

THE BIG IDEAS

Mindset Reset #1

Growth-focused mental framework.

Skeletal Muscle

Does a Hero good.

Protein

The undisputed benefits.

Future Projection

Make the connection.

What If I Fall Off?

Don't be a donkeyhole.

"By highlighting muscle as your target for better health, you can create positive momentum focused on what you have to gain instead of what you need to lose."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

Forever Strong

A New, Science-Based Strategy for Aging Well

BY DR. GABRIELLE LYON · ATRIA BOOKS © 2023 · 400 PAGES

"Promoting muscle health is the driving force behind the Lyon Protocol—the combination of nutrition and training instructions with operating procedures that will grant you the power to make real, lasting improvements to your body composition and overall health. Muscle-Centric Medicine® and its protein-forward, strength-training-focused lifestyle will change everything.

My patients' incredible successes demonstrate just how well these lasting, long-term strategies work.

Within one month of adopting my program and shifting your understanding and your approach from fat-focused to muscle-centric, you will likely gain muscle, lose body fat, and have more energy. Once I teach you how to build a protein-forward nutrition plan, to center your training with a focus on healthy muscle tissue, and to establish mindset guidelines for execution and consistency, you will begin to feel better immediately. And then, farther down the road, you will benefit from improved quality of life and increased longevity.

Time and again, I've observed how quickly my patients' energy levels improve, cravings dissolve, and anxieties ease. Most important, after the Lyon Protocol becomes a part of their routine, they almost immediately develop a sense of inner freedom. My practice has shown me that **once my patients prioritized skeletal muscle as an organ, they gain a whole new sense of wellness.**

My goal is to help you achieve extraordinary health. While maintaining muscle mass demands different strategies for each age group and activity level, your ability to survive and thrive—no matter your age—is directly related to muscle tissue health. Muscle-Centric Medicine®, which recognizes muscle as the organ of longevity, is the future of health. Here's your chance to change your life and rewrite your future."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon from *Forever Strong*

Want to be "Forever Strong"? Then this is the book for you.

Dr. Gabrielle Lyon is a board-certified family physician and completed a combined research and clinical fellowship in geriatrics and nutritional sciences at Washington University in St. Louis.

Over the course of a two-decade collaboration with her mentor, Donald Layman, PhD, she has helped to bring protein metabolism and nutrition from the bench to the bedside.

She's also a friend.

We met through [Mark Divine](#) who she met by serving the same special forces community we've been blessed to serve. Her husband is a former U.S. Navy SEAL and her entire family is Heroic!

"Here's a maxim to keep you motivated: the higher your healthy muscle mass, the greater your protection against all-cause mortality and morbidity."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

"Most Americans get more than 50 percent of their calories from carbohydrates. And our collective overeating of starchy, sugary refined carbs has had devastating effects on our metabolism—resulting in rampant obesity, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes. ... Simply put, prioritizing dietary proteins while restricting carbohydrates can reverse metabolic syndrome."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

"By understanding muscle as the key to longevity and taking action to rebalance the effects of losing and gaining muscle, you can slow the process of aging."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

As per the intro quote up there, Gabrielle's perspective is that we need to focus less on *losing* fat and *more* on GAINING MUSCLE. This book, of course, is her how-to manual on how to go about doing that. It's fantastic. Get a copy [here](#).

As always, I'm excited to share some of my favorite Big Ideas so let's jump straight in!

MINDSET RESET #1

"Before we go any further, I want to lay the groundwork for understanding what I consider the 'drivers' of behavior.

Step one is to deconstruct your thinking around health and wellness. Is your mental framework fixed or growth-oriented? The term 'growth mindset,' popularized by psychologist Carol Dweck, reminds us of our own mental flexibility and the reality that reaching our full potential takes time and effort. Our beliefs may be powerful, she explains, 'but they are just something in your mind.' Understanding your own mind will help you embrace the new challenges of adopting a muscle-centric lifestyle. A mental framework that welcomes rigor will help you thrive while leveling up both your exercise and nutrition plans. That's because a growth-focused mental framework is the engine that drives progress.

People stuck in a fixed mindset often get caught up in essentialist notions of themselves ('I'm not an athlete'; 'I don't like health food'; 'I'm gym phobic'; 'I've never been able to stick with a workout plan') and lose sight of their capacity for change. With a growth-mindset approach, on the other hand, we recognize that each of us has the potential to learn new skills and practice new ways of being. Effort is not the end, Dweck insists, but 'your means to an end . . . that [is] learning and improving.' ...

Pairing a growth mindset with internal discipline is crucial. I call this integration a growth-focused mental framework. This approach will help you look forward to learning health-improvement skills and enjoy the process—not because it is easy but precisely because it is not. Through challenge comes mental and physical refinement, and that leads to a meaningful life. It's time to recognize that having an 'easy' life is a delusion laced with unmet dreams and complacency. If you choose the 'easy' path, life will end up being hard; if you choose the hard path, life will wind up easy. I'm here to show you how."

