



# PILLARS OF FITNESS

An Officer's Guide to Building a Strong Body —  
for the Indian Frame

LT CDR UPENDRA PRASAD (RETD.)

CALISTHENICS ATHLETE · INFS-CERTIFIED

FOR AVYAANSH

*"Discipline is the most loving thing  
you can give yourself."*

F O R A V Y A A N S H

I was skinny and weak once. No fitness background. No one ahead of me showing the way. Everything I know about building a body, I learned the long way — through fourteen years of trial, error, injury, and the slow patience of showing up.

This book is that road, written down. So you never have to start from zero.

— *Your Dad* 🍷

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A boy from a small Indian town. No fitness background, no money for trainers, no one in the family who had walked this path. He graduated into the 2008 crash, the Navy called, and he said yes — a short service officer with no pension at the end of the road.

Military training humbled him. He was skinny and weak, and it showed. He decided that day to never feel that way again. The gym came first. Then, when he was ready, calisthenics. Fourteen years later: handstands, front levers, back levers, backflips — every kilo of it natural, no shortcuts, no needle.

He is the creator of [icanbefitter.com](https://icanbefitter.com) — a platform built so his son, Avyaansh, never starts from zero. The AI fitness coach he built, **Avya**, is named after him.

MARINE VETERAN

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# WHY I WROTE THIS

A relative called me a few years ago. *"Bhai, I want to get fit. Where do I even start?"* He didn't want a lecture. He wanted one clear thread to pull.

I have been asked that question a hundred times since — by cousins, by colleagues, by strangers on the internet who saw a photo of me upside down on a pair of rings and assumed I was born this way. I wasn't. I was the skinny kid who got winded climbing stairs. The one who avoided the gym because it felt like a place for people who already had the body.

Here is the truth nobody told me when I started, and the reason this book exists: **you have been failing not because you are weak, but because you were handed the wrong map.** The fitness advice you have been drowning in was written for a different body, a different kitchen, and a different life than yours.

You are an Indian — at home or somewhere across the world carrying India inside you. Your body stores fat differently. Your plate is built on rice and roti and dal. Your family shows love by feeding you. The gym influencer telling you to eat six chicken breasts a day does not live in your world.

This book is the map I wish someone had given me. It is built on five pillars — Mindset, Nutrition, Training, Recovery, and Consistency — and on the science of *your* body, not a borrowed one. I have stripped out the noise, the scams, and the lies. What remains is what actually works.

Read it like a letter from someone who has walked the road and came back to show you the way.

*Har Har Mahadev. Let's begin. — Upen*

# CONTENTS

## THE OPENING – WHY OUR BODY PLAYS A DIFFERENT GAME

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01	The Body That Lies to You	8
02	Your Body Plays a Different Game	10
03	The Traps That Hold Us Back	12
04	Fitness Myths & Reality	14

## PILLAR ONE – MINDSET & DISCIPLINE

---

05	My Story: Skinny and Weak to Handstands	17
06	Systems Beat Motivation	19
07	Start So Small You Can't Fail	21

## PILLAR TWO – NUTRITION

---

08	The One Law: Caloric Deficit	24
09	Protein: The Lever Indians Ignore	26
10	Build Your Indian Plate	28
11	Supplements & Deficiencies	30
12	Eating in the Real World	32

## PILLAR THREE – TRAINING · PILLAR FOUR – RECOVERY

---

13	Why You Must Lift	35
14	No Gym, No Excuse	37
15	Recovery: Sleep, Stress & the Cortisol Belly	40

## PILLAR FIVE – CONSISTENCY · THE NEXT GENERATION

---

16	For the Women Reading This	43
17	The 12-Week Starter Protocol	45
18	Track, Adjust, Get Back Up	47
19	Fitness for Kids: Raising a Strong Child	50

THE OPENING

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# WHY OUR BODY PLAYS A DIFFERENT GAME

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Before the plan, the truth. You are not lazy and you are not broken.  
You were handed a map drawn for someone else's body. Let's  
redraw it for yours.

## CHAPTER ONE · THE OPENING

# THE BODY THAT LIES TO YOU

*The scale measures gravity. It has never once measured whether you are healthy, strong, or proud of what you see in the mirror.*

Step on a weighing scale tomorrow morning and it will give you a number. That number feels like a verdict. It is not. It is one of the most misleading measurements in your entire life, and learning to ignore it is the first thing I need you to do.

Your body weight is everything inside you added together — muscle, fat, bone, water, the food still moving through you. It swings a kilo or two in a single day based on salt, sleep, and water. When two people weigh exactly the same, one can look lean and powerful and the other soft and tired. Same number. Completely different bodies.

What you actually care about is not weight. It is **body composition** — how much of you is muscle versus how much is fat. That is what changes how you look, how you feel, and how long you live. And this is where the Indian body hides a dangerous secret.

## The skinny person who isn't healthy

There is a man in every Indian family who is "naturally thin." Never exercised, eats what he likes, stays slim. Everyone envies him. Inside, he may be in more trouble than the visibly heavy uncle, because thinness on the outside can sit on top of high fat and almost no muscle on the inside. We have a name for it now: *skinny-fat*, or the "thin-fat" phenotype.

## 21.2% VS 9.1%

Body fat in an Indian man and a European man at the *same* BMI of 22.3. More than double the fat — at an identical, "normal" weight.

Yajnik et al., "thin-fat Indian" research · Endotext/NCBI

Read that again. Two men, the same height, the same weight, the same number on the scale. One is carrying more than twice the body fat of the other. The scale called them identical. The scale lied.

# YOU CAN BE THIN AND UNFIT. YOU CAN BE HEAVIER AND STRONG. THE NUMBER WAS NEVER THE GOAL.

## The mirror, the tape, the photo

So if not the scale, then what? Three honest measures. The **mirror**, looked at without cruelty. A **tape** around your waist at the navel — for the Indian body this single number predicts health better than weight. And a **photo** in the same light every few weeks, because progress is too slow to see day to day but undeniable across a month.

Weigh yourself if you like — just demote it. It is one data point among several, and the least important one. We are not here to weigh less. We are here to be **leaner, stronger, and harder to kill**. That starts with understanding exactly why your body plays by different rules — which is the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO · THE OPENING

# YOUR BODY PLAYS A DIFFERENT GAME

*This is not a vanity project. For the Indian body, fitness is the difference between a long life and a medicated one.*

Most fitness advice you have ever read was written for a body that is not yours. It was built on studies of Europeans and Americans, for whom a certain weight means a certain risk. Your body — the South Asian body — runs on a different and more demanding setting. Once you understand it, everything else in this book makes sense.

## Same weight, more danger

At any given weight, the Indian body tends to carry more fat and less muscle than a white European body — and to store that fat in the worst place, deep around the organs in the belly. This "thin-fat" pattern means we hit metabolic danger at numbers that look perfectly safe on a Western chart.

## BMI 23 $\approx$ BMI 30

A South Asian can carry the diabetes risk at a BMI of ~23 that a European carries at 30. We are also diagnosed 5–10 years earlier.

Diabetes (American Diabetes Association), 2014

This is why India's own guidelines draw the lines lower than the rest of the world: overweight begins at a BMI of **23**, not 25, and the waist warning sits at **90 cm for men and 80 cm for women**. By global standards you might be "fine." By the standard your body actually runs on, you may already be in the yellow zone.

