

# THE SECRETS OF PERSONAL TRAINERS



Our Christmas present  
to you: top fitness  
tips from 10 of the  
country's finest  
personal trainers

BY DOMINIC CADDEN  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ESA RUOHONEN

THEIR LIVING depends on getting their clients in shape and keeping them there. Along the way, they've worked with thousands of people and filtered many hard truths out of all that accumulated sweat. They've picked their way through the motivational minefield and figured out how to shape bodies, attitudes and habits so clients can reach their fitness goals. Here, 10 of Australia's top trainers share secrets gathered from more than 100 years of combined experience. >>





#### MARK MCKEAN

Strength Coach, Australian Fitness Network's Personal Trainer of the Year 2003, Diploma of Teaching, Diploma of Fitness, PhD (Cand), CSCS

### KEEP STRENGTH IN BALANCE

Mark McKean believes he has worked out the exact ratios that will keep your upper-body muscles in correct proportion to one another so that you avoid injuries and bad posture – and it could increase your bench-press strength

"It's no good just doing bench press to get stronger. You need to make sure that the muscles that stabilise and control the shoulder joint increase proportionally in their strength to improve your bench press faster."

For the prime movers, McKean works on a pull/push ratio of 1:1 – that is, your one-rep maximum (1RM) bench press should equal your 1RM pull-up weight (including bodyweight).

The lower end of the trapezius muscle plays a key role in stabilising the scapula (shoulderblade). If you take dumbbells that are 10 per cent of your 1RM bench press, you should be able to do eight reps of a bent-over trap raise. For this

exercise, stand and lean forward so your torso is parallel to the floor. With elbows straight, raise your arms up until they form a 45° angle between head and shoulder and reach the same height as your back.

Use the same ratio for the external rotators of your shoulder. Straddle a bench. Now bend your right knee and put your right foot up on the bench. Holding a dumbbell with an overhand grip, rest your right elbow on your knee. Your arm should be at a right angle. Slowly rotate your forearm down and across your body [like a windscreen wiper], keeping a right angle at the elbow until your forearm is just below parallel to the floor. Return to the top. That's one rep. Alternate arms and legs.

Your barbell biceps curl for eight reps should be 30 per cent of your 1RM bench press, and your single-arm dumbbell shoulder press should be about 20 per cent of your 1RM bench-press weight for eight reps.



#### MARTHA LOUREY-BIRD

Exercise scientist and author of *Exercise and the F word\**

### GET IN THE GAME

Martha Lourey-Bird believes that in the long term, men stay on track with exercise and diet better when they do some kind of training that has a competitive aspect

"Training for a competition makes you learn how to pace yourself and makes for a longer commitment to exercise, rather than the all-or-nothing approach I often see."

"A lot of guys in their thirties or forties have a health scare that kicks them into action, but any change to a healthier lifestyle works better when they set a goal around the exercise rather than their health. For example, say, 'I want to run in a pub-to-pub race' or 'I want to play competition footy next season'. Sign up for an event or commit to a team, then you can build your training around that. The added benefit is that returning to a sport can conjure up a lot of positive memories and feelings for guys, as well as bringing back their confidence."

"At the same time, it's important to know that for health, it's not all about the specific training you do for your competition – incidental exercise really does make a difference because we're so sedentary. I find it's good motivation to add up the amount of time you spend on your backside every day, then replace 10 per cent of that time with being moderately active."

\* Find out more at [marthaloureybird.com.au](http://marthaloureybird.com.au).



"SIGN UP FOR AN EVENT OR COMMIT TO A TEAM, THEN YOU CAN BUILD YOUR TRAINING AROUND THAT"







**MICHAEL RYAN**  
Star trainer and *Wolverine* sculptor

## SHOCK TO THE SYSTEM

Michael Ryan sculpts movie stars such as Hugh Jackman and models such as Lara Bingle by constantly varying their training to shock the body

"It can be simple things, like changing a grip on one exercise, changing the angle, changing the speed of the repetition or the time under load. I'm really big on changing up the rest period in-between sets. We'll do sets with only 20 seconds' rest, or lift a weight close to your one-rep max, put it down for 30 seconds, then repeat this for six reps. Blow-out sets are a good way to finish as well. For example, end a chest workout with a light bench press, pumping out as many reps as you can – 16, even 20 reps.

"You rarely see someone working opposing muscle groups like chest and back because it's such a hard workout as you're working such major muscle groups, but that's the type of thing that I'd do. Whole-body workouts are another great way to shock the body because they're bloody hard.

"People think that they just have to lift heavier to get bigger. Technically, that's true. But if they understood diet, their results would be exponentially better. Everyone talks about how big Hugh was in *Wolverine*, but at his absolute peak he was only 89 kilograms – it's just that he's shredded.

"That comes from six meals a day, three hours apart and 40 grams of protein in each meal. If you lift heavy weights, you need plenty of carbs, too. Have them up to lunchtime and then back off them towards evening. Try to take the protein from natural food sources, predominantly fresh fish. When you can't do that, you can supplement with a powder."