At the end of each chapter, Gabrielle has a little "Mindset Reset."

That one is from the Mindset Reset at the end of the introductory chapter.

Remember Rule #1 of the good, noble, Heroic life...

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE CHALLENGING!!!

When we approach our lives with the right mindset—what Gabrielle calls a "growth-focused mental framework"—those very same challenges we used to complain about become the weights in our optimizing workouts making us stronger all day, every day.

As we've said countless times but it's ALWAYS worth repeating...

Our INFINITE potential exists *outside* our comfort zones. How does it feel when we leave that comfort zone? BY DEFINITION (!), it feels UNCOMFORTABLE.

We need to have the Wisdom to remember that simple fact of reality along with the Discipline to do what needs to get done whether we feel like it or not.

THEN.... We may just find that we can do it all with a smile.

As Gabrielle puts it: "It's time to recognize that having an 'easy' life is a delusion laced with unmet dreams and complacency. If you choose the 'easy' path, life will end up being hard; if you choose the hard path, life will wind up easy."

"Brain scans of people in their forties revealed that a wider waistline was associated with a lower brain volume. ... One longitudinal study that measured the abdominal diameter of 6,583 individuals over time revealed that participants with the largest diameter were nearly three times more likely to develop dementia than those with the smallest diameter. This means that simply being overweight exponentially increases your risk of memory loss."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

"I don't talk much about setting 'goals' for wellness. To me, that framework offers too much room for failure—keeping too many people in cycles of sickness when they deserve the freedom of optimal health. Instead of goals, let's focus on setting the standards necessary for you to reach your future self who embodies strength, inside and out."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

P.S. That reminds me of [Jim Rohn](#). In *The Five Major Pieces to the Life Puzzle*, he says: "We all have to endure one of two pains: the pain of discipline or the pain of regret. The difference is discipline weighs ounces while regret weighs tons."

P.P.S. Right after that first Mindset Reset, Gabrielle says: "The ultimate life hack is hard work." Amen. Let's get to it.

THE LIFE-CHANGING POWER OF SKELETAL MUSCLE

"Skeletal muscle (the muscle that moves bones to control our locomotion) not only constructs our physical architecture but also impacts our physiological infrastructure. A grossly underestimated resource, muscle burns fat, drives metabolism, protects against disease, and so much more.

- Nearly immediate improvements (measurable within two weeks) brought about by increasing muscle health include better blood-sugar regulation, hunger control, and increased mobility.
- Longer-term benefits include a stronger body and stronger bones, an improved blood profile including lower triglycerides, metabolism protection, increased survivability against nearly every disease, and a better mood.
- Muscle-Centric Medicine® harnesses this powerful system to heal disease, build better body composition, boost energy, increase mobility, and combat the conditions associated with aging.

Consider skeletal muscle as your body armor and the Lyon Protocol as your battle plan. *Forever Strong* will show you what to do and how to train your mind to *get the job done*. Nurtured through nutrition, lifestyle, and proper exercise, healthy muscle tissue brings endless health benefits, ultimately holding the key to aging *the way you want to* rather than the ways society has convinced you to accept. The better your habits, the more dialed-in your execution, the more you will be able to attain excellence in this personal sphere. Treat your muscles right, and the results will astound you."

That's from chapter #1: "Shift the Fat-Focused Paradigm."

Muscle. I bet you didn't know it did a Hero THAT much good, did ya?

I didn't until I read this book. (And [Peter Attia's Outlive](#).)

In the section *right* before this one, Gabrielle tells us: "Some of the people I treat have been flooded with plant-based perspectives that have shattered any reasonable nutritional balance and pushed them toward consuming frighteningly high levels of carbs. These folks often wind up struggling with digestive issues and chasing fatigue."

Quick personal question time...

Are YOU following a plant-based, high-carb (and low protein?) approach and fighting fatigue?

And, she says: "The truth is that our society's obsession with fat and lack of focus on skeletal muscle—the internal engine that drives all systems—send people down the wrong path. Over the past decade, I have seen the pain caused by our failed health approaches playing out in the lives of my patients. Like most people, many of them start out with superficial ideas of skeletal muscle—they think about looks, mobility, or functional performance. Strength training can carry stigmas of vanity and 'bro science.' But muscle does far more essential work than improving appearance or athleticism. Instead, this dynamic tissue, which makes up about 40 percent of a person's mass, is the keystone organ of health. Healthy muscle is imperative to a body's function. That's why, if you want to change your body—inside and out—repairing damaged muscle and building new lean muscle mass form the critical first step."

