everything? Meet your new life coach. by Wing Sze Tang

The personal trainer is evolving," notes Mark Stables, a certified personal trainer and the owner and director of Toronto's Benchmark Group. Benchmark and other organizations are riding the growing wave of wellness, or lifestyle, coaching. The distinction between the old and new guards is significant: While your personal trainer is focused on getting your body in shape with exercise and maybe nutrition, lifestyle coaching has emerged with a pledge to overhaul your mindset.

As a concept, lifestyle coaching dates back to the 1980s, when American financial planner Thomas J. Leonard found that his clients wanted help managing their lives beyond money matters. He spearheaded the first formal coach training program as well as the International Coach Federation, a non-profit professional association that now claims more than 130 chapters (including ones in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal).

What's driving growth in the field today is the gap between health knowledge and actual behaviour. We all know, basically, how to live right. But who's executing? "We've been telling people what to do, as far as how to have a healthy lifestyle, for over 20 years," says Susan Cantwell, founder of the Lifestyle Coaching Institute, based in Fredericton, and author of *No More Excuses! Breakthrough Thinking for Real Weight Loss*. "We hold, as a general public, more information than we ever have about health risks and proper eating habits. We've told and told and told. Yet we've got the worst overweight and obesity stats we've ever had. Telling doesn't work." After 10 years as a personal trainer, Cantwell made the leap to lifestyle coaching and caps her roster of clients at 20.

"I could work with you really intensely, and you could change your whole body into whatever you want—you could go Hilary Swank or you could go Kate Moss," says Stables. "But at the end of the day, if you don't understand the dynamics behind the change, you're not going to stick with it."

## The Four Habits of Effective Losers

What it really takes to drop pounds. by Kathy Magilton, CFC

It's enough to make you throw your hands up in surrender and dive under the cashmere throw with a pint of Chunky Monkey. The overwhelming majority of women who diet to lose weight will gain it all back within five years. Professor James Hill, director of the Center for Human Nutrition at the University of Colorado, noticed that while people do seem to be very good at losing weight (and any wacky diet can achieve that), when it comes to maintaining, results are dismal. Looking to unearth the secret knowledge of the elite few who manage to shed the pounds for good, in 1993 Hill co-created a master list of their successful techniques. The National Weight Control Registry was born. While the criteria call for a minimum loss of 30 pounds maintained for at least one year, the average on the registry is an impressive 67 pounds kept off for five and a half years.

A CNN health report came up with seven basic techniques that seem universal to the approximately 4,500 registrants: 1) expect failure (in other words, accept that losing weight is a skill that needs to be learned); 2) don't punish or deny yourself (you will have a blowout at some point, so just get back on track); 3) weigh yourself often; 4) exercise daily; 5) be more active (you know, take the stairs); 6) eat low-fat,

high-complex carb foods (in other words, not the Atkins model); and 7) eat small meals throughout the day, rather than going hungry between your three squares.

Sound easy? Hill thinks he can make it even simpler. While he agrees that CNN's interpretation of his data is "generally on target," he broke down the information for us into four keys that are even more easily digested:

- **Get 60 to 90 minutes of activity per day.** When a dieter plateaus after an initial weight loss, exercise is the deciding factor in continued success. Hill stresses that the minutes do not have to be consecutive, and they can also incorporate traditional gym workouts and less intense activities. In fact, walking is the form of cardio most often reported among registrants.
- **Eat breakfast every day.**
- **Weigh yourself frequently** (at least once a week).
- **Follow a low-fat, high-carb diet** (about 24 per cent of calories from fat).

Just by following these steps, he says, "Our work suggests it is possible to lose weight and keep it off." So step away from the Chunky Monkey, throw off the cashmere, and embrace the tried-and-true methods of successful—and, more important, permanent—weight loss.

The "coach" term is admittedly nebulous, even for those in the industry. "Certifications have gone from basic to more of a holistic approach," explains Stables, whose CV is peppered with credentials, including a lifestyle coach licence from the Lifestyle Coaching Institute. "Wellness coaching encompasses all things in health. It means exploring nutrition, stress and weight management, fitness, any precursors to disease, and then picking a coach approach as opposed to a trainer's." He readily acknowledges the concept's flaw, however. "It is pretty vague to people. When my friends ask me, I joke and say, 'I'm one part shrink, one part behaviourist, one part psychotherapist, one part trainer, one part coach.'"

