
***SECRETS OF
FIGHTING FEMALE FLAB
OVER 40***

with
Master's Fitness Champ
Maxine Johnson

by
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Secrets of Fighting Female Flab Over 40

With Master's Fitness Champ Maxine Johnson

TOM VENUTO: Hi, Maxine. Thank you so much for the interview. I know that you're actually over 50, but I titled this interview *Fighting Female Flab Over 40*. The reason is, I didn't want to exclude women in their 40s or discourage 40-somethings from reading based on the title because what you have to say is going to interest people in that age category as well. Also, women in their 40s will see that if a 50-something can do it, they no longer have any excuses—they're still "youngsters" in comparison.

Why don't we start by having you share your basic personal stats with our readers, such as who you are; where you're from; your height, weight, body fat if you measure that; and any other personal details you want to share.

MAXINE JOHNSON: Thank you, Tom. I am a personal trainer, figure competitor, fitness model, and wellness coach. I have lived in the northwest all my life—mostly in the greater Seattle area. I'm 56 years old, single, and the mom of three grown, beautiful young men.

My stats are:

Height	5'4"
Weight	130 pounds off season; 125 pounds at competition
Body fat	Approximately 12% off season (although it got to 18% last winter); 9% at competition
Measurements	Breasts 37", Waist 27", Hips 35"

TOM VENUTO: Thanks. Would you tell us a little bit about how you got started in fitness and how that eventually led to your very first fitness competition in 2004?

MAXINE JOHNSON: You bet. It was 1987; I was 36 years old and standing in the grocery line with my youngest child. I started flipping through a fitness magazine (I think it was an early edition of *SHAPE*), and I came across a multi-page story on Rachel McLish. It must have been shortly after she became the first Ms Olympia Female Bodybuilding Champion and her pictures in that magazine left me speechless. I had never seen such beautiful muscles on a woman before, and I immediately connected with the look. I took the magazine home, dragged my

husband's old weight set out of the closet, and started weight lifting in front of the mirror. Soon a ladies' gym opened in my neighborhood and I joined.

Two years later, I became a certified aerobics instructor and 2 years after that, at 40 years old, I was in the best shape of my life. In about 4 years I went from an out-of-shape size 10 at age 36, to a toned-up size 7 at age 40. People started asking if I was training for competition, but I didn't know anything about competing except that I didn't feel that my life as wife and mom would support that kind of activity, so I put it aside.

For the next 8 or 9 years I tried to keep up the workouts but business and home life took up more of my time. Then on May 1, 2000, my sister suddenly died. A year later I lost my 22-year marriage, and the very next day I turned 50! I felt like there was so much that had happened to me that was out of my control, so the gym became the place where I took it back.

The game in the gym was simple: I just picked up the weight, made sure it was heavy, and lifted it a number of times, then put it down. Then I did it again—and again. The battle was just between me and the weights, and I felt like I won every time I picked them up.

Eventually, with encouragement from friends, I decided to pursue the dream of competing. Setting that goal helped me stay focused so that I could move forward in a positive direction. I met some great trainers who guided me on nutrition and workout intensity and entered the Washington State Ironman 2004 at age 53, competing in the Over 35 division.

TOM VENUTO: Before we go any farther and get into training- and nutrition-specific questions, I think a great way to set the tone even more is to share how I first connected with Maxine.

I had just completed co-authoring a book with Jon Benson called [*Fit Over 40*](#). I contributed one chapter, Jon wrote a chapter, and the rest of the book consisted of 50 success stories of men and women between ages 40 and 80 who had developed incredible physiques and fitness levels.

We had sent out press releases and emails calling for people who fit those criteria—over 40 and FIT!—and we filled up the 50 slots very quickly with some great success stories. The day after the book was completely finished—and I mean we already had all 50 success stories and the book had already been typeset for ebook PDF format with table of contents, pages numbered and everything—I got an email from Maxine along with a few of her photographs.

She shared some stories about her personal life, challenges she had overcome and how she got involved in fitness for the first time in her late 30s which eventually led to her hitting the fitness stage for her first competition at age 53.



“Eventually, with encouragement from friends, I decided to pursue the dream of competing. Setting that goal helped me stay focused so that I could move forward in a positive direction.”

In her email to me, which I’ve saved to this day, she wrote: “Tom, we baby boomers have pushed the envelope and changed paradigms once again. 50 IS the new 30!”

I was so impressed with Maxine’s accomplishments and her whole outlook that I asked Jon to include her in the [Fit Over 40](#) project even though the book was already finished and we already had the 50 success stories. Maxine was number 51. That just goes to show how impressed we were with her.

It’s a pleasure now to catch up with Maxine again two and a half years later because I know Maxine has not only been busy in the fitness business and competing again, but winning and making strong showings at very high level competitions.

Could you bring us up to date and tell us what’s happened since your first competition in 2004 and since you appeared in [Fit Over 40](#)? Don’t forget to tell us about the competition you WON last year!

MAXINE JOHNSON: Thanks, Tom. I think the win you’re referring to is the Emerald Cup 2006, and I’m grateful for that win and really all my placings in 2005, 2006, and to the present.

After my first show in October of 2004, I met IFBB Fitness Pro Tanji Johnson (www.tanijohnson.com) at a local gym and started attending her posing

classes. Her coaching pushed me from a 7th place showing in that first competition, to a 1st place showing 6 months later in the Vancouver Classic, 2005.

