

The Cure for Weight Loss

Because Truth Is Low-Hanging Fruit

By Cory Gardener

With John Gardener, my father

Dedication

For my father, **John Gardener** —
the most badass collections lawyer and gymnast I've
ever known,
who taught me that the body is a temple
and that common sense is usually enough.

All-beef hot dogs.
Real cheddar.
Eaten a few times a year.



PCH Chili Dogs
Orange, California.
Incomparable chili.

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Chapter One: The Origin of Our Bodies

You're barefoot in cool morning grass. The air is sharp enough that you can see your breath. Somewhere ahead, an animal moves across the horizon. You and your tribe have been running since dawn—not for exercise, not for fun, but because this is how you survive. Your legs burn, your lungs work steadily, your body knows exactly what to do. There is no debate about whether you feel like moving today. Movement is the day.

This isn't nostalgia or fantasy. This is the environment your body was built for. In that moment—running, breathing, adapting—you are not “working out.” You are simply doing what a human body does when it is allowed to function as intended.

Your body is not accidental. It is the result of evolution and natural selection. That's not a philosophical statement—it's a biological one. The humans who survived long enough to reproduce were the ones whose bodies could endure effort, manage stress, recover, and keep going. Those traits didn't disappear just because society got more comfortable. They were passed down. You are carrying them right now.

As time went on, humans built tools. Spears became bows. Bows became guns. We learned agriculture. We learned how to store food, settle land, divide labor. Survival slowly became less physically demanding. Technology took over tasks that once required movement. But none of that changed the hardware. It only changed the environment.

Here's the part people miss: evolution doesn't care about convenience. Your body didn't update its operating system just because chairs were invented. At a biological level, you are still an animal. Every major system in your body—muscular, cardiovascular, hormonal, neurological—was designed with movement as a constant input.

We like to think we've "outgrown" that reality. That we're smarter now. More advanced. But intelligence doesn't cancel biology. You can be surrounded by technology and still operate inside an organic body with specific requirements. Ignoring those requirements doesn't make you modern—it makes you misaligned.

You don't negotiate with breathing. You don't debate whether sleep is earned. You don't treat digestion as optional. Movement belongs in the same category. It is not a lifestyle choice. It is not a hobby. It is not a moral failing if you skip it—it is simply a biological cost you pay later.

We are organic machines. We inhale oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. Cells convert fuel into energy. Waste is expelled. Systems regulate themselves toward balance. Movement is part of that loop. Remove it, and efficiency drops. Output drops. Stability drops.

This is not motivational language. This is mechanics.

No matter how advanced society becomes, your body still expects movement to maintain balance, performance, and homeostasis. That expectation never went away. And weight gain, fatigue, anxiety, and chronic dysfunction are not personal failures—they are predictable outcomes of ignoring how the system works.

That's the foundation. Everything else in this book builds on that reality.

Before closing out this chapter, there's one more way to look at this that's worth sitting with—a simple thought experiment about who is actually running your body.

Most of what keeps you alive happens without your permission. Your heart beats. Blood moves. Organs communicate. Hormones release. Temperature regulates. Healing occurs. You don't vote on any of it. You can temporarily interfere with a few surface-level functions—hold your breath, tense a muscle—but the overwhelming majority of the system runs quietly in the background. Call it the subconscious, the autonomic nervous system, or just biology doing its job. However you label it, roughly 80 percent of what's happening inside you is governed without your conscious input.

Now consider what that means. There is a part of you that is constantly monitoring the system as a whole—energy levels, stress, circulation, recovery, balance. When that system signals the need for movement, it isn't guessing. It isn't moralizing. It isn't trying to punish you or make you better. It's doing what it always does: adjusting inputs to keep the machine functioning. Ignoring that signal isn't an act of independence. It's a disagreement with the part of you that's actually keeping the lights on.

Seen this way, movement stops being a chore and starts looking like cooperation. You are not the sole operator of your body—you're a partner in it. And when the system that runs 80 percent of the operation says, *we*

need to move, arguing back doesn't make you disciplined or modern or busy. It just means the conscious 20 percent is overriding the captain of the ship. That's not rebellion. That's misalignment.

