

THE
WHOLE
BODY
RESET

Your Weight-Loss Plan

for a *Flat Belly,*

Optimum Health &

a Body You'll Love

-AT MIDLIFE AND BEYOND-

Lose up to
22 POUNDS in
12 WEEKS
with the power of
**PROTEIN
TIMING**

STEPHEN PERRINE

WITH HEIDI SKOLNIK

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— at Midlife and Beyond —

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Introduction: A Flat Belly at 50+

You don't have to gain weight as you age.

All the negatives we associate with age fifty and beyond—an expanding midsection, softer muscles, and general physical decline?

They aren't inevitable.

They're avoidable.

Indeed, they're even reversable.

And yet...

The vast majority of us struggle with weight gain in middle age. The standard weight-loss tricks that may have worked in our thirties and forties no longer keep the weight off. We may be eating just as healthfully and exercising just as much, but we're still gaining weight, seemingly faster than ever before. Why?

This book answers that question. And it lays out the simple, proven, and effective program that can reverse age-related weight gain and muscle loss, flatten your belly, and slash your risk of disability, disease, and mental and physical decline.

This isn't a fad diet.

This isn't like anything you've ever read before.

This is the Whole Body Reset.

"I Used to Be Thin..."

Wherever you're sitting right now, take a moment to glance down.

See your belly? It's larger than it once was, isn't it?

Belly fat evokes a lot of feelings. It's easy to take this growing expanse, this "middle-age spread," as a personal affront. It's right there in front of us, all the time, and it just won't seem to go away. In fact, if anything, it keeps getting bigger. No matter how many exercise programs we've tried, how many diets we've attempted, how many supplements or "superfoods" we've eaten, belly

fat is as stubborn as a tired three-year-old—it won't be moved by any amount of logic, any degree of bargaining or begging. In fact, between our twenties and our sixties, men on average experience a more than 200 percent increase in visceral fat—that's the fat that lies deep in our bellies, hanging around our internal organs like rock-star groupies. Women see a 400 percent increase in this type of fat.

Maybe, we tell ourselves, our belly fat is a sign that we've failed.

Or maybe, it's just a sign that we're getting old.

If you've ever felt that way, well, I'm right there with you.

For most of my life, managing my weight was easy. In fact, weight loss was practically my career: I've researched, written about, and followed just about every diet trend of the past several decades. I've broken gluten-free bread with tennis champ Novak Djokovic and broken a sweat alongside race car driver Danica Patrick. I've followed Paleo, low-fat, low-carb, vegetarian, vegan, and anti-obesogenic diet plans. I've intermittent-fasted, I've cleansed, I've gone organic and sugar-free. I spent nearly two decades working at *Men's Health*, where we practically invented the word "abs." And for most of that time, I edited the highly successful Eat This, Not That! franchise, first as a food column, then as a book series, and then as its own magazine and website. I've overseen more than two dozen *New York Times* bestsellers in the diet and nutrition field as an author, editor, or publisher.

In other words, if you can eat it, I've probably written a book on it.

Then, a few years ago, two things happened. First, I turned fifty. Then I joined the staff of AARP.

As executive editor, I oversee health and wellness coverage for *AARP The Magazine* and the *AARP Bulletin*. When our nearly 38 million members write in with their health and fitness concerns, I'm the guy whose in-box gets flooded. And among our members, one worry pops up over and over: "*I used to be thin. Now I'm overweight. And there doesn't seem to be anything I can do about it.*"

That's how I felt, too. I was eating the same way I always had, enjoying the same healthy, balanced diet that had kept me in size 32 pants well into my forties. But my old clothes weren't fitting anymore, my belly was getting larger, and my old way of eating and exercising wasn't cutting it.

As a health journalist, I knew that this new front porch was doing more than making me look bad; belly fat is dangerous. Unlike the subcutaneous (“under the skin”) fat you can pinch between your fingers, our belly, or visceral, fat sits in our abdominal cavity, coating our major organs. As it grows, it generates inflammatory compounds, substances that have been linked to arteriosclerosis, asthma, autoimmune diseases, Alzheimer’s... and that’s just the As. You can add an increased risk of colon, breast, and prostate cancers, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and heart disease to that list. The emergence of COVID-19 put an even finer point on it, as belly fat’s sniveling little sidekick—chronic inflammation—arose as one of the top risk factors for coronavirus complications. Being overweight can even increase your risk of taking a fall or dying in a car accident. Bottom line: If it can kill you, there’s a good chance belly fat plays a role.