## The numbers behind the warning

This is not abstract. It is the defining health story of our generation.

# 101 MILLION

Indians living with diabetes, plus another ~136 million with prediabetes. Roughly 4 in 10 adults carry dangerous abdominal fat.

ICMR-INDIAB, *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, 2023

Diabetes, heart disease, fatty liver — for the Indian body these arrive earlier and at lower weights than the textbooks promise. I am not telling you this to frighten you. I am telling you because it reframes the entire project. **You are not training to look good at a wedding. You are training so your body does not betray you at fifty.**

## MUSCLE IS NOT VANITY. FOR YOUR BODY, MUSCLE IS MEDICINE.

Here is the hopeful half of the same truth: the lever that fixes this is one you control. Building muscle and stripping visceral fat directly attacks the exact weakness your genetics handed you. The body that is wired for early diabetes is the same body that responds beautifully to strength training and enough protein. The disadvantage and the cure share an address.

So no more apologising for caring about your body. This is the most rational, highest-return investment an Indian can make. The only thing standing between you and starting is a set of traps — and we name every one of them next.

## CHAPTER THREE · THE OPENING

# THE TRAPS THAT HOLD US BACK

*You already know what to do. Something keeps stopping you. Let's name it out loud — because a trap you can see is a trap you can step around.*

Knowing your body needs training is not the hard part. The hard part is everything in our world quietly arranged to keep you on the sofa with a second helping. These are not your personal failings. They are forces — and most Indians never beat them because nobody names them.

## "Log kya kahenge"

What will people say. The man who starts jogging and is teased for "trying to look like a hero." The woman whose gym membership invites comment from relatives. We are wired to fear social judgment more than we fear disease. So we shrink our ambitions to avoid being seen trying. Decide now: the opinion of people who will not carry your hospital bills does not get a vote in your health.

## "Shaadi ke baad" — the great letting go

There is a script in our culture where you are allowed to care about your body only until you are married, and then you are expected to soften into comfortable middle age. The wedding photos become the high-water mark of a lifetime. Reject the script. The body you build at thirty is the body that lifts your child at forty and walks without a stick at seventy.

## "Healthy means well-fed"

In much of our culture a soft, round body still reads as prosperous, and a lean one as someone who "doesn't eat well." Aunties worry you look weak when you are, in fact, finally getting strong. Love is poured through food: *one more roti, beta*. Learn to receive the love and decline the second serving. Both can be true.

**THE FOOD IS LOVE. YOU CAN KEEP THE LOVE AND STILL SAY NO TO THE THIRD PARATHA.**

## The gym feels like someone else's room

Walking into a gym for the first time is genuinely intimidating — the mirrors, the grunting regulars, the feeling that everyone is watching. They are not; they are looking at themselves. But the fear is real, and it stops millions. The cure is not courage. It is starting somewhere you already feel safe — your own floor, a quiet park — until strength makes the gym feel ordinary.

## The two killers: no time, and too much noise

When Indians are asked why they don't exercise, one answer dominates.

**56%**

say "lack of time" is the number-one barrier — far ahead of every other reason. The honest fix isn't more time; it's a smaller, smarter plan.

Exercise-adherence study, J. Family Medicine & Primary Care

And then there is the noise — a thousand influencers selling a thousand contradicting diets, most of them wrong. You don't need more information. You need the *right* information, once, and the discipline to ignore the rest. That is the whole purpose of this book.

One trap deserves its own chapter, because it is the one that wastes the most money and trust: the lies the fitness industry has sold you. Let's tear them down before we build anything.

## CHAPTER FOUR · THE OPENING

# FITNESS MYTHS & REALITY

*Almost everything you have been sold about fitness is noise. Three true things defeat nearly all of it.*

Before we lay a single brick, let's clear the rubble. You have been fed myths your whole life — by magazines, relatives, and influencers with abs and no idea. Most of them collapse the moment you ask for evidence. And almost every one of them dies to a single sentence:

**ENERGY BALANCE. PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD. ENOUGH PROTEIN.  
MASTER THESE THREE AND THE REST IS NOISE.**

Hold that triad in your mind as we go. Here are the lies that hold Indians back the most.

**MYTH** "Lifting weights will make a woman bulky."

**REALITY** Women carry a fraction of the testosterone men do — building large muscle is extremely hard even for men who try. Lifting makes a woman strong, lean, and shapely, not bulky. This single myth has robbed a generation of Indian women of the exact training their bodies need most.

**MYTH** "Too much protein damages your kidneys."

**REALITY** In healthy people, higher protein does not harm the kidneys — a myth disproven across dozens of studies. (Genuine pre-existing kidney disease is the only exception, and that's a doctor's conversation.)

**MYTH** "Do crunches to burn belly fat."

**REALITY** Spot reduction is a fantasy. You cannot choose where fat leaves; it goes from everywhere as you build an overall deficit. A thousand crunches build the muscle under the fat without removing the fat on top.

**MYTH** "Detox teas and cleanses flush out fat and toxins."

**REALITY** Your liver and kidneys already detox you, for free, around the clock. "Detox" teas are mostly laxatives — you lose water, not fat, and sometimes your money and your gut health with it.

**MYTH** "Lemon-honey water in the morning melts fat."

**REALITY** No food melts fat. There is no enzyme in lemon or honey that touches your fat stores — and the honey just adds sugar. The same goes for jeera water, papaya "fat-cutters," and green tea. Useful as habits, useless as magic.

**MYTH** "Soreness means a good workout — no pain, no gain."

**REALITY** Soreness just means you did something unfamiliar. You can grow with little soreness and be wrecked by a session that built nothing. Measure progress by strength over weeks, not by how much you limp tomorrow.

**MYTH** "You can't build a real body without a gym, supplements, or meat."

**REALITY** Bodyweight training builds serious muscle when you make it progressively harder. Supplements are optional convenience, not magic. And a vegetarian who hits their protein builds muscle just as well — millions of strong Indians are the proof.

Notice the pattern. Every myth sells you a shortcut, a gadget, or a fear. The truth is quieter and cheaper: eat at a slight deficit, train with progressive resistance, get enough protein and sleep, and repeat for longer than you feel like. The rest of this book is simply *how* — built on five pillars, starting with the one that decides everything: your mind.

P I L L A R   O N E

01

# MINDSET & DISCIPLINE

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Your body will follow your mind, never the other way around. Before a single rep, we build the engine that keeps you going when motivation is long gone.

## CHAPTER FIVE · PILLAR ONE

# MY STORY: SKINNY AND WEAK TO HANDSTANDS

*I am not built different. I was the weakest man in the room once. The only thing I had was the refusal to stay that way.*

I want you to know where I started, because if you have ever felt too far behind to begin, my story is the argument against that feeling.

I grew up in a small Indian town. Middle-class family, no fitness background, nobody around me who lifted or ran or thought about their body as something to be built. I finished my engineering degree in 2010, straight into the wreckage of the global financial crisis — the worst hiring year in a generation. I applied everywhere. One door opened: the Indian Navy. I walked through it.

And the Navy humbled me. I arrived skinny and weak, and military training made sure I knew it. I could not do the things stronger men did easily. I remember the specific shame of it — being the one who struggled. That shame became the most useful thing that ever happened to me. I decided, on the floor of that training ground, that I would never feel that weak again.