Chapter Two: Movement as a Non-Negotiable

One of the first lies people absorb—usually without realizing it—is that exercise “isn't for everyone.” Somewhere along the line, movement got framed as something reserved for a certain type of person: athletes, gym people, fitness freaks, Navy SEALs. If you don't identify as that kind of person, the conclusion feels obvious—you must be exempt.

That framing is wrong from the start. Movement has never meant extremes. Even in ancient societies, not everyone hunted. Some gathered. Some built. Some carried. Some walked long distances. Roles differed, but movement didn't disappear. There has never been a version of the human body that functioned well without regular physical demand. The expectation was never intensity—it was participation.

Modern culture quietly turns movement into a performance instead of a requirement. If it looks hard, painful, or humiliating, people assume it must not be for them. But that's a misunderstanding of the assignment. The goal was never to suffer. The goal was to keep the system operating the way it was designed to operate. Reasonable effort. Consistent input. Nothing heroic.

This is where the reward mentality sneaks in and does real damage.

Somewhere along the way, exercise got turned into a transaction. *I worked out, therefore I earned something*. A meal. A dessert. A drink. Three drinks. The logic sounds harmless on the surface, but it completely misses the

point. Movement isn't a job you clock into so you can clock out with a prize. It's maintenance. You don't brush your teeth so you can smash sugar afterward. You don't sleep so you can punish your body the next day. You do those things because the system requires them.

When you treat exercise like currency, you distort its purpose. You turn something foundational into a bargaining chip. And once that happens, movement becomes optional—something you negotiate with instead of something you honor. That's how people end up trapped in cycles of extremes: all-or-nothing workouts followed by all-or-nothing eating. Burn, then binge. Punish, then reward. Repeat.

The truth is simpler and less dramatic. Movement is not how you earn food. Food is not how you justify movement. They are two separate inputs serving two separate functions. Your body does not keep score the way your mind does. It doesn't care that you "deserved" something. It cares whether it's getting what it needs to function.

Exercise is non-negotiable in the same way sleep is non-negotiable. You can skip it. You can rationalize skipping it. You can convince yourself you're too busy or too tired or too different. But the cost doesn't disappear—it just shows up later, quietly, compounded over time.

This chapter isn't about guilt. It's about removing the false drama around movement. You don't need to earn it. You don't need to justify it. You don't need to turn it into an identity. You move because you are a body that expects to move. That's it.

Once you accept that, the negotiation ends—and things get a lot easier.

There's another layer to this that matters more than people realize, and it starts with language.

At some point, movement stopped being understood as a natural state and got rebranded into an activity. We stopped *moving* and started “working out.” We stopped living in bodies and started “exercising.” That shift sounds harmless, but it isn’t. Language shapes perception, and perception shapes behavior. When movement gets renamed, it also gets relocated—from something that simply *is*, into something you *go do*.

Once movement becomes an appointment, it becomes optional. It gets scheduled. Deferred. Rescheduled again. It becomes a luxury, a chore, or a personality trait. Something you do before work, after work, on weekends, or when life calms down. And just like that, the most basic requirement of your biology is separated from your identity as a human being.

That separation is the trick.

When movement is no longer part of who you are, but instead something external you “should” do, you’re easier to manage. Easier to sell to. Easier to distract. A body that doesn’t move well doesn’t think as clearly. A mind that’s foggy doesn’t question narratives as effectively. A person disconnected from their physical reality is far more likely to outsource solutions—to products, programs, pills, subscriptions, and promises.

Think of it like a three-legged stool. Physical health. Mental health. Something deeper—call it spiritual health, self-trust, or internal alignment. Knock out one leg, and the whole thing collapses. When physical health degrades, mental resilience follows. When mental clarity fades, self-direction weakens. And once those supports are gone, people become far more compliant—far more susceptible to being told what they need, what they lack, and what will finally fix them.

This doesn’t require a conspiracy. It’s just incentives. A population that’s tired, disconnected from their bodies, and at war with basic movement is a

population that consumes more and questions less. When people are strong, clear, and physically capable, they're harder to sell fear to. Harder to convince they're broken. Harder to trap in cycles of dependency.

Reframing movement as “working out” helped make that possible. It turned a necessity into a niche. It detached people from the quiet authority of their own bodies and replaced it with external rules, metrics, and identities. You stopped listening inward and started waiting to be told what to do.