"Losing skeletal muscle means losing the mitochondria that produce energy in your cells. It should come as no surprise that producing less energy leads to fatigue."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

"Remember, while getting older is inevitable, the health declines caused by diminished muscle mass are NOT! A muscle-centric lifestyle incorporating nutritional and movement changes can rewrite your life story."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

"Benefits of a protein-forward diet: balanced blood sugar, increased energy, mental clarity, decreased body fat, improved body composition, reduced cravings."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

Now for some practical tips on what to do...

THE BENEFITS OF PROTEIN, UNDISPUTED

"The recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for protein, which, as we've discussed, represents the minimum amount to prevent deficiency, hasn't changed for thirty years. All existing reliable science makes clear that today's recommended dietary allowances—for protein in particular—are nowhere near optimal. The current RDA calls for 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. I, meanwhile, recommend a baseline of 1.6 grams per kilogram, prioritizing the needs and wellness of the individual. (This recommendation is rooted in groundbreaking research on the leucine threshold necessary to trigger muscle-protein synthesis...)

My prescription, simply put, is that **every adult should consume at least 1 gram per pound of their ideal body weight each day. In particular, your first and last meals of the day should each contain a minimum of 30 grams of high-quality protein.**

One source of food-policy pressure is the WHO, which aims to establish requirements that underdeveloped countries can meet. Like other nutritional guidelines, WHO recommendations are not about optional health for individuals but are about economics and achieving minimum standards of health for the underprivileged. Efforts to make policies accessible to different countries across the world reflect attempts at standardization. Decisions to lower protein recommendations are not about health. To put it plainly, adopting policies concerned with global health would require lowering standards in the US, strictly for inclusivity's sake."

Protein.

It does a body (and its muscles!) good.

Personal question time: How much did YOU eat yesterday?

I repeat: Gabrielle recommends that **"every adult should consume at least 1 gram per pound of their ideal body weight each day. In particular, your first and last meals of the day should each contain a minimum of 30 grams of high-quality protein."**

That's SIGNIFICANTLY higher than the RDA (2x higher, in fact!)—which, as she politely points out, is the MINIMUM required to avoid deficiency and influenced by a number of biases.

As you think about how much (and what kind of!) protein you plan to eat TODAY, you may want to have this in mind...

Gabrielle tells us: "Contrary to the messaging many of us are getting today, a hearty steak as part of your diet is better for you than ultra-processed plant-based foods such as Twinkies, Lucky Charms, and Impossible Burgers. More than 12 million Americans have purged all meat from their diets, according to a recent Gallup survey. And tens of millions more have slashed their consumption of steaks and burgers. Based on USDA data, the US per capita consumption (pounds per person per year) of beef from 1970 to 2020 fell an average of 34 percent with no health or environmental benefits. Yet we still blame red meat for nearly all our health problems. This terrifies me as a physician."

Note: Any time a physician I respect says: "This terrifies me," I pay attention.

And: "High-quality animal protein is the original superfood that plays a pivotal role in health. A recent study published in the Journal of Nutrition concluded that adults need to source 45 to 60 percent of their total proteins from animals to ensure sufficient levels of other nutrients. If people keep shunning red meat in favor of low-quality plant-based foods, including cereals, breads, pastries, and pizzas, chronic disease rates will continue to skyrocket."

She concludes that section by saying: "Blanket advice to eat plant-based with an anti-animal spin deserves much of the blame for surging chronic disease rates."

"No one can accurately argue with the fact that animal products provide higher-quality protein. It's time we stopped thinking of nutrition as either plant or animal but included both in our diet. Red meat is as old-school as it gets—the highest source of bioavailable proteins and amino acids—it's the OG of superfoods."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

Note: I was vegan for over a decade. And, I was one of those super-annoying, self-righteous, vegangelical fundamentalists who WAS CERTAIN I was right and all that. (Hah. Not hard to imagine, eh? Laughing.)

And... Although I don't miss the migraines and moodiness and bloating from those days, I'm committed to NOT being dogmatic about ANY nutritional philosophy EVER again. So... I won't say much more in this context other than this...

If you're plant-based and you feel GREAT (!), awesome. If you're plant-based and you're NOT feeling great, I encourage you to consider being open to other perspectives that may help you get your Energy optimized so you can most fully give yourself to the world.

FUTURE PROJECTION

"Maria and I had a pretty tough heart-to-heart about how her present self was sabotaging her future self, and finally it clicked. First, I introduced her to her future self—that part of Maria who is disciplined and fit and who understands that to keep this future self, she just needs to collapse the distance between now and later. She must allow her future self to be stronger than her present self. This is where the real training comes in—not with weights but with her mind.

