



Hart & Soul

By Marcus Charleston

It's ironic that in a city which scores low marks on national magazine polls for overall fitness, Philadelphia is home to one of America's fittest mayors and one of America's best personal trainers. Jim Hart, a trainer at the 12th Street Gym, has been named one of America's best personal trainers - two years running - by Men's Journal magazine. This recognition has resulted in increased demand for Hart's personal training services.

Dubbed "The Iron Chef," in the November 2004 issue of Men's Journal we met for some great tasting, low-fat pizza at Mama Palma's on the corner of 23rd & Spruce in Philadelphia. Appropriately enough, Jim Hart had just finished a spinning class before we sat down to discuss food and fitness. As expected, Hart set a good example for his clients by sporting a fit physique. It is hard to believe that this self-confessed food lover from a large Irish family was once an overweight kid. "My family was overweight and digested what I called, 'the SAD diet.'" Sad in this case stands for Standard American Diet of meat and potatoes," comments Hart.

"My mom was, and still is, a fantastic cook who liked to bake cakes and other fattening foods," Hart remembers. In direct contrast to her love of cooking Hart's mother was a constant dieter. "She was always on diets and the family took part," Hart recalls.

The diets, combined with the pain of being a fat child, served as the impetus for Hart to start biking and pumping iron in order to lose sixty pounds by the time he entered high school. To this day Hart stays strict with an 80/20 diet. "Throughout the week I eat 80% natural and the weekend, when I allow myself a treat it, is 20%. It's all about balance and moderation," Hart explains.

The attention to diet and exercise paid off resulting in the once overweight Hart competing in bodybuilding competitions. From a diet standpoint, training for a bodybuilding competition has been his biggest fitness challenge. According to Hart, "It's a fun challenge and a rite of passage for trainers. It's the ultimate statement of how fit you are."

What might set Jim Hart apart from other trainers is his knowledge of nutrition. Hart's love of food set him on a career

path to becoming a professional chef who trained at the Restaurant School. "My last year of college I helped a caterer which got me thinking that I could do this," says Hart who ran a catering business for six years.

Hart's personal and professional experiences have helped him convey to clients that you can eat well and look good. As Hart likes to say, "I'm the guy to see when you want more taste and less waist." Hart acknowledges that compliance is the biggest problem for clients when they begin to make changes to their diet.

"Changing a habit is hard and getting people to stick with a program when they're out of town isn't always easy. But it can be done," Hart admits. While many people are on the go and can't always eat right, Hart feels a protein bar is better than a candy bar. He does however advocate that, "The primary source of nutrition should always be real food because it takes more work for your body to break those calories down."

To help clients make an easier adjustment to changes in their diet, Hart offers supermarket-shopping tours at the market where his clients regularly shop. "I take people up and down the aisles and offer recipe suggestions," says Hart. Knowing supermarkets are laid out with all sorts of products that can easily derail a healthy diet, Hart reminds his clients that, "Food labels are very deceptive and that the perimeter of the store is the healthiest."

Hart has shared his knowledge of fitness and nutrition in a self-published book titled, "The Fat to Muscle Challenge and Good to Go!" Take Your Diet to Work, which is available on his website www.hartbody.com. He is currently at work on "Pura Vida," his next book, which will focus on healthy living for the Hispanic market.

For Jim Hart the psychological component of fitness is just as important as the physical. "Training is more than going to the gym and counting reps for people; you have to know what's going on in people's lives psychologically," says Hart.

Focusing on the psychological aspect of training is Jim Hart's next challenge as he transitions from personal training to life/wellness coaching. Hart aspires to help people live their best life or as Hart calls it, "High end coaching for the higher end of life."

If past success is any indication, this next phase of Jim Hart's career is sure to see him recognized as once again one of America's 100 best personal trainers.

I'm here to tell you that it's ok to eat. If you're trying to live on the smallest amount of food possible, you're putting your health on the line. And you're subjecting yourself to needless torture.

Your body needs food for physical AND psychological nourishment. How do I know this? Decades of training, experience and research in human physiology, nutrition, and eating habits. I took everything I learned, and experienced, and developed a nutrition program that is a PROVEN method for shedding body fat and keeping it off forever!

Try this delicious recipe and I guarantee you won't feel like you're on a "special diet" but you will be eating to LOSE body fat and GAIN lean muscle!

HIGH PROTEIN WAFFLE SANDWICHES

From Jims website www.hartbody.com

Waffle iron preheated

4 Slices of whole wheat bread (40 calorie slices, preferably Arnold™ or Pepperidge Farm™ brands)

3 egg whites and 1 whole egg

2 slices of nonfat American cheese

(use Kraft™, Borden™, or SmartBeat™ brands)

2 tablespoons of parmesan cheese

Pam™ cooking spray

1 teaspoon of pepper

Instructions: In a bowl combine egg whites and one yolk, scramble until well-combined. Add pepper. Assemble sandwiches, tear each cheese slice in 4 pieces and mound in the center of the bread (this prevents overflow). Mound parmesan on top of American cheese. Place the remaining slice on top. Spray waffle iron with cooking spray. Slice each sandwich in half and bake 3 - 4 minutes until golden and crisp

Cool, wrap and store up to one week.



Marcus Charleston is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in Main Line Today, the Official Visitor's Guide to Philadelphia and Philadelphia and Boston Magazine's Elegant Weddings. He is a producer at WYPR in Baltimore