This is why reclaiming movement matters beyond weight or aesthetics. It's not just about health. It's about autonomy. When movement returns to its rightful place—not as a task, but as a baseline—you reconnect with your body as a source of information instead of something to manage or negotiate with.

And once that happens, the consumer spell starts to break.

Chapter Three: Food Isn't a Reward — It's Fuel

Somewhere along the way, food stopped being understood for what it is. It stopped being fuel and became entertainment. Pleasure. Comfort. Identity. We were slowly taught—through advertising, convenience culture, and repetition—that food exists primarily to taste good, to feel good, and to fill emotional gaps. Calories became secondary. Function became optional. Taste became king.

That shift matters, because once food is framed primarily as pleasure, everything downstream gets distorted. Eating becomes disconnected

from need. Hunger gets confused with boredom. Satisfaction gets confused with fullness. And the idea that food has a job—to support energy, movement, recovery, and clarity—gets buried under cravings and habits that were never about nourishment in the first place.

One of the biggest lies propping this up is the idea that “bad food tastes good and healthy food tastes bad.” That belief didn’t come from nowhere. It was manufactured. Fast food and ultra-processed food aren’t just convenient—they’re engineered. Designed in labs to hit specific combinations of salt, sugar, fat, and texture that override natural satiety cues. They’re meant to be addictive. They’re meant to be hyper-stimulating. And over time, they don’t just harm your body—they damage your palate.

When you consistently eat engineered food, your sense of taste adapts downward. Real food starts to feel bland. Vegetables taste boring. Protein tastes dry. Subtle flavors disappear. That’s not because healthy food is inherently bad—it’s because your taste buds have been trained to expect chemical levels of stimulation. It’s like blasting music at full volume for years and then wondering why acoustic sounds feel dull.

Here’s the part most people never get told: that adaptation works both ways.

If you stop eating fast food and ultra-processed junk long enough, your palate resets. Slowly at first, then unmistakably. Foods that once tasted “meh” start tasting rich. Sweetness becomes noticeable without being overwhelming. Salt becomes something you detect instead of crave. You don’t lose enjoyment—you regain sensitivity. And once that happens, the trap becomes obvious. The food that was sold as pleasure starts to taste artificial, heavy, and excessive.

This is the middle ground people miss. The choice is not between joyless eating and reckless indulgence. There is a wide, sustainable space where food both tastes good *and* serves its purpose. But you can't access it while your system is hijacked. You have to let your body relearn what food actually is.

Food is not a reward for movement. It's not a consolation prize for stress. It's not something you earn by suffering. It's fuel—plain and simple. And when you start treating it that way, the relationship stops being emotional and starts being functional. That's not restrictive. That's freeing.

And once food returns to fuel, weight loss stops being a battle and starts being a byproduct.

One of the most persistent excuses people lean on when it comes to food is cost. The idea that eating well is expensive, inconvenient, or unrealistic, while fast food is cheap and efficient. That belief survives only because no one ever stops to actually do the math.

We live in a moment where information—and now AI—has collapsed the effort barrier. You can generate grocery lists, meal plans, and recipes in seconds. You can compare prices instantly. You can walk into a store with a clear plan instead of reacting to packaging and impulse. The idea that eating well is inaccessible isn't just outdated—it's lazy thinking propped up by habit.

Take a step back and compare reality to the narrative.

A single fast-food combo can easily run thirty dollars once you factor in tax, add-ons, and portion creep. For that same thirty dollars, you can buy ten grass-fed burger patties from Costco. Ten real meals. High protein. Actual

nutrients. Food that feeds your body instead of hijacking it. That's not a health argument—that's a financial one.

Fast food isn't cheap. It's expensive in every way that matters. You pay more per calorie, more per gram of protein, and more long-term in health costs. What you're really paying for is convenience and stimulation—not nourishment. And even the convenience argument falls apart once you realize how little planning it actually takes to eat real food consistently.

This is where AI becomes a tool instead of a novelty.

You can ask for a week of meals built around whole foods, minimal prep, and a fixed budget. You can generate grocery lists tailored to Costco, Trader Joe's, or any local store. You can optimize for protein, calories, taste, and cost simultaneously. The barrier isn't knowledge anymore. It's willingness to stop outsourcing decisions to marketing.