The gym came first. Slow, clumsy, no idea what I was doing. Then, when I had built a base, calisthenics found me — training with nothing but my own bodyweight and gravity. Years of trial and error. A mentor here and there. A formal nutrition and fitness certification. Dozens of books. Injuries that tested whether I actually meant it.

## 14 YEARS

From a skinny recruit who couldn't keep up to handstands, front levers, back levers, and backflips. No cycle. No needle. No expiry date.

*Every kilo earned — natural, the long way*

I tell you "no steroids" not to boast but because it matters to you. What I built, I built with food, training, sleep, and time — the same tools you have. There is no secret you are missing. There is no genetic gift I was handed. There is only the boring, holy work of showing up.

# I AM NOT YOUR PROOF THAT IT'S EASY. I AM YOUR PROOF THAT IT'S POSSIBLE.

The photo a few pages back — the skinny boy on the left, the lean athlete on the right — has twelve years between the two frames. Twelve years of ordinary days. That is the real lesson of my story, and the reason this pillar comes first: **the body is built by the man you become, not the workout you do once.** So let's build that man — starting with the truth about motivation.

## CHAPTER SIX · PILLAR ONE

# SYSTEMS BEAT MOTIVATION

*Motivation is a guest. It arrives loud, stays a week, and leaves without warning. Discipline is the family that lives there.*

Every January, gyms in every Indian city flood with new members. By March, most of those memberships are dead cards in dusty wallets. The people did not lack desire. They lacked a system.

~80%

of people who join a gym in the new year have quit within about five months. The pattern is so reliable the fitness industry quietly banks on it.

Gym-retention industry data (directional)

Here is what nobody tells you: **motivation is not the engine. It is the spark.** It gets you to start. It will not get you to stay. Anyone who waits to "feel motivated" before training will train rarely, because feelings are weather — they change daily. The disciplined person trains on the grey days too, and the grey days are most of them.

## Become the person, don't chase the goal

The strongest shift you can make is from outcomes to identity. "I want to lose 10 kilos" is a goal, and goals end — you hit them or you don't, and either way the motivation collapses. Instead: "I am someone who trains." That is an identity, and identities don't end. Every time you show up, you cast a vote for the kind of man or woman you are becoming. Miss a day and the world doesn't end — you just cast the next vote tomorrow.

**DON'T AIM TO GET FIT. AIM TO BECOME A PERSON WHO TRAINS.  
FITNESS IS THE SIDE EFFECT.**

In the Navy, discipline was never about feeling inspired. It was about standards that held whether or not you felt like it. You can build the same thing for your body, on a far smaller scale. You do not need military willpower. You need a system so simple and so small that motivation becomes optional.

## Consistency beats intensity — every time

A brutal workout once a week builds almost nothing. A modest workout three times a week, for a year, changes your life. The man who trains "okay" for ten years beats the man who trains "perfectly" for ten weeks and quits. This is the entire game, and almost everyone gets it backwards — they go too hard, too soon, and burn out before the habit ever sets.

So we will do the opposite. We will start so small it feels almost silly — because small is what survives. That is the next chapter, and it is the most important practical thing in this book.

## CHAPTER SEVEN · PILLAR ONE

# START SO SMALL YOU CAN'T FAIL

*The goal of week one is not to get fit. It is to prove to yourself that you are someone who shows up. Everything is built on that.*

Most people fail because they start too big. Fired up on day one, they commit to an hour at the gym, six days a week, a strict diet, no sugar, all of it at once. They last nine days. Then one missed session becomes two, the guilt sets in, and the whole thing collapses. You have done this. So have I.

The fix is counterintuitive: **make the first step so small that failing is harder than doing it.** Not thirty minutes of exercise — two minutes. Not a perfect diet — one extra source of protein at one meal. Not ten thousand steps — a ten-minute walk after dinner. The size of the first habit does not matter. The *repetition* matters. You are not training your body yet. You are training your identity.

## The truth about "21 days"

You have heard it takes 21 days to build a habit. It is a myth.

## ~66 DAYS

The median time for a new behaviour to become automatic — and it ranged from 18 to 254 days across people. Habits take longer than the internet promised. Patience is part of the method.

Lally et al., *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 2010

This is good news, not bad. It means the early clumsy weeks are normal, not failure. You are not broken because it still feels like effort on day 30. You are exactly on schedule. Keep going.

## The one technique that works: "after X, I do Y"

Don't rely on remembering or feeling like it. Bolt the new habit onto something you already do without thinking. *After I brush my teeth, I do ten squats. After I make my morning chai, I take my vitamin. After I get home, I change into shoes and walk for ten minutes.* The existing habit becomes

the alarm clock for the new one. This single trick — attaching the new to the old — is more powerful than any amount of willpower.

#### YOUR ONLY JOB THIS WEEK

Pick **one** tiny action. Attach it to something you already do daily. Do it every day for a week. Do not add anything else. Do not go bigger. Just prove you show up. That proof is the foundation the entire rest of this book is built on.

Once showing up is who you are — not what you force — you are ready for the real machinery. The next pillar is the one most Indians get wrong, and fixing it changes everything: how you eat.

P I L L A R   T W O

02

# NUTRITION

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You cannot out-train your plate. For the Indian body, nutrition is not 50% of the result — it is closer to 80%. This is the hardest pillar, so we make it simple.

## CHAPTER EIGHT · PILLAR TWO

# THE ONE LAW: CALORIC DEFICIT

*No diet, no supplement, no influencer can override this. Eat fewer calories than you burn, and you will lose fat. Everything else is detail.*

If you take one fact from this entire book about fat loss, take this: **a caloric deficit is the only mechanism by which the human body loses fat.** Keto, intermittent fasting, low-carb, that expensive diet your cousin swears by — every single one works *only* when it puts you in a deficit. None of them is magic. They are just different doors to the same room.

Your body burns a certain number of calories a day to exist and move — your TDEE, Total Daily Energy Expenditure. Eat less than that number and your body makes up the difference by burning stored fat. Eat more, you store. Eat the same, you stay. This is thermodynamics, not opinion. Your body is not exempt from physics.

## Find your number, then eat below it

Search "TDEE calculator," enter your weight, height, age, and honest activity level. The number it gives you is roughly your maintenance. To lose fat, eat a little below it.

## 300–500

Calories below your maintenance — the deficit that strips fat while protecting muscle. Not 1,000 below. Slow and steady wins the body; aggressive cuts eat your muscle and rebound.

Gradual-loss research (Garthe et al.) · target ~0.5 kg/week

Why moderate? Because when you slash calories too hard, your body — especially the muscle-poor Indian body — does not just burn fat. It cannibalises muscle, the very tissue you are trying to keep. You lose weight on the scale and look softer, not leaner. We covered that scale lie in Chapter One. A gentle deficit, held for months, is how you lose fat and keep the muscle that makes you look fit.

## You don't need to count forever

You do not have to weigh rice for the rest of your life. But you do need to track honestly for a few months — long enough to build a mental model of what your meals actually cost. Once that model is in your head, you can eyeball it. Track to learn, then track to maintain. The goal is awareness, not obsession.