Since the [Fit Over 40](#) book, I have remained consistent with my training and competing, and started a little fitness modeling too—mostly to promote my business and brand. Here is my competition resume:

Competitions:

- July 2007 Master’s Nationals, Pittsburgh, PA – Over 45 division, 6th place
- July 2006 USAs, Las Vegas, NV – Over 35 division, no placing
- July 2006 Master’s Nationals, Pittsburgh, PA – Over 35 division, no placing
- April 2006 Emerald Cup – Over 35 division, 1st place
- April 2006 Vancouver Classic – Open Class, 3rd place
- October 2005 WA State Ironman – Over 35 division, 1st place
- September 2005 Evergreen State – Over 35 division, 3rd place
- April 2005 Vancouver Classic – Over 35 division, 1st place
- October 2004 WA State Ironman (my first competition!) – Over 35 division, 7th place

I’ve decided to do one show a year now for a while until I can get my business up and running.

TOM VENUTO: That’s quite a list of achievements! Congratulations—and not just for the wins—it’s an achievement just to be on stage at the USA or nationals, and top 6 at a show of that caliber is impressive.

Before we move on, there are a few issues I want to mention, otherwise my fear is that some of our readers might tune out and say, “Well, this doesn’t apply to me...” “Maxine is a fitness competitor and I’m not...” “Maxine is one of those ‘perfect body people.’ She was even an aerobics instructor; she’s not a ‘real person’.”

That’s funny, because last time I checked, you were definitely a real person! But all kidding aside, in a survey I did one year ago when I opened the **Inner Circle** for members, two of the biggest concerns and requests were: (1) Success stories from “REAL” people, and (2) Information that catered to the over 40, 50, and 60 crowd.

I think that women over 40 or 50 who are not interested in fitness competition might think that you’re different. You’re genetically gifted, you don’t have hormonal health issues, you don’t have the same challenges they do, you don’t have a 50-plus-hour-a-week job, you have unlimited funds or sponsors, and you can just train all day long—or something else along those lines.

What would you say to these women to make them realize that you're a lot more like them than they think, and that you have something to teach and offer that applies directly to them, assuming they're not interested in competition?



"I've decided to do one show a year now for a while until I can get my business up and running."

MAXINE JOHNSON: Wow, those are really good questions, Tom, and I'll do my best to answer. I don't have sponsors—most of my competition costs are paid for out of my pocket. And I do have a day job! I was working in the corporate world doing a 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. job until August of 2005 when I became a full-time personal trainer.

I'm going to list some statements that hopefully explain where I came from and how I started out:

- I grew up chubby and with low self-esteem—I was teased by male family members, which made matters worse.
- I developed a drug and alcohol problem in my teens.
- I suffered from depression in my early 20s.
- I gained 47 pounds with my first pregnancy at age 24.
- I gained 32 pounds with my second pregnancy at almost age 29.
- I gained 35 pounds with my third pregnancy at age 31—and when I delivered this child I was 170 pounds and stretched to the limit. With each child I became a little heavier.

I never was real thrilled with my body shape before having children, and I was even less thrilled with it after. So, when I saw how weight training can put

curves on a body in all the right places and you don't have to be skinny to be successful at it, it changed my whole perspective and gave me hope.

When I first started lifting I was a working, married mother raising 4 boys—my 3 sons plus a stepson. My youngest was almost 5 years old. The oldest was 15. In between I had my 13-year-old and our 8-year-old. My husband worked in a receiving warehouse loading trucks, and I worked split shifts in a fabric store for minimum wage.



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On a typical day I would get up about 6:00 a.m. and get the older boys fed and out the door to school by 7:00 a.m. Then I would get myself ready for work, and drop the youngest child off at the babysitter's by 8:30 a.m. When my first 4 hours were done at work (at 1:00 p.m.) I drove to the gym and got about a ninety-minute workout in. Then I picked up the 5-year-old and went home to fix dinner for the family. As soon as dinner was cooked and my husband got home around 4:30, I went back to work and finished my last 4 hours. I usually returned home at about 10:00 p.m. and started preparing for the next day. Yes, I was busy, but I was so motivated to transform my body into the body I had always wanted, there was no way I was going to give up my workouts. I loved them!

Eventually I started a home-based business that still allowed me flexibility in my schedule for workouts. But after about 4 years, the business took up more of my time.

TOM VENUTO: Just so we put things into perspective even more, how much time did you spend training when you first started working out in your 30s? How much time do you spend today, and how does the time and effort commitment change before a competition compared to the rest of the year? Also, nearly everyone wants the most results in the least time. What do you think average women can expect realistically in terms of results from a given amount of time spent training?

MAXINE JOHNSON: In my early days I would spend about 1-½ hours, 4 days a week working out. That included 45 minutes of aerobics class, followed by my weight training. Today, I spend about 1 hour 4-5 days a week weight training, followed by 30-45 minutes of some kind of cardio, unless I'm training for competition. For competition preparation my cardio time increases to 1-½ to 2 hours a day in addition to 1 hour of weight training, and I do 5, maybe 6 days of weight training.

How long will it take for most people to see results? I would say give it 6 weeks before expecting to see really measurable results, in terms of body fat numbers dropping and inches lost. But—and this is really important—you will feel the difference the first day. There is something wonderful that happens to the body when it is pushed hard. I don't know what it is, and yes we all experience soreness, but you will feel better in a way you have not felt before, starting on the very first day. And, each day that you are faithful to your workout, you will continue to feel that good.