**PAUL HASLAM**  
*Men's Health* Muscle Matters columnist  
and two-time Mr Australia

## STRETCH RIGHT FOR STRENGTH

Recent research has changed ideas on stretching – and some of the old ways might be robbing you of strength

"People tend to do static stretches in-between sets to 'recover', but when you hold a stretch, it signals to the muscles to turn off and relax. If you're in the middle of a workout, you want that muscle to be ready to produce force, but stretching decreases the force a muscle produces for a number of minutes afterwards.

"Dynamic stretching is ideal before and during a workout because it actually gives you more muscle activation due to the stretch-reflex action. So, for example, before working your chest you might do normal push-ups, then some explosive push-ups (hands jumping up off the floor), then in-between sets do one or two clap push-ups to keep the muscles primed and switched on. For legs, do two or three tuck jumps (on the spot, knees to chest). For biceps, do some quick flexion-extensions, and for triceps, throw a medicine ball."

Haslam suggests saving all your static stretching until after the workout, when you want your muscles to turn off, relax and recover. "The longer you hold these stretches, the better – at least a minute, but up to two minutes will produce good flexibility results."

Don't relax too much, though – flexibility alone won't save you from injury.

"A meta-analysis of studies on stretching in relation to injury prevention found that the main cause of muscle injuries is not a lack of flexibility, it's a lack of strength."



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**NICK CALDWELL**

Director, The Mill, and former SAS officer

## IT'S ALL ABOUT ENVIRONMENT

Three-quarters of applicants for The Mill, a Perth gym run by SAS veterans, will be culled before they complete the membership form. Gym director Nick Caldwell says that's because you have to be selective about where you train and who you train with

"What we look for is attitude, because to us, the gym is a place of work – you do your work, you leave. If you have time to sit and watch TV or look at yourself in the mirror, you're not working hard enough. There are no TVs, no distractions here. If someone's doing a technique incorrectly, we rely on people being able to communicate with each other. You could correct yourself in the mirror, but you don't always have the benefit of a mirror outside the gym. It's also about humility; being open-minded to take on criticism because, at the end of the day, it's our peers who are our best judge, not ourselves.

"To us, talking is stalling. There's a minimum amount of talk to get the job done or have a point clarified, but if you can talk more than that, then you're not working hard enough. We have a no-swearing policy because clients should have mental self-discipline. We punish people for excessive noise.

"If your gym values its equipment over your training goals then they don't have your best interests at heart. It's fine with me if clients have to drop equipment if it means they will be safe when they push themselves to their absolute limit.

"It's best to train with people of varying levels. Guys above your level – who you aspire to emulate – and people below your level keeps it real – it shows you where you've come from and how hard it was to get where you are now."



**AMANDA COOMBE**

Four-time Tasmanian Fitness Professional of the Year and director of Personal Best Fitness

## PERSONAL TRAINING NEEDS TO BE PERSONAL

As a four-time finalist for Australian Personal Trainer of the Year and national expert on personal training, Amanda Coombe explains what to look for in a personal trainer

"Anyone can write an exercise program; it's how it's delivered. Clients should have an experience and learn something every session as opposed to just doing the exercise. You should always be challenged to be a bit outside your comfort zone, but also feel empowered by learning new skills.

"You need a personal trainer who suits your goals and personality. In my case, I work towards clients having a long-term lifestyle change, so even if another form of training might be more effective, I'll do something that people actually enjoy and handle physically and mentally. I usually find that pain's no motivator and it's not good for client retention, but sometimes I get guys who say, 'Look, I don't care how much I hurt, I just want results'. In that case, I might send them to another trainer who suits that style – any trainer should be honest enough to do that.

"Guys almost always respond really well to things written down on paper, so your trainer should have really good records and constantly go back to show you how much you've progressed. And the trainer should always have variations that adapt to your needs and keep things interesting.

For instance, kettle-bell training gives a new lease of life to blokes over 110kg or who've done a lot of training with weights or cardio machines. There's so much cardiovascular work and strength work in the one hit, and there's always a new challenge because they have such a high new technical component.

"In the end though, it's up to your commitment. As I tell my clients, you don't need to pay me to be lazy – you can be lazy on your own."





**MATT THOM**

Director of Fitness Kick and four-time World Fitness Federation pairs champion

## KEEP THE BALANCE

**Matt Thom believes the key to getting lean and staying lean is maintaining the body's acid/alkaline balance**

"The body largely uses fat as a place to dump toxins. When we eat too many acid-forming foods, our body commandeers fat as a place to dump the acid waste so that stress is taken off the liver and kidneys. When we get our body alkaline, we can get rid of fat easier because the body no longer needs to hang onto it as a dumping ground."

Acid-forming culprits include alcohol, prescription drugs and some acidic foods. "For instance, high-protein diets are very acidic because the protein forms acids in the body. In the case of alcohol, the body will always try to metabolise it ahead of anything, including fat, so if you're working out after a big night, your body will burn alcohol as fuel, not fat."

"Another advantage is that when people are more alkaline, their energy levels are more consistent, they feel fitter and are less likely to get sick."