**THE DEFICIT DECIDES WHETHER YOU LOSE FAT. PROTEIN DECIDES WHAT KIND OF BODY IS LEFT BEHIND.**

So the deficit is the law. But a deficit alone can leave you skinny-fat — smaller, but still soft. The lever that turns "weight loss" into "fat loss with muscle" is the one Indians ignore most. That's next.

## CHAPTER NINE · PILLAR TWO

# PROTEIN: THE LEVER INDIANS IGNORE

*The single biggest gap between the Indian plate and the body you want is protein. Fix this one thing and half your problem solves itself.*

Our food is glorious — and it is built on carbohydrates. Rice, roti, poha, idli, paratha, sugar. Delicious, comforting, and chronically short on the one macronutrient that builds and protects muscle.

## ~9-11%

of the average Indian's daily calories come from protein — among the lowest shares in the world — while roughly 62% comes from carbohydrates.

ICMR-INDIAB national diet survey, Nature Medicine, 2025

This is why so many Indians who "eat healthy" and even lose weight still look soft and feel weak. They are starving their muscles of the raw material to exist. And remember the thin-fat phenotype from Chapter Two — we already carry less muscle than other populations. Low protein on top of low muscle is a double disadvantage.

## How much you actually need

The official Indian RDA is about 0.83 grams per kilo of bodyweight. Understand what that number is: a floor to prevent deficiency, not a target to build a body. For someone training, the evidence points much higher.

## 1.6-2.2 G/KG

Grams of protein per kilo of bodyweight to build and keep muscle — two to three times the basic RDA. A 70 kg person: roughly 110–150 g a day.

Morton et al., meta-analysis of 49 studies, BJSM, 2018

## Why protein is your unfair advantage on a cut

Protein does three things no other food does as well. It **preserves muscle** while you are in a deficit, so the weight you lose is fat. It is the **most filling** macronutrient, so you feel satisfied on fewer calories — it makes the deficit easier to hold. And it costs your body the most energy just to digest. Hit your protein and the rest of your diet becomes remarkably forgiving.

## GET YOUR PROTEIN RIGHT FIRST. EVERYTHING ELSE IN NUTRITION IS SECONDARY.

"But I'm vegetarian" is not the obstacle you think it is — millions of strong Indians are proof. You just need to know where the protein hides in our food, and how to build a plate around it. That is the next chapter, and it comes with a table you can use tonight.

## CHAPTER TEN · PILLAR TWO

# BUILD YOUR INDIAN PLATE

*You don't need foreign food or boring "diet meals." You need to rebuild the plate you already eat — protein first, carbs second.*

Most Indian plates are 70% carbohydrate with a token amount of protein on the side — a mountain of rice with a thin film of dal. We are going to flip that. The new rule for every meal: **build the protein first, then add the carbs around it.**

Here is the protein in foods you already eat. Notice the trap most people fall into: a katori of home-style dal is mostly water — it is not the protein source you think it is.

FOOD	REALISTIC SERVING	PROTEIN
Soya chunks (dry)	~30 g (1 cup soaked)	~16 g
Chicken breast (cooked)	100 g	~31 g
Whey protein	1 scoop (~30 g)	~24 g
Paneer	100 g	~18-20 g
Fish (rohu, cooked)	100 g	~19 g
Tofu (firm)	100 g	~17 g
Rajma / chana (cooked)	1 bowl	~9-13 g
Eggs	2 whole	~12 g
Milk (toned)	1 glass (250 ml)	~8 g
Curd / dahi	1 bowl (150 g)	~5 g
Dal (home-style, cooked)	1 katori	~5 g
Roti / rice (context)	1 roti / 1 bowl	~3 g

Sources: IFCT 2017 (NIN/ICMR) & USDA. Plant proteins are slightly lower in quality, so vegetarians should aim a little higher and combine sources.

## The vegetarian's two best tricks

First, **dal-chawal is smarter than it looks**. Cereal (rice, wheat) and pulses (dal) each miss different amino acids; eaten together, they complete each other into a fuller protein. Our grandmothers were right. Second, **soya chunks are the cheapest serious protein in India** — over 50 grams of protein per 100 grams dry, for a few rupees. If you eat veg and want a lever, this is it.

## Dial the carbs down, don't delete them

You don't need to fear rice and roti — Chapter Four killed that myth. You just need less of them and more protein in the space they leave. Keep the rice, halve the portion; add an extra egg, a bowl of curd, a fist of paneer. Same meal, same flavours, a completely different body over a year.

### LET AVYA BUILD YOUR PLATE

Hitting a protein target from Indian food takes a little planning at first. Tell Avya your weight, your goal, whether you're veg or non-veg, and it builds your daily protein target and meals around the food you actually eat — then tracks it for you. Your plan, not a generic one.

Food is the foundation. But there is an industry built on convincing you that food is not enough — that you need powders and pills to succeed. Some of it helps. Most of it is a scam. Let's separate the two.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN · PILLAR TWO

# SUPPLEMENTS & DEFICIENCIES

*Supplements are the most over-sold, under-regulated corner of fitness — especially in India. Here's the short list of what's worth your money, and the longer list of what isn't.*

First, the warning. The Indian supplement market is dangerously unregulated, and a lot of what's on the shelf is not what the label claims.

## 69%

of popular protein supplements sold in India were mislabeled in a peer-reviewed study — many with far less protein than claimed, some contaminated with fungal toxins, most with detectable heavy metals.

Citizens Protein Project, journal Medicine, 2024

That cheap "raw whey" at a suspicious price is often not whey at all. If you buy protein powder, buy a reputable brand with third-party testing, or skip it and eat your protein from food. Convenience is never worth poisoning yourself.

## The short list — worth your money

**Creatine monohydrate.** The most-researched, most-proven supplement that exists. 3–5 grams a day, every day, no loading needed. It increases strength and lean mass, and here's the kicker — *vegetarians benefit more*, because they start with less in their muscles. It does not damage your kidneys and does not cause hair loss; both are myths. If you buy one thing, buy this.

**Protein powder (whey or plant).** Not magic — just convenience. A tool to hit your protein target when food is impractical. Useful for busy people and vegetarians; never required.

**Vitamin D and B12.** Not muscle supplements — deficiency fixes (more below). Genuinely worth it for most Indians.

**Caffeine.** Your pre-workout. A coffee before training measurably improves performance. You don't need a Rs 3,000 tub.

### The waste list — keep your money

**BCAAs** — pointless if you eat enough protein, which already contains them. **Fat burners and "thermogenics"** — minimal effect, real risk; several have been banned worldwide for liver damage. **Mass gainers** — mostly cheap sugar with a muscular man on the tub. **Testosterone boosters** — they don't work. **Detox and slimming teas** — laxatives in disguise.

### The deficiencies quietly draining you

Before you blame yourself for being tired, get your blood checked. Indians are deficient in three things at rates that wreck energy, mood, and recovery — and no workout fixes a nutrient you don't have.

#### GET THESE THREE CHECKED

**Vitamin D** — deficient in the majority of Indians despite all our sun (we live indoors, and pollution blocks the rest). **Vitamin B12** — deficient in up to 70% of vegetarians, because it's almost absent from plant food; if you're veg, you likely need to supplement it. **Iron** — especially in women; over half of Indian women of reproductive age are anaemic. Fix these and the fatigue you blamed on "getting older" often lifts.