What I needed was a program designed specifically for someone my age—a smart, easy, effective eating plan for a person at midlife and beyond. So I looked around, and I discovered...

There’s not much out there for people our age.

“I went off blood pressure medicines. My cholesterol is better. And it’s fun to shop for clothes again!”

Elizabeth Woodward, age 55, Tigard, Oregon

Dropped 22 pounds on the 12-week test panel and 30 pounds overall

Elizabeth knew she needed to make a healthy change.

“I was up thirty pounds over my ideal weight—meaning the weight I wanted to be at,” she says. A former exercise physiologist, Elizabeth was already very active, walking six to eight miles every day and going to the gym regularly. So she knew if she was going to drop those unwanted pounds, it meant changing her diet.

“Knowing what you need to do and actually doing it are two different things,” she told us. “Then AARP offered this program. I just said, ‘Okay, this is my start date. This is what I’m doing.’” She began by becoming more aware of what she was eating, making sure her portions were sensible, and most important of all, adding protein to her breakfasts every day. And sure enough, not only did the pounds start coming off—she lost twenty-two during the Whole Body Reset twelve-week trial—but they kept coming off, and stayed off, even during the pandemic. Today, she’s not only thirty pounds lighter, but she recently tried on her wedding dress—and it fit! “My daughter was really impressed,” she says.

So is her doctor: Her healthy HDL cholesterol levels rose, her unhealthy LDL levels dropped, and now both are within the recommended guidelines. “I was even able to go off my blood pressure medicine when I dropped the weight,” she says. “My doctor put me back on after my weight plateaued, but at a very low dose.”

And she did it all without feeling like she was making sacrifices. “I still have my mocha in the morning; that’s what I get up for!” Elizabeth says. “And I love ice cream. I still have it almost every night. I’m just careful about what I eat the rest of the day.”

But perhaps most important is how she feels. “My energy levels have definitely increased. My mood improved. And now it’s fun to shop for clothes again. I couldn’t go to the stores because of COVID, so I’ve been shopping online, and I find that I’m not returning things like I used to, because the clothes fit better.

“I’ve always worked remotely, but recently I went into the office and they were like, ‘Oh my gosh, what happened to you?’ Everyone wanted to know what I did. And I said, ‘The Whole Body Reset.’”

For all the countless diet programs that claim to “shred” fat, “melt” our bellies, and “supercharge” our metabolisms, few if any are designed to target the specific needs of people at midlife and beyond. Modern diet and weight-loss programs—including popular programs like the South Beach Diet or Whole30, as well as proven, healthy nutrition plans like the Mediterranean diet—have been developed and targeted to the general public. Despite the significant changes that occur in our bodies as we age—particularly in our hormonal, structural, and digestive systems—no program existed to address the specific needs of people our age.

Even the U.S. government has left people fifty and older in the lurch. The 2020–2025 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*—which informs everything from food packaging to agricultural policy—includes specific recommendations for every age category: for toddlers, teens, young adults, and folks in their twenties, thirties, and forties, broken out by gender, and carefully curated up to age fifty. But there, the *Dietary Guidelines* drops us like hot potatoes. Indeed, there’s just one additional set of guidelines for men and another one for women, and all they say is “51+.” As far as the government is concerned, outside of recommending more calcium and vitamin D after age seventy, the daily nutritional goals are the same for a fifty-one-year-old woman and her seventy-five-year-old mom.

Does that seem right to you?

Many experts who study the nutritional needs of people fifty and older believe the current guidelines are so far off, they're potentially unhealthy—a recipe for weight gain. And the most surprising fact of all is that there's plenty of science available to show exactly how we should eat to prevent age-related muscle loss, reverse age-related weight gain, and, most important, preserve our long-term health.

It's called "protein timing."

Protein timing is a way of eating that's deceptively simple but has been shown in study after study to halt age-related weight gain, preserve lean muscle, and turn back the tide of what we've come to think of as "natural" decline.