Together we got very clear about who she wanted to be and outlined the step-by-step actions that would take her there. Then we put in consequences as a way of establishing guardrails. What worked for Maria was this: every time she let her present self eat the cookies, she would take a stack of twenty singles and throw them out the window of her car. That stung. She hated the waste, so this was a perfect consequence for stepping out of integrity with her future self. Guess how many times she had to follow through with that consequence? Once. It took one time to change the habit forever. Through establishment of appropriate guardrails combined with fostering a tight connection with her future self, we were able to collapse the two selves so Maria could finally reach her goals."

That's from the Mindset Reset at the end of chapter #3 called: "Bulletproof Your Changing Body for Strength at Every Age."

Right after that passage, Gabrielle shares a little exercise. She tells us: "People often suggest that you visualize what you want and how it will feel when you get it. Here's what I found works better: do a future projection of what it will cost you if you hang on to your current bad habits. This is incredibly effective. It highlights what you will have to give up if you continue to make negative choice."

And, she says: "Sit in a quiet place and imagine... If you continue these negative practices going forward, what will it cost you in two years? How about four? How about twenty?"

I LOVE THAT.

It's like a micro-[Quick Trip to Hell](#)—which is one of THE most powerful exercises I know.

So... Think of your current behaviors—with an emphasis on the one or two or three behaviors you KNOW just aren't serving you. Got it? Good. Now fast-forward those two, four, and twenty years. SEE THE EFFECTS on that FUTURE YOU.

Then come back to Today. And MAKE THE CONNECTION between that FUTURE YOU and the choices you're making all day every day.

And... BE NICE to that Future You!

P.S. The research on this stuff is incredible. Check out this +1 called "[You + Your Future Self in an fMRI: Does Your Future Self Look More Like a Stranger or You?](#)" and this +1 called "[Your Future Socks: And Your Current Self.](#)"

"Carve out time for rest and recovery. Prioritize sleep, as this is when the body grows and repairs. Nearly one-third of Americans older than eighteen fail to get the recommended seven to nine hours of sleep. Chronic lack of sleep disrupts skeletal muscle and glucose levels, as well as our endocrine systems and hormones, predisposing us to health issues that include obesity, insulin resistance, and type 2 diabetes."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

"We humans were designed for physical movement, and our bodies are capable of extraordinary feats. Don't think of training as an activity with health benefits. Instead, consider it as a baseline requirement for wellness and an essential component of maintaining health and protecting longevity."

~ Dr. Gabrielle Lyon

WHAT IF I FALL OFF?

"What if I fall off? Don't be an asshole to yourself; it is done. In my practice, I have seen patients continue to beat themselves up daily for falling off their plan. This never ends well. Buddhist teachings give us the concept of the second arrow. The first arrow is the initial experience of pain from failing, a slight, or an attack. Sometimes this first arrow is self-inflicted, other times not. Either way, life comes with first arrows. That's just the way it is.

The second arrow, on the other hand, is the one you can control. That is the one you jab into yourself in the form of negative self-talk, globalizing, self-blame, 'poor me' narratives, or any number of other scripts that we so often jump into following a painful occurrence.

I say, when that first painful arrow comes in, pull it out. Fast. Don't shoot yourself with another. There is no need to compound the pain. What happened has happened. Take a moment to remember all the decisive steps you've already taken in your life that felt impossible at the time. Then remind yourself that you've tackled much harder situations, yet here you are. You will get back up again. And this time, I'll be at your side."

Those are the final words of the book.

And... That's some pretty great advice about what to do when you fall off. It's a very good distillation of [Kristin Neff's](#) science of [Self-Compassion](#).

In short: Don't be an a-hole to yourself. (Hah.)

Or, as we'd say at the Johnson house as we remember the donkey [Ryan Holiday](#) gave us when we first moved to Austin that we have since given to our neighbor...

Don't be a donkeyhole to yourself. (Hah.)

And, *definitely* don't shoot yourself with that second arrow. (Check out [this +1 on The Second Arrow](#) and more wisdom from our Notes on [Thich Nhat Hanh's](#) great book [No Mud, No Lotus](#).)

Rather than shoot yourself with that second arrow in the same spot, how about we 1-2-3 it then practice some Targeted Thinking?

(1) Reflect on what you're doing well and CELEBRATE that; (2) Identify where and how you missed the mark (get SPECIFIC!); (3) Decide how you'll use that data to get a little better.

Then set yourself a new Target en route to being *Forever Strong*.

And go hit that Target.

TODAY.

B

Brian Johnson,
Heroic Philosopher CEO

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About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson is the Co-Founder + CEO of Heroic Public Benefit Corporation and the author of [Areté: Activate Your Heroic Potential](#). He's 50% Philosopher and 50% CEO and 101% committed to helping create a world in which 51% of humanity is flourishing by the year 2051. Learn more at [heroic.us](#).