## NO SHORTCUTS. NO STEROIDS. FOOD FIRST, A FEW HONEST SUPPLEMENTS SECOND, AND A BLOOD TEST BEFORE YOU GUESS.

You now know what to eat and what to ignore. The last nutrition battle is the hardest one — fought not in the supermarket but at your mother's dining table, at the festival, at the restaurant. Let's win it.

## CHAPTER TWELVE · PILLAR TWO

# EATING IN THE REAL WORLD

*A diet that only works alone in your kitchen is not a diet — it's a prison sentence you'll eventually escape. Learn to eat among people who love you with food.*

Here is where most Indian fitness journeys die — not at the gym, but at the table. The joint-family dinner. The festival. The wedding with eleven courses. The relative who takes it personally if you refuse a second helping. You cannot win by hiding from these. You win by having a plan.

## The family table

Love in our culture flows through food, and refusing it can feel like refusing the person. So don't refuse the person — manage the plate. Fill it with the protein and vegetables first so there's less room for the fried and the sweet. Take the one roti, not the four. Accept the mithai, eat half. *"Bas, pet bhar gaya, it was delicious"* — said warmly, with a full heart — keeps the love and declines the calories. You are not rejecting your mother. You are staying alive for her.

## Festivals and weddings

One festival meal will not undo a month of consistency — bingeing for a week of festivities might. The trick is the days around the feast, not the feast itself. Eat normally and high-protein on either side, stay active, enjoy the actual celebration without guilt, and return to your rhythm the next morning. Diwali is not the problem. The fortnight of leftovers is.

## Eating out & the NRI takeaway trap

Restaurant and takeaway food is engineered to be calorie-dense — oil, cream, sugar, and portions built for sharing.

# ~2,300 KCAL

In a single typical Indian takeaway meal abroad — a full day's energy in one sitting, before the naan and rice are even counted.

safefood UK analysis of Indian takeaways

For my NRI readers, this is the real battle: surrounded by a Western food environment and missing home, the takeaway becomes comfort. Order the grilled tikka over the buttery curry, ask for less oil, take half home, and skip the second naan. You can eat the food of home. Just not all of it, every night.

## **DISCIPLINE ISN'T NEVER ENJOYING THE FEAST. IT'S ENJOYING IT, THEN GOING BACK TO WORK.**

That's the whole nutrition pillar — the deficit, the protein, the plate, the supplements, and the real world. Now we get to the part you probably came for: building the muscle itself. Pick up something heavy.

P I L L A R   T H R E E

03

# TRAINING

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You don't need two hours a day or a fancy gym. You need to make your muscles work against resistance, a little harder over time. That's the whole secret — and it's enough.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN · PILLAR THREE

# WHY YOU MUST LIFT

*Cardio shrinks you. Resistance training rebuilds you. For the Indian body, lifting isn't optional — it's the cure for the exact weakness in your genes.*

If you only ever did one form of exercise, I would not tell you to run. I would tell you to lift — to train against resistance, whether that's weights, bands, or your own bodyweight. Here is why it matters more for you specifically than for almost anyone.

Remember the thin-fat phenotype: we carry more fat and less muscle, and we develop diabetes earlier and at lower weights. Muscle is not just for looking good. **Muscle is the body's largest sink for blood sugar.** The more muscle you carry, the more glucose your body can pull out of your blood and store safely instead of leaving it to damage you. Building muscle directly attacks the exact disease your genetics line you up for. It is, quite literally, metabolic insurance.

## 10-20%

Lower risk of early death, heart disease, and diabetes — from as little as 30–60 minutes of muscle-strengthening work per week. You do not need hours.

Momma et al., meta-analysis of 16 studies, BJSM, 2022

Read that dose again: thirty to sixty minutes a *week*. Two or three short sessions. This is not the punishing two-hour grind the influencers sell. The returns on a small, consistent amount of strength work are enormous — and they plateau quickly, meaning more is not dramatically better. You are not training for a medal. You are training for a life.

## What lifting does that cardio can't

Cardio burns calories while you do it and is wonderful for your heart — keep some of it. But it does not build the muscle that reshapes your body, protects your metabolism in a deficit, and disposes of your blood sugar for decades. A body built on cardio alone, in a calorie deficit, often ends up smaller

but still soft — the skinny-fat trap again. Resistance training is what makes the deficit produce a body you're proud of.

**DON'T TRAIN TO BURN TODAY'S CALORIES. TRAIN TO BUILD THE BODY THAT BURNS THEM FOR YEARS.**

"But I don't have a gym / I'm intimidated / I'm a woman who doesn't want to bulk up." None of these survive the next chapter. You can start today, on your floor, for free.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN · PILLAR THREE

# NO GYM, NO EXCUSE

*I built handstands and levers with no machines — just my body and gravity. The floor of your room is a complete gym. You simply have to start.*

The gym is optional. I am living proof — most of what I built came from calisthenics, training with nothing but bodyweight. Your body is a complete resistance machine. The only rule that matters is **progressive overload**: make it a little harder over time. More reps, harder variations, slower lowering, shorter rest. That progression is what builds muscle, whether the resistance is a dumbbell or your own weight.

## The five movements that cover everything

You do not need fifty exercises. You need five patterns, trained progressively:

- ☐ **Push** — push-ups (knee › full › feet elevated › archer). Chest, shoulders, triceps.
- ☐ **Pull** — rows under a sturdy table, or pull-ups if you have a bar. Back, biceps. The one most beginners skip.
- ☐ **Squat** — bodyweight squats › split squats › one-leg progressions. Legs, glutes.
- ☐ **Hinge** — glute bridges › single-leg bridges. The posterior chain that fixes desk posture.
- ☐ **Core** — planks and dead-bugs. Real core strength, not crunches chasing a six-pack.

Three short full-body sessions a week using these five patterns, getting a little harder each week, will build a noticeably stronger body in three months. The exact starter plan is in Chapter Seventeen.

## Walking: the most underrated exercise in India

Before any of that, just walk. It is free, joint-friendly, and powerfully effective — and you do not need the magic ten thousand.

**6,000–8,000**

Steps a day captures most of the life-extending benefit. The famous "10,000" was a 1960s marketing slogan, not science. Benefits begin as low as ~4,000.

Paluch et al., *The Lancet Public Health*, 2022

## Yoga, and training around pollution

Yoga is a beautiful, culturally-rooted entry point — wonderful for mobility, breath, and calm. Just know its limit: without continuously increasing resistance, it builds less muscle than progressive training. Use it alongside lifting, not instead of it. And for those in polluted cities — on high-AQI winter days, train indoors. Outdoor exercise when the air is hazardous can cost more than it gives; there is no shame in a living-room workout when the sky is grey.

**THE BEST WORKOUT IS THE ONE YOU'LL ACTUALLY DO, IN THE PLACE YOU ACTUALLY ARE.**

Training breaks the body down. It only grows back stronger when you let it — and that recovery is a pillar all its own, the one almost everyone neglects.

P I L L A R   F O U R

04

# RECOVERY

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You do not grow in the gym. You grow in the hours after — asleep, fed, and calm. Skip recovery and you train hard for half the result.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN · PILLAR FOUR

# RECOVERY: SLEEP, STRESS & THE CORTISOL BELLY

*Sleep is the most powerful, most ignored performance tool you own. It is also free. Most people leave half their results on the table because they won't go to bed.*

You can train perfectly and eat perfectly and still fail — if you do not sleep. This is not soft advice. The effect is brutal and measurable.