Your results are also going to depend on your diet. A person cannot expect to reach her goals or see great results if she is eating poorly. What is eating poorly? Going longer than 4 hours without food, eating processed foods, white flour products, salty/fatty/deli meats, consuming commercial red meat and dairy, drinking soda-pop, eating candy and pastries, etc. I spend considerable time with my clients, educating them on basic nutrition and meal planning.

TOM VENUTO: The majority of women over 40 that I speak with about fitness and fat loss seem to think that it's going to be a long, hard road, and that after 40 it necessarily gets extremely difficult. Some women believe that after menopause, getting fit is a hopeless cause.

You started weight training at age 36, after having 3 children, and reached the best shape of your life at 40. Now in your mid-50s you're winning fitness competitions. That accomplishment alone should convince any woman to believe she can reach her fitness goals too, but I still think there's a lot of self doubt in women's minds when they start the journey.

Personally, I find it much easier to get in shape today in my late 30s than I did when I was 21—but most people don't believe it could actually get easier

when you get older, and women often reply to me, “Yeah, well you don’t have to go through menopause!”

Since my male opinion doesn’t seem to count in this part of the discussion, let’s hear it straight from the superior of the two genders: What do YOU think, Maxine? How does the ease or difficulty of getting in shape now compare to how it was for you 20 years ago, and how does your fitness level in top shape today compare to your 20s and 30s? What words of encouragement do you have for women who think it has to be harder as you get older?

MAXINE JOHNSON: The journey to fitness doesn’t have to be a long, hard road. If you decide that this is really a lifestyle change and you choose activities that are fun, then it won’t seem so much like work. There are many things you can do. Go dancing! Everyone I know of who has taken up dancing—salsa, swing, etc.—has lost weight and had a blast doing it! If you want to change the shape of your body without plastic surgery, then add weight lifting to that fun and be amazed at how your body will respond! And besides, what’s the alternative? Staying overweight and unhappy? Making excuses as to why you can’t do it instead of finding ways to do something?

There is no age at which someone is “hopeless,” in terms of getting in better shape. Yes, the longer a person waits, the less likely they will be able to regain the look of a 20-year-old. But again, what’s the alternative? Studies have shown that even very senior women in their late 70s and 80s are able to increase muscle strength and bone density by resistance training. It used to be thought that after a certain age a person could not build muscle. But that is simply not true. Just because muscles have collected a number of years doesn’t mean they lose their inherent ability to grow! Anything living will grow if it is encouraged and fed. You encourage muscle to grow and bones to thicken by putting weight against them and then feeding them what they need: high-quality protein and complex carbohydrates from many sources such as beans, legumes, brown rice, whole grains, veggies of all colors, and fresh fruit, preferably in season.

Honestly, Tom, there is no difference in how I feel when I work out now compared to 20 years ago. Nothing is more difficult—quite the contrary; I am stronger and more coordinated than ever now. I don’t get sick, I’ve never had a flu shot, and I don’t intend on ever getting one, and I don’t ever get the flu. I used to lose my voice and get sinus infections, but since weight training and eating a bodybuilder’s diet, I just don’t get sick. I don’t have arthritis or joint problems, I just have to remember to stretch more now, and I don’t spend time in tanning beds anymore, but that’s it. As far as workouts go, as long as I keep them interesting and incorporate new things (like cycling and salsa dancing), I feel great just like I did in my 30s. I work out just as hard as I did 20 years ago. My muscles are full and round, my diet is much better now, and I’m leaner.



“There is no difference in how I feel when I work out now compared to 20 years ago. Nothing is more difficult—quite the contrary; I am stronger and more coordinated than ever now.”

Here is what I think is the KEY: We have to change how we define “aging.” Are the symptoms we associate with aging (wrinkles, sagging bodies, forgetfulness, big bellies, diabetes, heart disease, etc.) simply the inevitable result of collecting years? Or are they caused by what we do or don’t do during those years? I’m convinced it’s the latter. I was told by a friend that I “exposed the lie.” The lie says that because we collect years we automatically fall apart physically.

I don’t believe we get old simply by collecting more years. I believe we get old by telling ourselves we’re getting old. When we say things like: “I guess I must be getting old,” “I’m having a senior moment,” or “I’m too old for that,” and so on. The body will respond subconsciously to comply with that statement. So we should not be saying those things about ourselves if we want to stay youthful!

I believe we force our bodies to get old by mistreating them through a bad diet comprised of processed foods, commercial red meat and dairy, cigarettes, soda-pop, artificial additives, deli meats loaded with fat and nitrates, toxins in the air and water... I could go on and on. Our bodies are designed to heal themselves and replenish if they are given the proper tools: natural whole foods, clean non-toxic water, plenty of sleep. It’s not a mystery—it’s just a matter of giving the body what it naturally needs—natural foods that come out

of the ground and meats that come from animals that have been treated well and raised naturally and humanely.

I encourage women to work out even if they never have before. Better late than not at all! My clients who are in their 40s and 50s who have never worked out and are doing exactly what I tell them to do are getting results they never thought possible.

