



Fit After 40: Tips on Becoming Your Personal Best

By Robert Cheeke
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Like many people do, as I approached my 40th birthday, I began to analyze where I stood with my health and fitness. The milestone wasn't cause for a midlife crisis, but rather, an evaluation, taking stock of my fitness and nutrition and how the reality compared with my goals.

I had already been following a [plant-based diet](#) for a quarter century. But as a retired competitive bodybuilder, I found myself comparing my 40-year-old self with my 25-year-old self, wondering if my best years as an athlete were behind me.

Then I thought of my plant-based athlete friends [Rich Roll](#) and [Rip Esselstyn](#), both in their 50s and achieving some of their best physical performances in various sports disciplines, and Caldwell Esselstyn, MD, still active in his 80s. I looked inward and asked myself, "Do I, too, have it within me to become my personal best in my 40s and beyond?"

Developing Routines for Success

Here's what I know: Every day we have 1,440 minutes to make the most of the beautiful opportunities we have to embrace life. During that time, we make choices: what we will or will not put on the end of our forks; what movement and exercise we will or will not engage in; and whether the self-talk that is constantly in our heads will positively or negatively guide our decisions to be carried out each day.

One of the ways to remove the guesswork—and reduce the role that willpower plays—is to create positive habits that become routines. The following are some practices to ensure you're as healthy and fit as possible in your 40s and beyond:

- Start every day with some sort of exercise, even if it's just a short walk, to ensure you have some level of physical fitness incorporated into your day upon waking.
- Before eating or drinking anything else, begin your day by drinking water. Since our bodies (and our muscles, and our brains) are 70 percent water, hydrating can help you get off to a great start and set the tone for the day.
- Make a list of your favorite plant-based whole foods from each category: fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts, and seeds. That way, you will buy foods based on what you will actually eat, which will reduce the temptation to bring unhealthy foods into your house. These favorite foods, then, become your habits and routine, and you'll be fueling yourself with whole foods you enjoy eating on a regular basis.
- Set health and fitness goals so you have something to work toward each day. Don't make them too small or too big, but opt for goals that inspire you to want to live a healthy and active lifestyle. What's your impetus for being healthy in the first place? Your sincere answer will help guide your goals, which will be supported by your actions.
- Beyond a daily morning walk, engage in some sort of physical exercise at least three or four days a week. That could be cycling, swimming, running, weight training, dancing, hiking, or simply going for an additional walk in the afternoon or evening to keep yourself active throughout the day.

By starting your day with a brief walk, some water, whole plant foods, and a review of your personal health and fitness goals, and consciously incorporating other exercise throughout the week, you will position yourself for success no matter what stage of life you are in.

I now have my sights set forward, rather than looking back over my shoulder at who I used to be. Outwardly, I am bigger and stronger than I was at any time in my twenties, and have matched my peak physical muscle mass and strength I achieved in my mid-thirties. I'm confident that some of my best days in health and fitness are ahead of me, and they can be for you too.

Wishing you all the very best in plant-based health and fitness.