## 55% LESS FAT

In a controlled study, people on the same diet who slept 5.5 hours instead of 8.5 lost 55% less fat — and more muscle. Same calories. Sleep decided what they burned.

Nedeltscheva et al., Annals of Internal Medicine, 2010

Short sleep wrecks the hormones that govern hunger and fat. It raises ghrelin (the hunger signal) and lowers leptin (the fullness signal), so you wake up hungrier and eat more without noticing. It worsens insulin sensitivity — dangerous for the Indian body specifically. Aim for **7 to 9 hours**. Not as a luxury. As part of the program. If you will not sleep, do not bother optimising your protein to the gram — you are fixing the small leak while the dam is open.

### The cortisol belly

Chronic stress is the silent saboteur. When you are stressed for months — work, money, city life — your body holds high cortisol, and cortisol tells your body to store fat preferentially in the worst place: deep in the belly, around the organs. The same visceral fat that drives the Indian diabetes risk. You can out-train a bad meal. You cannot out-train a life of grinding stress and no sleep.

**TRAIN HARD, EAT WELL — THEN GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY AND RECOVER.**

## The recovery basics, in order

- **Sleep 7–9 hours.** Fixed bedtime. No screens for 30 minutes before. This is the highest-return habit in the book.
- **Take rest days.** Muscle grows on the days off, not the days on. Three training days and four easier ones is plenty to start.
- **Manage stress deliberately.** A daily walk, breath, prayer, the guitar, ten minutes of silence — whatever returns you to centre. It is training, not indulgence.

Four pillars down. You know the mind, the plate, the training, and the recovery. The final pillar is the one that turns all of it from a three-month attempt into a life: consistency. And it begins with the readers our fitness culture fails most.

P I L L A R F I V E

05

# CONSISTENCY

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The four pillars only work if you keep them standing. This is the pillar that turns a three-month attempt into the rest of your life — and it starts with the people our fitness culture ignores most.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN · PILLAR FIVE

# FOR THE WOMEN READING THIS

*Everything in this book is for you too. But our culture builds extra walls around a woman who wants to be strong — so let's name them and walk through them.*

If you are a woman in India or in the diaspora, the research is blunt: you face more barriers to fitness than the men around you, and you start from further back.

## 57%

of Indian women are insufficiently physically active — markedly higher than men. Not because women care less, but because the walls are higher.

Lancet Global Health, 2024





Those walls are real and I will not pretend otherwise. Mixed-gender gyms that feel unsafe or judgemental. Concerns about modesty and what to wear. Streets that aren't safe to walk or run on after dark. And the deepest one — the expectation that a woman puts everyone else first, that time spent on her own body is somehow selfish. It is not selfish. A strong, healthy mother, daughter, wife is a gift to everyone who depends on her.

## The myth that has robbed a generation

Let me kill the biggest lie one more time, because it stops more Indian women than anything else: **lifting weights will not make you bulky.** Women have a fraction of the testosterone required to build large muscle; even men who chase size struggle for it. What strength training gives a woman is a lean, toned, capable body, stronger bones that protect against the osteoporosis we're prone to, better hormonal health, and confidence that follows you out of the gym. The "toned" look you want *is* muscle. You build it by lifting, not by avoiding it.

**YOU WILL NOT GET BULKY. YOU WILL GET STRONG. AND STRONG IS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING A BODY CAN BE.**

## How to start, around the walls

-  **Start at home.** The bodyweight plan in this book needs no gym, no audience, no commute. Build your base where you feel safe.
-  **Find your space.** Women-only gyms and hours exist and are growing. A safe space you'll return to beats a "better" one you'll avoid.
-  **Train with someone.** A sister, a friend, a cousin. Support is the single strongest predictor that a woman keeps going.
-  **Claim the time without guilt.** Thirty minutes for your health is not stolen from your family. It is invested in them.

The rest of this book — every protocol, every plate, every principle — is written for your body as much as anyone's. Now let's put it all on one page.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN · PILLAR FIVE

# THE 12-WEEK STARTER PROTOCOL

*The whole book on one timeline. Twelve weeks to go from standing start to a real, established habit and a visibly changing body.*

Here is everything, assembled. Do not add to it. Do not go harder than it says. The plan is deliberately moderate because moderate is what you'll still be doing in week twelve. The detailed meal plan and the exercise-by-exercise workout card are in the closing pages; this is the map that ties them together.

## The four constants — every week, all twelve:

- ☐ **Eat** 300–500 kcal below maintenance, hitting your protein target (1.6 g/kg) every day.
- ☐ **Train** 3 full-body sessions a week (home or gym — see the Workout Card).
- ☐ **Walk** 6,000–8,000 steps most days.
- ☐ **Sleep** 7–9 hours. Non-negotiable.

### WEEKS 1-2 · FOUNDATION

#### Just show up

Learn the five movements with easy variations. Two sets each, never to failure. Goal: not soreness — attendance. Start tracking your food to learn your numbers. Win the habit before you chase the result.

### WEEKS 3-6 · BUILD

#### Add a little, every week

Three sets now. Each week, add a rep or two, or move to a slightly harder variation — progressive overload in action. Protein dialled in daily. This is where strength starts to show and clothes start to fit differently.

### WEEKS 7-10 · PROGRESS

#### Get genuinely stronger

Harder variations (feet-elevated push-ups, deeper rows, split squats). Push the last set close to — not to — failure. The body composition shift is now visible in photos. Trust it and keep going.

WEEKS 11-12 · CONSOLIDATE

### Make it permanent

Lock the routine. Reassess with photos and the tape, not the scale. Then simply continue — there is no "after." This was never a 12-week diet. It was the first twelve weeks of the rest of your life.

## TWELVE WEEKS WON'T FINISH THE JOB. THEY'LL PROVE THE JOB IS YOURS TO FINISH.

A plan only works if you can see whether it's working. The last skill — and the one that saves you when motivation dips — is knowing how to measure, adjust, and get back up after you fall. Because you will fall.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN · PILLAR FIVE

# TRACK, ADJUST, GET BACK UP

*You will miss days. You will fall off. Everyone does. The winners are simply the ones who got back up faster — not the ones who never fell.*

Two skills separate the people who transform from the people who restart every January: they measure the right things, and they recover from setbacks instead of being ended by them.

## Measure what matters — not the scale

We started this book by firing the scale, and here is why it matters most. As you build muscle and lose fat, the scale can barely move while your body transforms — muscle is denser than fat. Trust the scale and you'll quit in despair while actually winning. So measure better:

- **Photos** — same light, same spot, every 2 weeks. The truest record. Day to day you see nothing; across a month, undeniable.
- **The tape** — waist at the navel. For the Indian body this single number tracks health better than weight.
- **Strength** — are the reps going up, the variations getting harder? Logged numbers don't lie.
- **The mirror and your clothes** — honest, free, and with you every day.

Tracking your food and training also simply works — people who log honestly lose more fat, because awareness is half the battle. This is exactly the quiet, daily record-keeping **Avya** was built to take off your hands.

