

'Fitness' trainer lifts up recovering addicts

By Heather V. Eng

Tuesday, March 8, 2005



Jeff Rutstein was "a meathead."

He could bench-press 400 pounds, but he was a physical wreck, addicted to steroids, drugs and alcohol. After being hospitalized for complications after quitting those substances cold turkey in 1988, a depressed Rutstein recovered by using what had almost killed him - exercise.

His book, "Rutstein on Fitness: Strengthening the Body to Heal the Mind," is due out later this month. The autobiography/weight-training guide features exercises designed to help those recovering mentally and physically.

"Less is more," Rutstein said. "I think it could really change people's perceptions of exercise. It doesn't have to be painful and it should make you feel good."

Rutstein grew up in Randolph, and started bodybuilding to gain respect.

"My whole self-esteem was how strong I was. Then, I came off the steroids and drugs and had to face reality," he said. "I was numbed out. My mind and body seemed detached from each other."

Rutstein tried working out at the gym, but felt discouraged at seeing the "same steroid-type mentality."

One day at home, he picked up a 5-pound dumbbell - a weight he would have shunned in his heavy-lifting days - and did a curl.

"I was able to feel the muscles in my arm, for the first time," Rutstein said. "It didn't awaken my body; it awakened my mind. It brought me out of my numb state."

When he returned to the gym, Rutstein helped a man whose trainer had overworked him. The man hired Rutstein and referred him to his psychologist, who started sending Rutstein other recovering addicts. Rutstein's reputation grew and he started his own gym where he could work one-on-one with clients.

Dr. Alex Vuckovic, assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and director of the Pavilion at McLean Hospital, said exercise can be effective treatment for mild to moderate forms of depression. Rutstein's chemistry with his clients also helps.

"Jeff has remarkable enthusiasm that's infectious," Vuckovic said.

Rutstein is a certified master personal trainer by the International Dance and Exercise Association and weight-training instructor through the national YMCA. But Rutstein believes his story allows clients to trust him and help them recover.

"I think the best certification was my own life experience," he said.

Jeff Rutstein will be signing "Rutstein on Fitness: Strengthening the Body to Heal the Mind" Saturday at 9:30 a.m. at the Bellingham Whole Foods Market, and Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. at Barnes & Noble in Nashua, N.H. Go to www.rutsteinonfitness.com.