Personal trainers follow a "do as I say"

tactic, according to Stables. "It's very directive. You take clients through their exercise programs," he says. Wellness coaches are a different beast altogether. Cantwell explains, "Coaches allow clients to have a shift in perspective, to see things they haven't seen, so that they can make choices."

The objective can be as small as curbing a latte addiction or as grand as triumphing over cerebral palsy in order to lose weight. The two most important words, Stables says, are "ownership" and "accountability." The first step is to translate that hazy sense of yearning into sharply defined aims. After assessing his client's readiness to change, Stables creates a long-term blueprint, then zooms in on three-month SMART goals: specific, ▶



measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. It's the same technique used in business boardrooms everywhere. After the goals are set, 40-minute sessions once a week concentrate on achieving the day-to-day targets.

Whatever the goal, wellness coaching relies on baby steps for success—a sharp contrast to no-food, no-rest, no-fun regimens that may help you shimmy into a bridesmaid dress but can't keep you fit forever. "For me to go in and say, 'You need to change all these things'—that's too much," explains Leah Epstein, a Can-Fit-Pro-certified nutrition and wellness specialist, personal trainer and founder of the Toronto-based Equilibrium Lifestyle Management. "A diet is not realistic. It's not going to fit. If you make very small changes, incremental changes that you can see yourself doing for the long term, that's when you see successes."

Epstein, who has the fresh-faced effervescence you'd expect from a professional pep talker, tailors each of her programs and delivers right to your doorstep, whether that means your home, your office, or by boat to

your cottage in Muskoka. Her three-month Equilibrium package, which includes three one-hour personal training sessions and one half-hour nutrition and wellness consultation per week, will set you back \$2,520.

"At gyms, personal trainers do virtually the same thing with every single person," observes Mythili Viswanathan, a PhD student who has been going to gyms on and off for eight years. "For them, it's one hour, and then they're moving on. I never learned anything." Last October, hoping to shed the pounds she gained from a course of steroids taken for back pain, the lifelong vegetarian and carb junkie began a custom-crafted fitness and nutrition program with Epstein. It was much more than just going through the motions. "The whole idea is for you to understand what you can do," explains Viswanathan. "I've changed everything about my outlook toward eating well and exercising."

Nearly all wellness coaches require a commitment of three months or more. "Quite frequently, it takes at least six months to implement behaviour modification," explains

Stables, using a term borrowed from clinical psychology. For wellness coaching, he charges \$350 per month for the first three months, and \$300 per month thereafter. (Personal training is extra.) Planning for relapse is also crucial to success, so that clients can resist temptation and skirt roadblocks.

Cynics will be forgiven for wondering whether these new "health professionals" carry any credibility. According to the International Coach Federation, there are more than 150 coach training programs in North America and the U.K., including "almost laughable self-study courses," granting more than 65 distinct credentials. But beyond dubious Internet schools, more traditional institutions are also eyeing the discipline. The University of Calgary recently introduced coaching as a professional designation program.

"Anyone can call themselves a coach. Now the industry's becoming regulated. That's a great thing," Stables says. He predicts that wellness coaching will go the way of personal training, quickly moving from novelty to niche service to health essential. For some, no handholding's necessary—all the tools for change are already there, and the driving force already deep inside. But for those who can't muster up motivation on their own, a coach can be the edge they need.

## Slim Fast

Lose weight without lifting a finger? Here's the skinny on slimming down with the new fat-melting and cellulite-battling techniques.

by Viiia Beaumanis

Whatever food you do not use immediately as fuel for movement, warmth, growth and repair is converted into fat and stored," Toronto cosmetic surgeon Dr. Stan Gore tells me. And when fat cells reach capacity, they reproduce.

That's the bad news.

Fat cells (known as adipocytes) are stockpiles of energy (read: fat). Each adipocyte has two receptors: an alpha, which encourages it to produce fat (lipogenesis) when you consume too many yummy things like fat, sugar, starch and cocktails, and a beta, which signals it to ►