## When the progress stalls

Stalls are normal, not failure. If the tape and photos haven't moved in 2–3 weeks, first check your tracking is honest (the calories that don't get counted are the ones that stall you). Only then make a small adjustment — trim 100–150 calories or add a thousand steps. Small nudges, not panic. Never crash your calories; that eats the muscle you worked for.

## The fall, and the getting up

You will miss a week. A trip, an illness, an exam, a low stretch. It is not the missing that ends people — it is the *story* they tell themselves about it: "I've ruined it, I have no discipline, what's the point." That story is the real enemy. One missed week is nothing against a year. The rebound trap — the crash-and-binge cycle — only catches people who treated the plan as all-or-nothing.

**MISSING ONE WORKOUT IS A MOMENT. QUITTING BECAUSE YOU MISSED ONE IS THE ONLY REAL FAILURE.**

So the rule is simple: never miss twice. Fall, then get up the very next day, exactly where you left off, no guilt, no penance. That single habit — getting back up faster — is the entire difference between the body you want and the body you keep promising yourself. I learned it on a Navy training ground, and it is the most important thing I can give you.

THE NEXT GENERATION

06

# PASSING IT ON

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The whole reason this book exists: so the next generation never starts from zero. The body you build is also the example you set.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN · THE NEXT GENERATION

# FITNESS FOR KIDS: RAISING A STRONG CHILD

*I am writing this book so my son, Avyaansh, never has to start where I did. If you have children, this chapter is the most important one — for them.*

Everything I have built — this platform, this book, the AI coach named after my son — exists for one reason: so Avyaansh inherits a head start I never had. If you are a parent, you can give your child the same gift. And the data says they need it urgently.

## 27 MILLION

Indian children and adolescents projected to be living with obesity by 2030 — among the highest numbers in the world. Screens are up, play is down, and our kids carry the thin-fat risk from birth.

World Obesity Federation / UNICEF India

Our children inherit the same Indian phenotype we do — born with relatively more fat and less muscle, wired for early metabolic trouble. Add screens, tuition pressure that crowds out play, and a culture that still reads a chubby child as a healthy one, and we are raising a generation into diabetes. But it is preventable, and the prevention is joyful, not grim.

### The myth that stops parents: "lifting stunts growth"

Many Indian parents fear that strength training will stunt a child's height or damage growth plates. It is false, and the major paediatric bodies are unanimous.

#### WHAT THE PAEDIATRICIANS ACTUALLY SAY

Supervised, age-appropriate resistance training is **safe** for children — there is no evidence it harms growth plates or stunts height, and not a single such case in the research. It builds

bone density, coordination, confidence, and cuts sports injuries by roughly half. The American Academy of Pediatrics and international consensus agree.

## How to actually raise a strong child

Not with diets — never put a child on a restrictive diet. You raise a fit child through environment and example.

- **Move as a family.** The single strongest lever isn't a program — it's you.
- **Protect play.** WHO says kids need 60 active minutes a day. Let them run, climb, fall, play sport — that *is* their training.
- **Fix the home food, not the child.** Stock protein and fruit, not biscuits and cold drinks. Never shame a child's body — build a better kitchen.
- **Guard sleep and limit screens.** The same two levers that work for you work for them.

# 5.8×

When both parents are active, children are nearly six times more likely to be active themselves. Your child learns fitness by watching you live it — not by being told.

Parental-influence meta-analyses

## THE MOST POWERFUL FITNESS ADVICE FOR YOUR CHILD IS TO LET THEM WATCH YOU TRAIN.

This is the real victory. Not just your own transformation, but breaking a chain — handing the next generation a body, a habit, and an example, so they begin their lives where you spent years fighting to arrive. That is what it means to make sure they never start from zero.

## To Avyaansh, On the Body

By the time you are old enough to read this properly, I hope much of it is already obvious to you – the way breathing is obvious. I hope you never know the particular shame I knew, of being the weakest one in the room and not knowing how to change it.

I was that boy once. Thin, unsure, with no one ahead of me showing the way. Everything in this book I learned slowly, often painfully, frequently alone. I wrote it down so that the road that took me fourteen years might take you fourteen weeks – or so that it is simply the air you grew up breathing.

*The body is not vanity, my son. It is the vehicle for every other thing you will ever want to do – to think, to love, to build, to stand up for what is right. Take care of it the way you would take care of something you were only borrowed.*

You will not always feel like it. That is fine. I have trained on a thousand grey mornings when I felt like nothing. Discipline is not the absence of that feeling – it is moving while you feel it. That is the whole of it, in fitness and in everything else.

And when you fall – and you will, everyone does – do not waste a single day in shame. Get up the next morning and begin again, exactly where you left off. The man who gets up fastest wins. I have staked my life on that one sentence, and it has never once let me down.

Whatever else I am able to leave you, let it include this: a strong body, a clear mind, and the knowledge that an ordinary person, starting from nothing, can build an extraordinary life. You are already the reason for all of it.

— *Your Dad* ♡

## PUT IT TO WORK

# YOUR FIRST 7 DAYS

*Forget the whole book for a week. Do only this. Prove you show up — the rest follows.*

- ❑ **Calculate your numbers.** Find your TDEE online. Set your protein target:  $\text{bodyweight (kg)} \times 1.6 \text{ g}$ .
- ❑ **Add one protein source to every meal.** Eggs, curd, paneer, dal, soya, chicken. Aim for your target.
- ❑ **Do 3 short full-body workouts.** Use the Workout Card. Easy variations, never to failure.
- ❑ **Walk after dinner.** 10–20 minutes, daily. Build toward 6,000–8,000 steps.
- ❑ **Sleep 7–9 hours.** Fixed bedtime. No screens 30 minutes before.
- ❑ **Take one photo and one waist measurement.** Your "before." Hide the scale.
- ❑ **Book a blood test.** Vitamin D, B12, iron. Fix what's draining you.

That's it. Don't add more. Win week one, and you've already done what 80% never do — you started, and you stayed.

## APPENDIX · NUTRITION

# THE 7-DAY SAMPLE MEAL PLAN

*A worked example, not a rulebook. Roughly 1,700–1,900 kcal and 120–140 g protein a day. Adjust portions to your own TDEE.*

**Vegetarian week** — built on paneer, curd, dal, soya, milk, and (optional) whey.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	SNACK	DINNER
1	Besan chilla (2) + curd	Dal + brown rice + sabzi + curd	Roasted chana + buttermilk	Paneer tikka + 2 roti + salad
2	Paneer paratha + curd	Rajma + rice + salad	Whey shake / Greek yogurt	Soya chunk curry + 2 roti
3	Moong dal chilla (2)	Chana masala + 2 roti + curd	Roasted makhana + milk	Tofu + veg stir-fry + 1 roti
4	Oats + milk + 1 scoop whey	Paneer sabzi + dal + 2 roti	Sprouts chaat	Mixed dal khichdi + curd
5	Idli (3) + sambar + curd	Soya curry + rice + salad	Peanuts + glass of milk	Paneer bhurji + 2 roti
6	Veg poha + milk + peanuts	Mixed dal + rice + paneer	Greek yogurt + fruit	Rajma + 2 roti + salad
7	Paneer bhurji + 2 toast	Tofu curry + rice + curd	Roasted chana + buttermilk	Mixed veg + paneer + 1 roti