The food industry depends on people believing they're too busy, too tired, or too broke to eat well. But once you see how easy it is to plan, buy, and prepare real food—once you realize that “cheap food” is often the most expensive option available—the illusion breaks.

Eating well isn't a privilege. It's a skill. And like any skill, once you learn it, it gets easier, cheaper, and more automatic over time.

Food doesn't need to be perfect. It just needs to do its job.

And when you start treating food as fuel—planned, intentional, and aligned with how your body works—the idea that fast food is your only option starts to sound as ridiculous as it actually is.

Food is not just fuel. It's medicine.

That statement gets twisted because people hear it as anti-doctor, anti-science, or anti-modern medicine. It's none of those things. It's simply an acknowledgment of cause and effect. Food and movement are the only two inputs that directly improve the *foundational health* of the human body. Everything else reacts downstream.

Drugs are powerful. They save lives. They manage symptoms. They stabilize crises. But they do not rebuild systems. They do not restore baseline function. They intervene—they don't regenerate. That's not a moral judgment; it's how they're designed to work.

Food and exercise operate differently.

Food provides the raw materials your body uses to repair tissue, regulate hormones, support immune function, and maintain energy. Exercise provides the signal that tells the body *how* and *where* to use those materials. One without the other is incomplete. Together, they form the only known mechanism for improving the body at the root level.

This is why weight loss, energy, clarity, and resilience tend to improve together—or not at all.

When you eat poorly but exercise, the signal is there but the materials are missing. When you eat well but don't move, the materials are present but the signal never arrives. The body stalls. Progress slows. People get frustrated and start searching for shortcuts that don't exist.

Drugs treat symptoms because symptoms are what show up last. Blood pressure rises. Blood sugar spikes. Cholesterol shifts. Inflammation

appears. By the time medication enters the picture, the foundation has already been compromised for years. The intervention works—but it works on the surface.

Food and exercise work upstream.

They change the environment inside the body so that healing becomes possible. They don't force outcomes. They create conditions. And when conditions improve consistently, the body does what it has always done best—it adapts, repairs, and stabilizes itself.

This isn't about rejecting medicine. It's about understanding hierarchy.

If the foundation is weak, everything built on top of it struggles. If the foundation is solid, fewer interventions are needed, and the ones that are needed work better. Food and movement are not alternatives to health care—they are the base layer of it.

That's why this chapter matters.

When food is treated as fuel *and* medicine—and exercise is treated as a non-negotiable signal—the body stops fighting itself. Weight loss stops being the objective and starts being the side effect of a system that's finally working the way it was designed to.

That's not ideology.

That's biology.

And this is where quality matters.

As you've probably already picked up by now, this way of thinking doesn't mean you never eat fun shit. I eat chili dogs. Occasionally. You've seen the photo. That's not a contradiction — it's the point.

What I wouldn't recommend is leading with that when you're trying to build discipline. Early on, you don't want to go too much, too fast and knock yourself off course. But once the system is stable, quality becomes the real filter.

There's a difference between a quality chili dog and fast food engineered in a lab.

All-beef meat.

Real cheese.

Simple ingredients.

Eaten once in a while? Your body can handle that just fine.

Ultra-processed food from places like Carl's Jr. or McDonald's is a different story. That's not food built to nourish — it's food built to override. Seed oils, stabilizers, additives, fillers. Cheap inputs designed for maximum consumption, not function.

The point isn't perfection.

The point is awareness.

What are you putting into your body?

How often are you doing it?

And what is it actually made of?

Calories technically matter, but for most people they function more like a scare metric than a useful one. Unless you're intentionally tracking macros, calorie counts mostly exist to confuse you or terrify you out of eating anything enjoyable.

Yes, a Crumbl cookie has like ten thousand calories.

Yes, you should probably run from that.

But obsessing over numbers without understanding ingredients misses the bigger picture. When food quality is high and frequency is reasonable, the system regulates itself far better than any app ever will.

Fuel doesn't have to be boring.

It just has to be real.

Pay attention to ingredients.
Pay attention to frequency.
Pay attention to how your body responds.

Do that consistently, and most of the food drama disappears on its own.