But the word just isn't getting out.

I set out to change that. I've spent the past four years poring over hundreds of studies, talking to scores of researchers, and crunching numbers and ideas with my coauthor, nutritionist and exercise scientist Heidi Skolnik. Now, backed by the mighty resources of AARP, the guidance of a panel of top health experts, and the enthusiastic participation of AARP staffers, I've built the first tested and proven, science-based weight-loss program designed specifically for men and women at midlife and beyond. It's the Whole Body Reset, and it's exactly what we need at this stage in our lives.

A Weight-Loss Plan for the Rest of Us

The Whole Body Reset applies up-to-the-minute weight-loss science—drawing from research primarily conducted not on animals, not on the general public, but on people our age. (Because our bodies are different, and a study of a food's effects on yeast, fruit flies, rodents, or twentysomething athletes is not the same as evidence of its effects on our prime-years physiques.) It reveals how protein timing—eating protein in the proper amounts throughout the day—triggers older bodies to spurn fat gain and hold on to lean muscle tissue. This approach, coupled with plenty of fiber, vitamins and minerals, and healthy fats, can help us not only to reshape our bodies, but to reshape our very lives. It's the foundation of the Whole Body Reset.

"I loved the simplicity of the groupings and the help with serving sizes. The

recipes were easy and delicious.”

—Beth Daniels, age 57, Silver Spring, Maryland

Dropped 19 pounds on the 12-week test panel

“This is real food that everyone likes!”

Bill Hawkins, age 64, Birmingham, Alabama

Dropped 10 pounds on the 12-week test panel and 40 pounds overall

Weight control has for years been an issue for Bill, a diabetic. And as a result, he’s no stranger to weight-loss plans. “I had done every diet known to man. And it’s always a struggle,” he says. But he couldn’t find one he could stick to.

The problem: Most diets just aren’t made for real life. “Many of the diets I’ve read about are things you can’t sustain,” he told us. “They’re geared for folks of different ages, or for people who have access to weird or uncommon ingredients. I have a family, and most programs require foods that they’re just not going to eat.”

But the Whole Body Reset is different: “When I saw this, it tied into everything I needed. You want meals that are convenient, that meet your needs. This is real food that everyone likes.” The diet was so easy that he lost ten pounds during AARP’s initial twelve-week pilot, and another thirty pounds during COVID.

The key to success for Bill has been eating more protein, which has allowed him to reduce simple starches and up the number of fruits and vegetables he consumes, without feeling hungry or deprived. “I feel fulfilled, especially in my lunch and nighttime meals,” he says.

As a result, he says his diabetes has become much easier to manage: “I feel tremendously better when my blood sugar is under control, and this diet has helped me do that. I can’t cut out medicines, but I can drastically reduce the number of times I have to go to the doctor. And I can point to better sleep, which has helped.”

This program isn’t low-carb or low-fat, it doesn’t require calorie counting or periods of food restriction, and it doesn’t eliminate any particular food category. But once you know how to do it, and incorporate it into your daily life, it can strip away as much as nineteen pounds in just twelve weeks—with the vast majority of those pounds coming from pure fat—while preserving muscle mass, maintaining metabolism, and positively impacting blood pressure and other critical markers of wellness. It can even significantly reduce your risk of many of the chronic diseases of aging, enhancing the overall health of both your body and your brain.

And the Whole Body Reset is easy.

- ❑ We can eat what we want: There's no weird science that says we can't eat certain food groups like beans, or tomatoes, or bread, or milk, or whatever it is we crave. This plan isn't low-carb, or low-fat, or ketogenic. No foods are required, no foods are off-limits. There are no calorie-counting charts to follow or measurements to take. Nor does the Whole Body Reset require you to eat foods that don't fit your lifestyle or suit your body—whether you're gluten free, vegetarian or vegan, or simply hate eggplant, you'll find you can eat well on the Whole Body Reset.
- ❑ We can eat real, normal, everyday foods: There are no special products or expensive supplements or exotic “superfoods”—just great, delicious food you'll find at your local supermarket and favorite restaurants. (Yes, even fast-food restaurants!)
- ❑ We can eat when we want: We don't have to fast or cleanse, or restrict ourselves to “on” or “off” hours or days. There aren't any tricky phases to navigate.
- ❑ This program is safe, healthy, and effective, and approved by top researchers in the fields of aging, nutrition, and weight management.