Menopause? Okay—yes, I am right in the middle of it and I don't like it. It's these crazy hot flashes that are so uncomfortable! Herbs helped me during peri-menopause but when full-on menopause hit, I had to go on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) and it helped. However, I don't like the thought of taking drugs, so I'm trying to get off the hormones and use herbal remedies again and they are working a little. The hot flashes are still there, but not as bad as they used to be. I'm taking great supplements, eating lots of fish and whole grains, getting lots of Omegas and veggies and fruit. But no matter, menopause does not keep me out of the gym and I don't allow it to affect any part of my life.

TOM VENUTO: Some people might say you were a late bloomer starting a fitness program at age 36, but in the bigger scheme of things, that wasn't late at all. I think you and I both agree and consider 30-something or even 40-something to be a spring chicken! Kelly Nelson, who still competes in her 70s, told me that she thinks 30-something is like “puberty!”

But what about the woman who has been sedentary her entire life and wants to start getting in shape for the very first time at age 55, 60, 65, even 70, or older? What, specifically, is the best way for a female senior to exercise to lose fat and firm up, and what should she do differently in her exercise program than someone starting at age 20, 30, or 40?

MAXINE JOHNSON: A woman who has been sedentary all her life and has no bone, joint, or major health problems should have no trouble starting a fitness routine. She should start out simply—like walking. The walk can be 15 minutes a day for a week and then increase from there. Or, if she's more able, she can start out walking for 30 or 45 minutes a day. She can buy some inexpensive little hand-weights or dyna-bands for resistance training, if she can't get into a gym. Or she can use what she has in her home. Maybe a couple of heavy books or soup cans!

My cousin was sedentary all her life, became extremely overweight, and developed type 2 diabetes. She is 6 years older than I am. When she found out that I was competing, she said she marched into her doctor's office and gave an ultimatum stating that she wanted the weight off, she wanted to get off her medication, and she didn't care what she had to do to make it happen. The doctor didn't really give her a lot of guidance outside the standard protocol, so my cousin took it upon herself to clean up her diet and get her body moving.

She lost about 100 pounds, and the doctors were astounded and documented her story.



“Age 55 may be a lot different than age 70—or not! It’s not just the accumulation of years that causes aging. Our age is more determined by the exercise we get or don’t get, by the kinds of foods we eat or don’t eat, and how we emotionally handle the ups and downs in life.”

I have had many clients experience a lessening of minor aches and pains as they get stronger and more agile through resistance training. A woman in her 40s or 50s who has been sedentary all her life should start slowly and maintain consistency. Three-times-a-week weight training with some good walks in between for cardio is great. And there must be gradual progression from there. Sometimes ladies don’t know how to increase intensity safely and need some guidance. That’s what I’m here for!

Another great suggestion is to keep a food diary for a few days so that you will become aware of what you’re putting into your mouth and when. Food diaries can be a real eye-opener! Then I would encourage you to start spacing your meals about 3 hours apart and make sure you include high quality protein and complex carbs with each meal. Many times this component alone can be a challenge, but followed consistently it makes a huge difference.

Nutrition is such a critical piece and you can’t ignore it. If you have to take baby steps to wean off of certain foods, then baby steps it is. Anyone who is serious about taking control of her health will get off the bad food and learn to develop hunger for the good stuff! No excuses!

Age 55 may be a lot different than age 70—or not! It’s not just the accumulation of years that causes aging. Our age is more determined by the exercise we get or don’t get, by the kinds of foods we eat or don’t eat, and how

we emotionally handle the ups and downs in life. I have seen 55-year-olds who think, act, and look like they are 80-plus, and I have seen 90-plus-year-olds who are young-thinking, young-acting, and active.

My dad is 77 years old and recently joined a gym and hired a trainer to help him build up his quads so he can go skiing next year. He skis every year! And he goes dancing, and he builds airplanes in his basement, etc. He is more physically active now than ever and I am so proud of him. By the way, he smoked cigarettes from the time he was 16 until he was 38 years old. He hasn't smoked for 39 years and he works out and eats 5 small meals a day.

TOM VENUTO: There are actually two major questions I receive often from age 40+ or 50+ readers. The first is, "How should I exercise differently?" and the second is, "How should I eat differently?" There seems to be an implied assumption that EVERYTHING is different when you get older, even the way you should eat.

Now, I do know that all else being equal, energy expenditure usually decreases as you get older, although we can slow this down a lot by maintaining our lean tissue. This means that the average person who keeps eating the same quantity of food at age 55 as he or she did at age 25 is probably going to gain weight automatically because what were once maintenance calories are now a surplus. However, outside of the simple calorie issue, do you think there are any major differences in the way an older woman should eat?

MAXINE JOHNSON: I don't know, Tom. I eat a lot! I just went into the hydrostatic body fat dunk tank to get tested a couple of months ago and found out that I burn over 1600 calories at rest—just sitting and doing nothing. Add my workouts on top of that and I guess I burn close to 3000 calories a day. I have to feed that to maintain my lean mass. Again, it's not the age that's the determining factor, it's the metabolism, and metabolism is affected by workout and nutrition history. And metabolism can be changed. I've seen it happen! No, we can't eat like a growing teenage boy (thank God) and expect to see weight loss. But we can eat for our activity level and make our metabolisms burn hotter. The more active the person and the more lean mass in that body, the hotter the metabolism runs and the more calories can be consumed without corresponding fat gain.