**Non-vegetarian week** — built on eggs, chicken, fish, plus curd and dal.

DAY	BREAKFAST	LUNCH	SNACK	DINNER
1	3-egg omelette + 2 toast	Chicken curry + rice + salad	Whey shake / curd	Grilled chicken + veg + 1 roti
2	Egg bhurji + paratha	Fish curry + rice + salad	2 boiled eggs	Fish tikka + salad + 1 roti

3	Boiled eggs (3) + oats	Chicken + dal + 2 roti	Roasted chana + buttermilk	Egg curry + 2 roti
4	Omelette (2 egg) + curd	Egg curry + rice + salad	Whey shake	Tandoori chicken + salad
5	Eggs + poha + milk	Grilled chicken + 2 roti + dal	Greek yogurt	Chicken + veg + 1 roti
6	Egg + paneer wrap	Fish + rice + curd	2 boiled eggs + fruit	Chicken soup + 2 roti
7	3-egg omelette + toast	Chicken biryani (measured) + raita	Whey shake	Grilled fish + salad + 1 roti

Drink water through the day. Tea/coffee fine – go easy on sugar. Vegetarians: a daily B12 supplement is wise. This is a template – swap dishes you dislike for equals on the protein table.

## APPENDIX · TRAINING

# THE STARTER WORKOUT CARD

Three full-body sessions a week, with a rest day between. Pick the home version or the gym version. Same five patterns either way.

**Home / no-gym** — full body, 3×/week. No equipment but a sturdy table and your floor.

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TRAINS
Bodyweight squat	3 × 12-15	Legs, glutes
Push-up (knees › full › feet-up)	3 × 8-12	Chest, shoulders, triceps
Inverted row under a table	3 × 8-12	Back, biceps
Glute bridge (› single-leg)	3 × 12-15	Hinge, posterior chain
Split squat (each leg)	3 × 10	Legs, balance
Plank	3 × 30-45 s	Core

**Gym** — full body, 3×/week. Machines or free weights, beginner-friendly.

EXERCISE	SETS × REPS	TRAINS
Goblet / leg-press squat	3 × 8-12	Legs, glutes
Dumbbell / machine chest press	3 × 8-12	Chest, shoulders, triceps
Lat pulldown / seated row	3 × 8-12	Back, biceps
Romanian deadlift (light)	3 × 10	Hinge, hamstrings, glutes
Shoulder press (DB / machine)	3 × 10	Shoulders
Plank / cable core	3 × 30-45 s	Core

**THE ONE RULE: PROGRESSIVE OVERLOAD**

When you can hit the top of the rep range for all sets with good form, make it harder next time — add a rep, a little weight, or a harder variation. That steady increase is what builds muscle. Warm up 5 minutes, rest 60–90 seconds between sets, and stop one rep short of failure while you're learning.

Always train within your ability and stop if you feel sharp pain. If you're new to exercise or have a health condition, clear it with a doctor first.

## APPENDIX · NUTRITION

# THE INDIAN PROTEIN CHEAT-SHEET

*Stick this on your fridge. Protein per realistic serving, and cheapest sources per rupee.*

FOOD	SERVING	PROTEIN	COST RANK
Soya chunks (dry)	30 g	~16 g	• cheapest
Eggs	2 whole	~12 g	• cheapest complete
Dal (cooked)	1 katori	~5 g	• very cheap
Rajma / chana (cooked)	1 bowl	~9-13 g	• very cheap
Milk (toned)	1 glass	~8 g	•• cheap
Chicken breast (cooked)	100 g	~31 g	•• mid
Fish (rohu, cooked)	100 g	~19 g	•• mid
Curd / dahi	1 bowl	~5 g	••• pricier
Paneer	100 g	~18-20 g	••• pricier
Tofu (firm)	100 g	~17 g	••• pricier
Whey protein	1 scoop	~24 g	••• convenience

Protein values: IFCT 2017 (NIN/ICMR) & USDA. Cost ranks are approximate Indian retail, 2025-26.

**The takeaway:** if money is tight, build on soya chunks, eggs, dal, and milk. They deliver the most protein per rupee in the country.

## REFERENCE

# GLOSSARY

**TDEE** — Total Daily Energy Expenditure. The calories your body burns in a day. Eat below it to lose fat.

**Caloric deficit** — eating fewer calories than your TDEE. The only mechanism of fat loss.

**Protein (g/kg)** — grams of protein per kilo of bodyweight. Aim 1.6–2.2 for building muscle.

**Progressive overload** — gradually making training harder over time. The trigger for muscle growth.

**NEAT** — Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis. Calories burned moving outside workouts — walking, chores, fidgeting.

**Visceral fat** — fat stored deep around the organs. The dangerous kind Indians store easily; the kind muscle helps clear.

**Thin-fat phenotype** — the South Asian pattern of higher body fat and lower muscle at any given weight.

**Body composition** — the ratio of muscle to fat. What actually matters — not bodyweight.

**DOMS** — Delayed Onset Muscle Soreness. Soreness after unfamiliar work. Not a measure of a good workout.

**Creatine monohydrate** — the safest, most-proven supplement for strength and lean mass. 3–5 g daily.

**BMI (Asian cut-offs)** — for Indians, overweight starts at 23 and obesity at 25 — lower than global lines.

YOUR NEXT STEP

# MEET AVYA

*This book gave you the map. Avya walks the road with you — every day, personalised to your body.*

Everything in these pages is general by necessity — a book cannot know your exact weight, your schedule, your kitchen, or how last week actually went. **Avya can.**

Avya is the AI fitness coach I built — named after my son. You tell it your weight, your goal, whether you're vegetarian or not, and how much time you have. It builds your calorie and protein targets, plans meals around the Indian food you actually eat, lays out your training, and tracks your progress week by week — adjusting as you go. Not generic advice copied from an American textbook. Your plan, for your body.

## START WITH AVYA — FREE

Take the First 7 Days from this book and let Avya run them with you. Download it, tell it about yourself, and take the first step today. The map is in your hands. Avya helps you walk it.

[icanbefitter.com/avya](https://icanbefitter.com/avya)

The hardest part was always starting. You've already read the whole map — that puts you ahead of nearly everyone. Now go.

GO DEEPER

# THE READING LIST

*A handful of the books and ideas that shaped how I think about the body and the discipline behind it.*

**Bigger Leaner Stronger** — Michael Matthews. A clear, evidence-based primer on training and nutrition for natural lifters.

**The Muscle and Strength Pyramids** — Eric Helms et al. The priorities of training and diet, ranked by what matters most.

**Atomic Habits** — James Clear. The science of small habits and identity — the backbone of this book's first pillar.

**Why We Sleep** — Matthew Walker. Why recovery is not optional, told through the science of sleep.

**The Bhagavad Gita** — on doing the work without attachment to the fruit. The oldest fitness advice there is.

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**A note on this book.** Pillars of Fitness is education and one man's hard-won experience — not medical advice. I am a fitness and nutrition practitioner, not your doctor. Before starting any new exercise or eating plan, especially if you have a medical condition, are pregnant, or take medication, consult a qualified physician. The research cited reflects the best available evidence at the time of writing; the numbers are sourced but general. Your body is specific. Listen to it, and to your doctor.

## HAR HAR MAHADEV

*Now stop reading. Go and begin. — Your Dad, for Avyaansh, and for you.*