To prove just how effective this plan is, AARP solicited employees ages fifty to seventy-five to take part in the first national pilot of the Whole Body Reset. More than one hundred employees embarked on a twelve-week health journey designed to stop, and even reverse, age-related weight gain and muscle loss. Even as they ate and exercised to build and preserve muscle mass, participants reported an average weight loss of more than five pounds, with one in three losing ten pounds or more. In the coming pages, you'll meet some of these folks—people just like you and me—and discover how easy it was for them to tweak their diets and earn life-altering results.

The Whole Body Reset works. It worked for me. It worked for our exclusive AARP test panel.

And it can work for you.

P.S.: Take the action! During our hugely successful Whole Body Reset pilot, we sent our panelists weekly, two-minute exercises designed to help them turn the ideas in this program into simple but life-changing steps toward taking

back control of their health. You'll find these "action steps" at the end of each of the first twelve chapters in the book. So grab a pencil and give them a try: They'll make your journey even easier!

Top Ten Benefits of the Whole Body Reset

1. Counteract the natural slowing of metabolism
2. Support and regulate the immune system
3. Curtail age-related muscle loss
4. Protect against loss of mobility
5. Bolster cognitive function
6. Promote bone health
7. Support robust cardiovascular health, including healthy blood pressure
8. Stabilize blood sugar
9. Improve general digestive health
10. Boost vitality, alertness, and engagement

— The Whole Body Reset at a Glance —

Number of meals: 3 (breakfast, lunch, and dinner)

At least 25 grams of protein at each meal for women, at least 30 grams for men. Each meal will include at least 5 grams of fiber. (Don't worry, this is easy!)

Number of snacks: 1–2

Each snack will give you an additional 7 or more grams of protein and 2 or more grams of fiber.

Foods to focus on:

- ❑ **Animal and plant proteins.** Lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, and beans all figure in our daily protein strategy, although you can reach this goal even if you follow a strict vegetarian or vegan lifestyle (we'll show you how).
- ❑ **Dairy.** You'll gain additional benefits if a portion of your protein intake comes from dairy foods, which will give you crucial muscle-building, disease-fighting nutrients like calcium, vitamin D, and magnesium. Can't tolerate lactose? We've got you covered (see [page 64](#)).
- ❑ **High-fiber grains, cereals, beans, and nuts.** Potent fiber sources, these plant foods will keep your energy high and help support fat fighting, muscle maintenance, and gut health.
- ❑ **Colorful fruits and vegetables.** You need to eat more now that you're a little older. As we age, our ability to extract nutrients from food diminishes, so it's important to snack on lots of colorful plant foods throughout the day, giving you fiber as well as vital minerals, vitamins, and other nutrients.
- ❑ **Healthy fats and oils from omega-3-rich seafoods, nuts, olives, and avocado.** Two servings a day will help keep you lean and sharp.
- ❑ **Calorie-free drinks.** The Whole Body Reset promotes increased consumption of water, still and sparkling—try it with a slice of fruit!—as well as unsweetened tea and coffee.

Secret weapon: Protein breakfast smoothies. The easiest, most efficient way to make every day a muscle-building, fat-burning day.

Foods to avoid: Highly processed foods and calorie-laden drinks. (Don't worry—you won't feel deprived! You can still find plenty of ready-to-eat treats in your local market or online store. See Chapter 8 for the amazing Magic Supermarket Label Decoder.)

Exercise: Whatever fits your lifestyle and your body—walking, running, biking, hiking, dancing in the kitchen—along with some strength and resistance training. Shoot for about thirty minutes a day, about five days

per week. (We make it easy to do and easy to fit into your day—see Chapter 12, Your Whole Body Fitness Plan.)

Phases, restrictions, specific meal timings, “superfoods,” and gimmicks:
None.