What makes the metabolism burn hotter? Eating small frequent whole meals throughout the day and building a solid foundation of muscle through consistent resistance training over a period of time.

TOM VENUTO: What advice would you offer our female readers about getting back their pre-baby figure after pregnancy?

MAXINE JOHNSON: If a new mom is nursing her baby, I suggest keeping her calories adequate for milk production. I mistakenly applied a moderate calorie reduction meal plan on a new mom, and her milk production depleted a little almost immediately!

Not good. We corrected that real fast. However, new moms need time to get out and walk, engage in muscle toning exercises, and eat a well-balanced diet of whole foods and plenty of liquids. When baby is weaned, then mom can start a little calorie reduction and increased activity to encourage weight loss. Be patient. Giving birth is a huge undertaking both physically and emotionally. If the new mom did not gain more than 40 pounds with her pregnancy, then she should see results in a few months, if she's consistent.

TOM VENUTO: What's your best advice for mothers with children—especially more than one child—who say that with the kids they don't have time to exercise at all?

MAXINE JOHNSON: You read my story above. We had 4 boys in the house and I was working split shifts. I made time for working out because I wanted to get in shape so bad. I looked at my schedule and found 2- to 3-hour pockets of time several times a week and claimed them for my workouts.

TOM VENUTO: The subject of menopause comes up constantly when discussing female fitness after age 40 or 50. Would you talk about this briefly—what it is, how it affects you, and what to do about it?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Menopause is the time in a woman's life when her ovaries slowly stop producing estrogen. Estrogen production shifts to other areas of the body. Menopause in Western culture is apparently more uncomfortable than in other cultures, or so I have read. Consequently, Western women seek relief from the discomfort by trying to replace the "lost" estrogen through herbs or hormone replacement therapy.

I get hot flashes and I don't like them at all. I experience a brief wave of depression, followed by a prickly feeling all over, followed by waves of heat that make me perspire. This lasts about a minute. Lately, because I am trying to get off HRT and go back to herbs, I've been experiencing withdrawals and hot flashes that wake me up in the night. But in no way does this keep me out of the gym. In fact, the best relief often comes when I am lifting or riding my bike.

TOM VENUTO: With the understanding that we both suggest that our readers see a medical professional for clinical health issues, is there anything you can say about hormone replacement therapy for the menopausal and post-menopausal female?

MAXINE JOHNSON: I'll just share what I've done. During peri-menopause I used herbs to alleviate symptoms such as forgetfulness, confusion, depression, sensitivity to noise, mood swings, etc.: Black Cohosh, Wild Yam, and Dong Quai worked great. Additionally, my doctor suggested I take 800 IUs of vitamin E and a high-potency B-complex. This worked very well for about 8 years. Then full-on menopause hit, and the herbs were no longer effective. The hot flashes were awful. I got a prescription from my doctor for traditional HRT, but the

estrogen was from a plant source. I continued with that until just a few months ago and I am trying to go back to herbs again and including more soy in my diet.



“The answer to losing menopausal belly fat is the same as what we discussed for losing fat in general.”

TOM VENUTO: A lot of women notice, or should I say, complain, about how they begin to gain belly fat after menopause, where they never had fat before. In general, men tend to store belly fat and women tend to store lower body fat, which are gender-based hormonal traits. But the distribution changes at menopause because a woman’s hormones change. My question is, because the distribution of fat changes, does that mean that a menopausal woman should do something different to lose “menopausal belly fat” than she would do to lose any other body fat?

Maybe even more importantly than how to get rid of it once you have it, what preventive measures do you suggest pre-menopausal women take to stop belly fat from accumulating in the first place?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Tom, those are really great questions... and tough to answer. But, from the information I found, it seems the answer to losing menopausal belly fat is the same as what we discussed for losing fat in general. I was researching this recently and found some pretty helpful information from the Mayo Clinic.

6 Strategies for Successful Fat Loss During and After Menopause:

1. Make a commitment for permanent change.
2. Get emotional support.
3. Set a realistic goal.
4. Enjoy healthier foods.
5. Get active, stay active.
6. Change your lifestyle.

You can find the whole article and more on the subject here:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/menopause-weight-gain/HO01076>

What can women do to stop belly fat from accumulating in the first place? Get active now, stay active, lift weights, and eat 5-6 small meals every day that consist of a high-quality protein and a complex carbohydrate to help keep blood glucose levels even throughout the day.

TOM VENUTO: I also noticed that the Mayo Clinic article said that the causes of belly fat-gain included exercising less and eating more. Those are simple, obvious causes and those 6 points are definitely simple, common sense recommendations for over-40 belly fat control. Although they did mention reduced calorie needs with age and also hormonal issues, I think that the way women are searching for some kind of “secret” while ignoring the simple and obvious calories in vs. calories out equation might be part of the problem.



“I like to treat myself about once a week, as long as I am not in training for competition.”

You wrote that you love chocolate, and once in a while you treat yourself to homemade nachos or a glass of red wine. That may surprise some people who might think you're a 100% clean-eating fanatic and that you must deprive yourself of everything that tastes good to look so great. Would you explain how, when, and how much of these "treat" foods you eat and how that changes, if at all, when competition time comes around? Also, how strict do you think a person should be with food choices to get good results, and how does someone personally balance the necessary discipline with enjoying life?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Oh yes—I like to treat myself about once a week, as long as I am not in training for competition. The nachos and wine have become a traditional after-contest treat for me, along with some chocolate ice cream or cake or cheesecake. Then, usually the next morning after a contest my friends and I will go out for pancakes for breakfast! (Woo hoo!) That's the only time I eat pancakes and syrup all year.

