

# Time to get healthy

## Herald editor vows to get in shape with help of personal trainer

*Joe Ferry*

It started a couple of weeks ago when I hit a pothole while cruising down Fifth Street in Perkasio.

A half a block later, my belly was still jiggling. I used to kid with my family that I was going to come up with a scientific formula to measure the phenomena:

*Length of Jiggle (times) Depth of Pothole (equals) Level of Fatness.*

But there was something different about this time, something that didn't seem so funny. Maybe it's because I've turned the corner into my 50s. Maybe it's because I'm tired of getting out of breath when I walk up a flight of steps. Maybe it's because I want to be around to see my grandson grow up.

This time, I'm serious about getting in shape. Oh, I've been in this place before. In fact, the title for this project comes from one of my favorite sayings. Several times, immediately after finishing a big bowl of ice cream, I would loudly announce to anyone within earshot: "That was my farewell to fat. I'm starting tomorrow," meaning, of course, that I was promising to begin yet another weight-loss program. My family would roll their eyes and laugh. They heard that familiar refrain so many times before.

And, true to form, an hour later my chubby little sausage fingers would be digging into a bag of cheese curls.

Well, tomorrow has arrived. I'm finally going to get serious about my health.

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Where to start?

It's clear I can't do this on my own. I've battled my weight problems for more than 25 years. In my teens and early 20s, I stayed in relatively good shape by playing baseball in high school and college. But as I got older, fitness took a back seat to a career, raising a family and keeping up with a house. The pounds just kept adding up.

It's not that I didn't notice. I tried all the fad diets: the Cambridge Plan (an awful tasting shake) in the 1980s, Nutri-System (effective but expensive) in the 1990s, Trim-Spa (who knows what untold damage it did to my body) in the 2000s. They all worked to a certain extent. But each time, I gained back all the weight I lost and then some.

I need help, someone who can demonstrate, educate and motivate me to stick with the program.

In talking to friends and checking out several web sites, my search leads me to Fernando Parades, a personal trainer who owns Fusion Fitness Studio on (appropriately enough) Ferry Road in Doylestown



Township. There is something about his philosophy of "practicality and livability" when it comes to fitness that is appealing. He's not about denial and punishment and pain. Instead, it's a scientific approach, one that takes into consideration the way different parts of the human body interact with each other.

"It's all about education," says Fernando, himself once a fatty with severe back problems. "I give the motivation and support you need to make changes in your life. Each individual is different. I don't try to make you fit into a program."

His enthusiasm is contagious. At our first meeting, he greets me in a booming, friendly voice. No judgement, no intimidation. Within minutes, we strike up an amazing rapport.

One of the first things Fernando does is warn me not to get too hung up on numbers, such as weight or percentage of body fat. In fact, he says, some people actually gain weight when they begin an exercise program because their bodies go through a cell hydration process, the necessary prelude to gaining muscle. The true test of progress, he says, will be how my clothes fit.

I squirm as Fernando scrutinizes each entry I made in a food diary from the previous week, taking notes as he goes along the list, from the crackers and peanut butter for a snack to the tomato pie on whole wheat crust for lunch. He doesn't even flinch when he sees I had a pastrami sandwich on a herb and cheese

roll from Subway for dinner one night.

"At least it wasn't two Big Macs," he says with a big smile.

I think I'm going to like this guy.

In the end, he gives me a B++ for my food diary, complete with a couple of smiley faces, mostly because I ate at breakfast every day. His major complaint is an almost total lack of protein on at least two days. Protein, he explains, helps build muscle, which, in turn, burns more calories, even at rest.

After the food review, it's time for a physical evaluation. It doesn't take long for Fernando, just looking at the way I stand, to realize my body is seriously out of whack. A series of simple tests proves him correct: weakness in my left shoulder, which causes me to slouch forward, and my right hip, which quickly causes fatigue in my thigh and leg when I exert myself.

The next exercise is even more revealing. Despite numerous attempts, I can't balance myself for more than an instant on the wobble board, a round wooden platform with a hard rubber ball on the bottom. But after a 10-minute session on the treadmill, during which Fernando has me walk forward, sideways and backward at a modest, one-mile-an-hour pace, I get on the wobble ball and almost immediately can balance myself for a couple of seconds.

Fernando's conclusion? After years of a mostly sedentary (euphemism for lazy) lifestyle, my brain has lost its ability to tell my muscles how to function correctly. It takes only a few minutes on the treadmill for my brain to dust off the cobwebs and start working the right way again.

That re-awakening will be the key to my fitness, says Fernando.

Even before I begin working out seriously, my journey takes a dramatic twist after a routine blood test to establish some baseline numbers. The results are sobering, far worse than I imagined: my total cholesterol is 203 (it should be under 200); my HDL, the good cholesterol, is 28 (it should be at least 40); my LDL, the bad cholesterol, is 135 (it should be under 130); my blood sugar level is 133 (it should be between 65 and 99).

The last time I had blood work -- about two years ago -- everything was fine. Now, the numbers paint a gloomy picture of a middle-aged man who spends too

much time lying on the sofa eating snacks and not enough time getting physical activity.

Yep, that's me.

Without a major lifestyle change, the trend is toward two outcomes, neither of them particularly appealing: heart disease and diabetes.

Now, instead of a light-hearted attempt to drop a few pounds and get in shape for the summer, it's a serious mission to undo the damage done by years of poor eating habits, minimal exercise and general neglect of my health.

Here's the plan: having identified my problem areas, Fernando will design an exercise plan designed to help me get my body back in balance, improve my core strength, reduce my cholesterol and blood sugar levels and, hopefully, lose weight. I'll meet with him or his assistant twice a week for the next 10 weeks to evaluate my progress and tweak the workout program as needed. They'll also monitor my food diary to make sure I'm making healthy meal and snack choices.

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I'm doing this in a very public way for a couple of reasons.

One, it will ensure that I stay motivated. Having your story appear in a publication that circulates in two-thirds of Bucks County every week is a powerful

incentive to persevere through the tough times (and believe me, it will be tough).

With more than 40,000 pairs of eyes watching, failure is not an option.

Another reason for putting myself on the hot seat is to help motivate other peo-

ple who might be wrestling with the same demons. If I can get off the couch and away from the dinner table, you can, too.

*(Next week: getting through the first few workouts.)*

## Tale of the Tape

	<b>Week 1</b>
<b>Weight</b>	<b>246 lbs.</b>
<b>Waist</b>	<b>45 in.</b>
<b>Chest</b>	<b>48 in.</b>
<b>Body Fat</b>	<b>21.6%</b>
<b>Cholesterol Total</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>HDL</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>LDL</b>	<b>135</b>