The Age-Defying Magic of Protein Timing

The Shocking New Breakthrough in Nutrition

If you feel helpless and hopeless about your weight, you're not alone. In the United States, nearly 43 percent of adults aged forty to fifty-nine are overweight or obese. Among those sixty and older, 41 percent are obese. Among adult Hispanics and non-Hispanic Blacks, rates are even more dire, especially for women: 54 percent of adult Black women and 51 percent of adult Hispanic women are obese.

Chances are, you've already tried a bunch of other diets. And workouts. And superfoods. And even if you've lost weight successfully in the past, I can almost guarantee that you've since put those pounds—and more—back on your frame. In fact, one study¹ of more than 8,800 people found that those who had been on a diet in the previous year were significantly more likely to gain weight than those who had not. And the more diets you go on, the greater your likelihood of gaining weight in the future.

That's because traditional weight-loss diets trigger our bodies to grow fatter in three specific ways.

The first is that, by restricting calories, a traditional diet sends your body the message that it needs to be prepared to live through times of famine. Once your body receives that signal, it automatically turns down your resting metabolism—the number of calories your body burns while you're sleeping, sitting at the computer, or binge-watching TV shows. So as great as it might feel to lose a few pounds by cutting calories or skipping meals or restricting foods, what you've done in reality is to reduce the number of calories your body burns each and every day, setting you up for future weight gain.

“Once I knew what my go-to foods were, it was fairly simple. I've made

permanent changes to what and how I eat.”

—Tracy Eichelberger, age 55, Washington, DC

Dropped 9 pounds on the 12-week test panel

The second is that when we go on a diet, we don’t just lose fat. Most of us lose muscle, too, and muscle is more metabolically active than fat. Once we’re into our mid-forties or so, muscle loss is already an insidious problem we must battle against on a daily basis. Because muscle plays a huge role in preventing belly fat, the more muscle we lose, the more belly fat we’ll gain in response.

The third and perhaps most important reason is that most diets are built for the general public, not for people in midlife. And our bodies at midlife ARE different.

But not in a bad way.

In fact, as we enter midlife, our bodies undergo an upgrade of sorts. They transition from old-school muscle cars—the type that run best on regular gas—to high-performance sports coupes. And high-performance vehicles require high-performance fuel.

Consider:

- ❑ As we get older, our body’s ability to turn protein into muscle is reduced (a phenomenon known as “anabolic resistance”). This process starts as early as our thirties and accelerates with age. Our protein needs skyrocket, as our bodies are beset by age-related muscle loss. New research shows that people in their fifties, sixties, and seventies may need considerably more protein than those in their twenties and thirties—and far more than current RDA guidelines recommend.² And not just a steak at dinner; we need to spread protein throughout the day if we want to hold on to our life-giving muscle; science shows that those who retain muscle as they age lower their risk of obesity, heart disease, even dementia.
- ❑ As we pass midlife, our ability to extract nutrients from food diminishes, so “nutrient density”—the notion of making your calories count, nutrition-wise—becomes a critical issue. In particular, vitamin D, calcium, magnesium, and vitamin B12 often become more difficult for us to access—even if we’re getting enough of them. And these nutrients are crucial to

helping us hold on to muscle and prevent fat gain. That's another reason why we need more protein and dairy, as well as more fruits and vegetables. Indeed, researchers have recently discovered that the more fruits and vegetables older adults eat, the lower their degree of muscle loss as they age.³

- ❑ Americans eat only about 16 grams of fiber per day—not nearly enough to keep our weight steady. A lack of fiber may be one of the biggest reasons we can't drop pounds. One weight-loss study of individuals with metabolic syndrome (a combination of health factors including excess belly fat and high cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood sugar) found that eating 30 grams of fiber per day, without dieting, was nearly as effective as following a diet that cut sugar, fat, salt, and alcohol. And yet—shockingly—the USDA guidelines actually recommend we reduce fiber intake as we age! No wonder we're gaining weight!

Why the Whole Body Reset? And Why Now?

We asked our panelists why they needed the Whole Body Reset. Here are some of their responses:

- "I'm getting married to my partner in July and am trying to lose about ten pounds before then."
- "It is simple: I want to see my grandchildren grow up!"
- "I'm planning a hiking vacation this summer and know by losing weight I'll have more endurance and enjoy myself much more."
- "As a type 2 diabetic, I am always looking for ways to control and reduce my A1C."
- "I have lost some weight but the last ten to fifteen pounds are so stubborn."