If a woman is out of shape and just starting a fitness program, then her whole mindset is to break her addictions to salt, sugar, and fat that she has probably developed and to start including exercise as a regular part of her life. Additionally, she is learning to eat 6 times a day and include healthy proteins and carbs in those meals. In my opinion, this woman should not be thinking of getting cheat meals until she has thoroughly conquered the bad habits and replaced them with healthy ones and she has met her weight loss goal, or come very close to it. Once all those things are in place and her body has become a fat-burning machine, then she can start including treats once in awhile. But her first choice for something sweet should be some fruit. Grapes are nature's candy! Berries are so good blended with soy yogurt, vanilla protein powder, and stevia.

But you know, there are legitimate times when we benefit by relaxing with friends and family with celebratory food. Christmas, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Easter, and other religious holidays are important to our humanity and spirituality, and these times need to be honored. Weddings, funerals, baby christenings, bar-mitzvahs, etc., are also special times to celebrate. But you don't have to be gluttonous to enjoy these times with loved ones. Of course a person should participate, but keep things under control and get back on the plan when the festivities are over.

TOM VENUTO: Okay, let's get down to the nitty gritty and talk about the specifics of how you train and eat. First, could you show us your daily menus—your pre-competition menu and the way you eat the rest of the year?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Right now I'm in what is called the "off season." But that doesn't mean I'm "off"; it just means that I'm not in contest prep. Even though I am allowed to eat whatever I want, I know myself well enough to know the danger foods I should not keep in my house. So, if I want any of the danger foods (peanut

butter, nuts, chocolate, ice cream, cheesecake), I will go out and buy a small portion for my once-a-week cheat meal and enjoy it. Then it's done and I don't have the continual temptation every day in the house. However, I make sure I get in my cardio and that I eat clean all the rest of the days.

Typical Day, Off Season:

Meal 1	½ cup oatmeal, 1 scoop protein powder, 4 egg whites, ½ cup water, ¼ cup soy milk, stevia, berries: all blended into a smoothie
Meal 2	4 ounces salmon, ½ cup brown rice
Meal 3	4 ounces broiled chicken breast, ½ cup black beans (homemade), salsa, 2 corn tortillas (authentic—the label is written in Spanish!)
Meal 4	Meal replacement shake or bar
Meal 5	2 cups mixed greens with purple cabbage, shredded carrot, red pepper, 4 ounces wild salmon, olive oil and vinegar dressing
Meal 6	protein shake or yogurt/protein “pudding” (plain soy or goat-milk yogurt mixed with 1 scoop of my favorite flavor protein powder)

Contest Prep Meals, 6 Weeks Out:

Meal 1	¾ cup oatmeal, 8 egg whites, ½ cup berries
Meal 2	1-½ scoops whey protein in 10 ounces water, with CLA and extra L-Glutamine
Meal 3	5 ounces poached chicken breast, 4 ounces baked yam or sweet potato, 1 cup asparagus
Meal 4	5 ounces poached chicken breast, ½ cup brown rice, 1 cup green beans
Meal 5	5 ounces tilapia fish, 4 ounces baked yam or sweet potato, large mixed salad with 2 tablespoons olive oil and vinegar
Meal 6	6 egg whites, 1 cup steamed broccoli

TOM VENUTO: I know you keep food diaries. Why do you think this is important, and why do you think that most people have so much resistance to counting calories or tracking nutritional intake?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Food diaries are really important, especially for beginners because it makes them conscious of what they are putting in their mouths. And, as a personal trainer, I want to know what foods they have been eating that got them into the shape they are in when I meet them. Many times people will tell me they eat

healthy, and I will look at what they wrote down in their diary and realize they don't know what healthy is. So then I know that some education is in order. The most shocking thing I read once was from a girl in her late teens who wrote in her food diary that she had a hot dog and a Coke for breakfast and she seemed entirely okay with that.



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TOM VENUTO: Would you give us a brief overview of your training program including the daily or weekly schedule and how you choose the exercises? Also, how often do you change workout programs?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Currently I'm on a 4-day split routine:

Monday, Day 1	Quads, calves, and cardio
Tuesday, Day 2	Chest, biceps, abs, and cardio
Wednesday	Off
Thursday, Day 3	Glutes, hamstrings, abs, and cardio
Friday, Day 4	Back, triceps, and cardio
Saturday	Abs and cardio

I will keep this workout schedule until I need to prepare for something like a photo shoot. Then, depending on my body fat levels, I may or may not increase my cardio and decrease the weight volume on my lifts.

TOM VENUTO: Do you think a fitness competitor should train like a male bodybuilder—for example, heavy resistance with body-part split routines and fairly high volume—or are there major differences in program design specifically for women?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Split routines, absolutely! It's simply not possible to develop the different muscle groups to competition level without using split routines. And I have found that in order to change the shape of your body you have to lift heavy. I have learned, though, that there is "bodybuilding heavy," and then there is "powerlifting heavy."