"I tell every person I train to have a tablespoon of barley grass [powder\* in a glass of water] every morning because it neutralises excess acidity in the body. It's also extremely rich in the 92 essential nutrients the body requires – and if you're getting your essential nutrients, your body turns off the hunger response because hunger is largely the body searching for nutrients. For me, barley grass made it very easy to stay lean in the off-season."

\*Go to [fitnesskick.com.au](http://fitnesskick.com.au) to find out more about barley grass powder.



"IN ONE DRILL, I SET MARKERS 6M APART AND CLIENTS RUN BETWEEN THEM FOR ONE MINUTE AT ABOUT 90 PER CENT INTENSITY"



**RUSSELL KEMPSTER**

Director, Prime Motion Personal Training

## BEEP YOUR FITNESS

**Russell Kempster trains applicants for the Victorian Police entry fitness tests. Many applicants trip up on the beep test – a shuttle run between markers 20 metres apart, with the pace required quickening every minute – because their training wasn't specific to the fitness they need**

"They might have done 10-kilometre runs and spent 60 minutes at 75 per cent of their maximum heart rate, but during the beep test they only spend 2-3 minutes at that intensity before the demands move up towards 100 per cent."

To get clients on track for the test – the same test commonly used for selection trials and training in cricket and all codes of football – Kempster incorporates three types of training. The first builds up a base of cardio fitness with 5-6km runs at moderate intensity. As you improve, go faster but keep the distance the same. You do more of these sessions in the first four weeks, then decrease their frequency as the emphasis shifts more to aerobic and higher intensity training. The aerobic training is a 1600m run at a steady pace, aiming to improve your time. Kempster bases this distance on how far clients would have to run to reach their target score in the beep test. The third component is high-intensity interval training, doing the beep test itself and similar drills.

"In one drill, I set markers 6m apart and clients run between them for one minute at about 90 per cent intensity. The frequent change of direction makes their heart rate go up and the lactic acid in their legs build up, which should increase their lactate tolerance."

Kempster also trains clients to pace their runs to hit the line on the beep so they're efficient with their energy. It's also good practice for any field sport where you might have to mark opposition players and preserve energy in case you need to sprint full-bore.







**MATT PATTI**

Fitness Australia's Exercise Professional of the Year 2008-09

## KNOW YOUR GENES

**People have been talking about training and eating to suit your genes for many years – the difference now is that instead of guessing, we can test several genes to see if they are working positively or negatively**

Personal trainer Matt Patti does personal genetic profiling for the executive teams of companies such as QBE through his company FitGenes. There are two parts. The first is to take a cheek swab that is then tested for 15 different genotypes by a lab called Excelgene. Next, clients answer a questionnaire to find their phenotypes – characteristics or behaviours that indicate lifestyle issues that might, for example, put them at high, low or moderate cardiovascular risk.

"We also ask things like what kind of sports did they play when they were younger, which might give us an idea of what activity their physiology is best equipped for," says Patti.

The genotype test results can indicate a client's predisposition to muscle and joint inflammation, detoxification (eg, how much the body hangs onto lactic acid) and the potential capacity for the body to handle high heart rates and changes in the amount of oxygen available. The results are then assessed in relation to the phenotypes. The outcome could mean that two blokes who appear to be on the same level could have very different programs.

"For example, take two overweight guys: one guy's genes put him in the 'at risk' category and his lifestyle issues are exposing him to the risks even more," says Patti. "He might start with walking or low-grade bike sessions, 2-4 times a week. Then we have a guy with positive genotypes, a vast sporting background and a low-risk family history, but he's fallen off the wagon. He might start with a light jog and some cross-training, plus a circuit-based resistance program that cycles exercises for the upper body, then the lower body, then the core exercise and a stint of cardio."

"The biggest mistake men make is when the person who is at risk goes into things too quickly."



**JAMES SHORT**

Joint-winner Fitness Australia's Exercise Professional of the Year 2008

## UNDERSTAND THE "WHY" FACTOR

**James Short believes the activity, not the goal, is the more important aspect of personal training**

"Don't get hung up on the goal – focus on achieving the activities required, then the goals will happen."

"Often when people are simply focused on their goal, they get a setback and go, 'Why do I bother?'. That's where your 'why factor' comes in – you need to identify why the goal is so important to you. So it's not enough to say, 'I want to put on muscle', you have to know why this is so important to you. The answers are what will keep you motivated when you have a setback."

"Don't keep it to yourself, be accountable to someone. Who's on your team? Who can you share your goals, challenges and successes with? Plan out all the activities you need to do towards your goals in three-week blocks. Set rewards and non-rewards in relation to your activities. If you did everything towards your goal, there's a reward. If you missed something, there's a non-reward, which must be emotionally charged, for example, giving your ex-girlfriend a \$200 dinner voucher."

"Always review your goals. Learn from your failures, then take that lesson into the next goal that you set. If you don't, then the failures repeat themselves. But remember, with every goal that you don't achieve there's also a goal in there that you did achieve, for example, you might not have achieved your weight-loss goal, but you achieved more energy, improved fitness, increased confidence and so on – and usually one of these other elements is the real goal."



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