All these weight-related factors, and their effect on midlife Americans, have been extensively researched. They just haven't been widely reported on. Until now. And no diet takes these surprising and significant differences in our bodies into account. Until now.

The Unique Promise of the Whole Body Reset

Enter the Whole Body Reset, and the magic of protein timing. It's a very simple way of eating that helps your body resist age-related muscle loss—even while you're burning fat and losing weight. Protein timing isn't a new concept, and it isn't a gimmick. It's a long-proven approach to maintaining and even growing lean muscle tissue. Mostly, it's been used by young athletes to improve performance, including muscular endurance, strength, power, and cardiovascular health.

But more and more evidence is showing that as we get older, timing our protein intake is no longer just a matter of being able to jump higher or run longer. Because of the way our bodies change with age, protein timing becomes crucial to keeping us lean, healthy, and disease-free. Eating the right amount of protein at healthy intervals means significant weight loss with no rebound weight gain. One study even found that overweight adults 50+ became both leaner and physically stronger when they started using protein timing.⁴

Here's why: When you were in your twenties, you could turn a glass of milk into muscle. Just a single cup of milk—with its 8 grams of protein—could get your body's muscle-maintenance process revving. But by the time we reach our thirties or so, we've already begun to see that ability fade—the aforementioned anabolic resistance. Metaphorically speaking, that glass of milk no longer boots up your muscle-building operating system. You need a bigger dose. The “make muscle” button has to be pushed harder and harder as we get older in order to make the process turn on.

This is a huge issue, because our bodies are constantly breaking down and rebuilding muscle tissue. But if you're not able to convert the food you eat into new muscle, then you're tearing down faster than you're building back up.

And by the time we're in our fifties, the problem has gotten severe enough that many of us have already begun losing significant amounts of muscle mass—leading to weight gain and all sorts of bad health outcomes. (You'll read how this process increases our risk of heart disease, diabetes, and Alzheimer's, among many other issues, in the coming chapters.)

But we can stop this slow descent into muscle loss and weight gain. This process is reversible. And so easily!

All we need to do is to up our protein intake to 25 to 30 grams per meal, and our bodies respond the same way a younger person's would. Indeed, one study found that when people in their sixties combined a high-quality protein meal and resistance exercise, their bodies responded in the same way as the bodies of people in their twenties.⁵

Let's say that again: If you eat the right amount of quality protein, your body responds as if it were forty to fifty years younger. Voilà. The Whole Body Reset.

This isn't a controversial point or some sort of far-out idea, by the way. It's the official position of PROT-AGE, an association of gerontologists and nutritionists. It recently reaffirmed that older people should eat about 1 to 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight—or roughly 0.5 to 0.6 grams per pound. But they also concluded that 25 to 30 grams of protein per meal was crucial⁶ for older people to reach their anabolic threshold—the point at which muscle can be maintained. And maintaining that muscle mass is what we're after.

And don't get the idea that this is some sort of “high-protein diet.” The average person following this plan won't actually eat much, if any, more protein on a given day than he or she does already. But what will happen is that the timing and concentration of that protein is going to change. And the results will be extraordinary.

Nor is the Whole Body Reset one of those miserable “low-carb” or “low-fat” diets. No, there will be plenty of comforting carbs, including whole grain bread, with an emphasis on high-fiber cereals, beans and rice, and plenty of satisfying, healthy fats as well. And of course, delicious salads and flavorful fruits and vegetables. Once you understand the power of protein timing, you'll see how easy it is to build nutritious and satisfying meals around all your favorite foods. Nothing is—pardon the pun—off the table.¹

Essentially, to stay lean and strong, our bodies need to be treated more like those of elite athletes. If you think of your midlife body in this way—as an upgraded model that needs special care, in the form of quality protein and higher-nutrient foods—you'll be amazed at how well it can perform and how good it can look. More important, you'll see many of the markers of age and ill health—blood pressure levels, cholesterol counts, blood sugar readings, and the like—come back under control. These numbers are the warning lights on your