Fitness and figure competitors, for the most part, do not powerlift, but they do lift heavy, if necessary. Lifting heavy means 4 sets of 6-10 or 8-10 reps. Personally, I have experienced difficulty in developing a nice quad-sweep in my legs. My upper body is great—I can keep the reps at 10-15 or more if I want. But I have come to think that maybe I have an overabundance of type 1 fibers in my legs so I have begun lifting very heavy (3-6 reps, 4 sets per exercise) on quad day, hoping to develop more type 2 fiber growth.

Program design is dependent on goals, regardless of gender. Normal women (non-competitors or women not on male steroids) can lift heavy, eat right, and develop beautiful, full, feminine muscles doing it.

TOM VENUTO: Do you think that the average woman should train the same way as a fitness competitor, or can there be big differences in the weight training programs?



“Everyone needs a goal, whether it be to prepare for being on stage, or fit into last year’s bathing suit.”

MAXINE JOHNSON: The basic lifting principles are the same, regardless of goals. And, truth be told, women really do want to look at least somewhat like what they have seen in the fitness magazines, but they are often hesitant to say that. The thing is, everyone needs a goal, whether it be to prepare for being on stage, or fit into last year’s bathing suit. So, to reach the goal you have to push yourself beyond your current capacity. The workout for the beginner is going to be a lot different than a workout for a competitor, simply because stamina and coordination need to be developed in the beginner. But the principles are the same.

Also, the woman who is not competing has way more flexibility in the kinds of activities she chooses outside her weight training. For instance, a fitness competitor has to attend her gymnastics class for serious fitness training so that she can perform her routine. It is not an option for her to choose, for instance, a step aerobics class instead. But the non-competitor can choose whatever she thinks is fun and effective for her on that day! As long as she moves her body and breaks a good sweat, she’s good. (In addition to her weight training, of course!)

TOM VENUTO: This next question has been so beat to death you’d think it would be dead by now, but it still gets asked by women every single day, so here we go. What if a woman doesn’t want to build muscle bulk? Should she train differently or avoid weight training?

MAXINE JOHNSON: I'm there with you, Tom. (Smile.) That's okay; it's a legitimate question.

Ladies, you don't have to worry about getting big and bulky like a guy. The estrogen levels in your body will not allow that to happen. The only way I know of that a female can get huge muscles like a man is if she takes male hormones. Yes, that happens and the results are usually not very pretty. That's why we have Fitness and Figure divisions in the bodybuilding world now. But, please, lift heavy if you want to change your body.

I see women in the gym all the time lifting little baby weights and their bodies don't change and then they quit because they think it doesn't work. So what does "lifting heavy" mean? It means that you pick a weight that you can safely lift only 6-8 times and you are struggling on numbers 4 or 5. That sounds like a lot, especially to someone new. So I'll share with you what I did all by myself in the very beginning; you might want to try this when you are not a beginner anymore.

4 sets per exercise:

Set 1	Lift a weight that will allow you 12-15 reps (lifts). You should be struggling a little on numbers 10-13. Rest about a minute.
Set 2	Increase the weight and do 10-12 reps. Rest.
Set 3	Increase the weight again and do 8-10 reps. Rest.
Set 4	Increase the weight for the last time and do 6-8 reps.

There—you have warmed and worked the endurance fibers and pushed your growth fibers (for lack of a better word) as well.

You may not be able to handle 4 sets of an exercise when you first start out, so start out with 2 sets using the lighter weights. I encourage you to go to my site www.temple-fit.com and pick out a Beginner's Weight Training sample workout if you are a beginner. Then after about 6 weeks (depends on you!) you can pick out an Intermediate Weight Training sample workout or modify the workout you have if you are comfortable doing that.

Ladies, feed the muscles you are trying to create. In the gym is where the muscles are torn down. Next, they need to be built back up, but to do that, they need the proper nutritional tools. Remember when you were growing your children? They needed special food that was suitable for them, and you were careful to give them what they needed. Have you spent time in your garden growing beautiful flowers or plants? If so, then you know they each have their own special nutritional needs too. Your muscles are no different. Your muscles have specific nutritional needs that are found in high-quality protein and complex carbohydrates, and they need to be fed every 2-3 hours. You may

want to consider supplementation as well. Feel free to visit my site for more information!

TOM VENUTO: What kind and how much cardio do you do year-round and before competition?

MAXINE JOHNSON: In the off season I like to get in an hour of some kind of activity every day—at the very least, 5-6 days a week. When preparing for a contest, I increase my cardio to two 45-minute sessions that are about 6 hours apart. That is in addition to my weight training.

TOM VENUTO: They say that bodybuilding, figure and fitness are individual sports, but almost all of the most successful men and women I know in physique sports have a huge circle of social support. What are your thoughts about the importance of having trainers, friends, confidants, coaches, mentors, and other supportive people in your corner?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Yes, it's true that bodybuilding, fitness and figure are individual sports, meaning that they are not team sports. The only real opponent a bodybuilder has is himself or herself! That makes it all the more important that the athlete has a supportive group of friends, fellow bodybuilders, mentors, or trainers because it is too easy to make excuses or not keep an objective and positive frame of mind through some of the tough times. In the early days I didn't have anyone simply because in my neighborhood I was a forerunner. But I had my books and my motivation, and I did get positive feedback! But when I decided to compete, I took the time to search out and find the support I needed, and I have been very blessed with wonderful friendships in the process.

TOM VENUTO: Who were your own personal role models when you first started and how did you find them?