Chapter Four: Weight Is a Useless Metric

When someone asks, “How much do you weigh?” what they’re really trying to ask is, *“Are you healthy?”*

Weight just happens to be the laziest proxy we’ve ever come up with for that question.

Because the truth is, weight by itself tells you almost nothing.

If you answer, “I weigh 192 pounds,” you haven’t actually said anything meaningful about your health. You haven’t said how well your body functions. You haven’t said how strong you are, how resilient you are, how well you recover, or how capable you are of handling stress. You’ve just given a number with no context.

Health is not mass.

Health is function.

A healthy body is one that works well. One that sleeps deeply and recovers. One with stable energy throughout the day. One with strong circulation, healthy organs, and joints that move without pain. One that can walk long distances, lift weight, run without panic, and calm itself down after stress.

None of that shows up on a scale.

You can weigh less and be unhealthy.

You can weigh more and be healthy.

You can lose weight while your health gets worse.

The scale doesn't know the difference.

Weight doesn't tell you how much muscle you have.

It doesn't tell you how inflamed you are.

It doesn't tell you how efficient your metabolism is.

It doesn't tell you how your heart, lungs, liver, or arteries are functioning.

It's a blunt instrument being used to measure a complex system.

For extreme cases, weight can be useful. If someone is five hundred pounds, the problem is obvious. But for the vast majority of people, the scale becomes a distraction at best and a psychological trap at worst. People chase a number instead of fixing the system that produced the number in the first place.

That's backward.

When the system improves, weight takes care of itself.

When the system doesn't improve, weight loss becomes temporary, fragile, and stressful.

This is why obsessing over the scale often leads to burnout, anxiety, and rebound. You end up managing symptoms instead of causes. You celebrate short-term drops and panic over normal fluctuations. You start judging your health by a daily data point that doesn't reflect reality.

A functional body doesn't need constant surveillance.

What actually matters is how your body performs and recovers.

How well do you sleep?

How steady is your energy?

How quickly do you recover from exertion?

How strong are you?

How far can you move without fatigue?

How calm does your nervous system feel under pressure?

Those are health metrics.

Those are signals worth paying attention to.

This is also where food comes back into the picture.

The healthiest food today isn't defined by marketing labels or calorie counts. It's defined by ingredient quality. The simplest rule works better than any diet trend: flip the package over. If the ingredient list is short and recognizable—meat, vegetables, fruit, grains, salt—that's real food. If it reads like a chemistry experiment, it's not.

Food with three ingredients will always beat food with thirty.

Ultra-processed foods don't just lack nutrients—they actively interfere with how your body regulates hunger, energy, and inflammation. Seed oils, preservatives, stabilizers, and artificial flavoring aren't neutral. They create internal noise. They confuse satiety. They inflame systems that were never designed to handle them.

Eating real food isn't about perfection. It's about removing interference.

When you give your body clean inputs—real food, consistent movement, adequate rest—the system stabilizes. Strength increases. Energy evens out. Recovery improves. And yes, weight tends to normalize. Not because you chased it, but because the body finally has what it needs to regulate itself.

This is why the scale fades into the background when things are working.

When you stop asking, “What do I weigh?” and start asking, “How well does my body function?” the entire conversation changes. The anxiety drops. The obsession loosens. The focus returns to what actually matters.

Weight loss stops being the goal.

Health becomes the standard.

And weight becomes what it always should have been:

a side effect, not a target.

Chapter Five: Mental Clarity and Physical Action

Mental clarity is not separate from physical health. It never has been. We just learned to talk about it that way.

The mind feels abstract, invisible, hard to measure. The body feels concrete. Tangible. So when something feels off mentally—anxiety, restlessness, fog, distraction—we treat it like a software issue instead of what it usually is: a system running with unresolved inputs. The body asks for something. It doesn't get it. So it asks again. And again. And again.

Every unmet requirement becomes a background process.

If you don't sleep, your system flags it.

If you don't eat, it flags it.

If you don't move, it flags it.

If you ignore stress, ignore discomfort, ignore responsibility, it flags it.

Those flags don't show up as polite reminders. They show up as agitation. Anxiety. Inability to focus. A constant sense that something is wrong but you can't quite name it. People call that mental illness. Sometimes that label is accurate. Often, it's just a system screaming for maintenance.