MAXINE JOHNSON: My role models 20 years ago were those I found in the books: Rachel McLish, Gladys Portuguese, Dr. Joyce Vedral, Cory Everson, and Anja Langer. I first found Rachel in the magazine in the grocery store. Then I shopped for more books and found *Perfect Parts* (McLish & Vedral), *Now or Never* (Vedral), *Superflex* (Everson), and *Bodyflex* (Langer).

TOM VENUTO: Most of us know how powerful beliefs can be because our beliefs are reflected in our behaviors and, as anyone familiar with the placebo effect knows, strong unconscious beliefs can even alter biology. I've written previously many times concerning the importance of belief systems about aging because so many women simply don't believe it's possible to get a great body after a certain age. As a result, they've lost before they've even started the game.

You once wrote that, "I believe our bodies are 'temples' that our spirits live in." You also said that after your first competition at age 53 you believed it was the beginning of an exciting new future. When I hear someone say that

they believe age 53 is the beginning, it really stands out, and I love to hear that.

What other personal belief systems do you have related directly to health and fitness that you think other women would be wise to adopt if they want to get results similar to yours. What are some limiting beliefs they should avoid?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Amazing questions, Tom. I'll do my best to answer concisely. First of all, it's difficult to compartmentalize my belief system into just health and fitness. I am Christian and have experienced God's redeeming love and power in my life when He saved me from drugs, alcohol, and abuse at age 21. My life since has been a journey of healing through many circumstances, and I am grateful to be here. My favorite scripture is Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

As stated, I believe that we are spirits first, then we are unique personalities with emotions and power to think and reason. I believe that our spiritual and emotional health has a profound effect on our behavior and our physical bodies. What we believe becomes what we say and do, which in turn becomes our character and ultimately forms our life.



"Go for a walk or do some kind of enjoyable activity that makes you sweat at least 30 minutes every day."

One of the things I learned through my faith is that our thoughts and words have creative power. Science has now proved that what we think—and particularly what we say—have an immediate effect on nerve centers in the brain. In fact, the speech area of our brains, called "Broca's area," is also the same area responsible for organizing action. So when a person speaks, the

speech center in Broca's area activates, and the nerve centers having to do with organizational planning that are also part of Broca's area, respond and attempt to align with what was just spoken. One article on the subject can be found here:

Where the Brain Organizes Actions: http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2006-06/cp-wtb060806.php

I don't know about you, but I find this fascinating. Knowing this, then, that our brains attempt to fulfill the words we speak, it is critical that we recognize what we are saying about ourselves and our lives, and change the negative statements to positive ones! With consistency, the mind will go to work to bring about in the physical self what is believed and spoken from the spiritual and emotional self.

TOM VENUTO: Yes, I find it very fascinating as well and have been studying the scientific and neurological basis of goal setting, law of attraction, affirmations, visualization, and other concepts that relate to motivation.

Since we covered so much information, I think a great way to finish would be with a summary checklist of what women over age 40 should do, if they're starting from scratch, to begin fighting the fat and building muscle. No more than 10 quick tips, one short line for each tip.

MAXINE JOHNSON: Okay, here are my 10 tips to get fit!

Maxine's 10 Tips To Get Fit!

1. Decide that, no matter what it takes or how long it takes, you are going to get healthier, stronger, and more beautiful than ever before!
2. Tell a friend or loved one about your decision and ask him or her to join you or to hold you accountable.
3. Plan what your workout times are and schedule them into your day planner.
4. Plan and prepare 5-6 meals for the next day.
5. Go through your kitchen cupboards and refrigerator and remove all foods that you know are going to be a temptation or are not good for you. Need help? Visit my site: www.temple-fit.com.
6. Go grocery shopping after you have had a meal with list in hand, and shop the perimeter of the store for fruit, veggies, whole grains, and the best protein, choosing organic whenever possible.
7. Go for a walk or do some kind of enjoyable activity that makes you sweat at least 30 minutes every day.
8. Go to my website and pick a sample weight lifting routine that you can take to the gym with you. Log your workouts.

9. Go and have your body fat and body measurements taken once a month.
10. Stay faithful to yourself and speak only positive statements over yourself and your body and declare your ability to be victorious!

TOM VENUTO: One last question: How can our readers contact you to find out about any services or products you offer?

MAXINE JOHNSON: Feel free to visit my website: www.temple-fit.com or write me directly at comments@temple-fit.com!

TOM VENUTO: Maxine, this has been awesome. YOU are awesome! This has been not only informational, but inspirational too. Thank you! ■

Fit Over 40 by Jon Benson and Tom Venuto



Find out how an obese couch potato discovered an amazing anti-aging fitness secret so simple, yet so powerful, even his doctors were scratching their heads when they saw his stunning transformation! This inspirational anti-aging, health, and weight loss ebook written by Jon Benson and Tom Venuto, reveals how you can look and feel 10–15 years younger by “role modeling” people who have already done it. You’ll learn about the training, nutrition, and mindsets of more than 50 men and women, age 40–80, who reshaped their bodies, lost weight, and transformed their lives after the age of 50, and how you can duplicate their success.

You’ll learn hundreds of anti-aging, health, exercise, and nutrition tips to help you look younger and stay in top shape regardless of your age. If you want to learn the fastest and easiest ways to lose weight and reverse the aging process in your body, then this could be the most important book you ever read—it will definitely be one of the most inspiring. For more details, visit:

www.fitover40.net

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