Think of it like an internal checklist that never shuts off until the items are handled. Not consciously written down, not moralized—just a set of conditions your body expects to be met in order to function. When you ignore them, the system doesn't give up. It escalates. It keeps pinging you because that's literally its job.

This is why avoidance feels so heavy.

When you don't do what your body and environment are asking of you—move, eat, rest, address problems—the cognitive load stacks. The mind never gets quiet because it's busy compensating. Anxiety isn't random. It's pressure from unfinished business, biological or otherwise. Depression often isn't emptiness—it's exhaustion from carrying too much unresolved signal.

When you start meeting those needs consistently, something unexpected happens: the noise drops.

Not because you “fixed your mind,” but because you stopped fighting your system. You gave the subconscious—the part actually running the ship—what it was asking for. Once that happens, the alarms don't need to blare. The background processes resolve. Mental clarity isn't forced; it emerges.

There's another layer to this that matters just as much.

Your body is one integrated system. When it runs inefficiently, the brain carries part of that burden. If your heart has to work harder, your lungs struggle, your digestion is poor, inflammation is high—your brain doesn't get a free pass. It's working overtime just to keep things stable. That costs cognitive bandwidth.

As physical health improves, the system lightens its load.

A stronger cardiovascular system means better oxygen delivery.

Better digestion means more stable energy.

Regular movement means better stress regulation.

All of that reduces the amount of background work your brain has to do just to keep you upright. What's left over is capacity. Focus. Presence. The ability to actually think instead of constantly react.

This is why people often experience clarity, confidence, and emotional stability *after* they get physically healthier—not before. The body stabilizes first. The mind follows. Not because of mindset hacks or affirmations, but because the system finally has room to breathe.

Mental clarity isn't something you chase.

It's something you uncover once the noise dies down.

And the noise usually isn't psychological.

It's physiological.

Stress is not the enemy. Unprocessed stress is.

Your body was never designed to avoid stress—it was designed to *move through it*. Literally. For most of human history, problems were solved with motion. Hunger meant walking, hunting, gathering. Danger meant running, hiding, fighting, relocating. Scarcity meant traveling. Survival problems were inseparable from movement. You didn't sit still and think your way out of trouble—you moved forward and resolved it with your body.

That wiring never went away.

Modern stress confuses people because the trigger isn't physical, but the response still is. Emails, deadlines, money pressure, social tension—your

nervous system reacts the same way it always has. Heart rate increases. Muscles tense. Breathing changes. Hormones release. Your body prepares for action.

But then... nothing happens.

You sit. You stew. You scroll. The stress signal has nowhere to go. The system stays activated with no outlet. That's not anxiety by accident—that's a stress response with no resolution.

Movement changes that.

When you walk, lift, run, or exert yourself, you give stress a path. You put your body into a controlled, elevated state that mirrors the response it's already in—then you let it resolve. Heart rate rises and falls. Breathing deepens and stabilizes. Muscles engage and release. Hormones spike and clear. The loop completes.

This is why people feel clearer after a walk. Lighter after a workout. More capable after physical effort. It's not distraction. It's processing. You're not escaping the stress—you're metabolizing it.

Movement creates perspective because it changes state. When your body shifts, your mind follows. Problems that felt overwhelming while sitting still often feel manageable once the system has moved. Not because the problem changed—but because *you did*.

This is also why the phrase “move forward” exists at all. It isn't metaphorical. It's biological. Progress has always required motion. Problem-solving has always been paired with movement. When you

remove movement from the equation, thinking stalls. Rumination replaces action. Stress accumulates instead of clearing.

The more consistently you pair movement with problem-solving, the better you get at both.

You build a body that knows how to process pressure instead of panicking under it. You build a nervous system that recognizes stress as something to move through—not something to freeze inside. Over time, this creates resilience. Not the motivational kind. The mechanical kind.

Mental clarity isn't about thinking harder.

It's about letting your body do what it was built to do so your mind doesn't have to carry the load alone.

When stress is processed, bandwidth returns.

When bandwidth returns, clarity follows.

Not as a mindset.

As a consequence.

Chapter Six: Discipline — Building Without Motivation

The first lie people are taught is that you should only do things because you *feel like it*.

That idea didn't come from biology.

It didn't come from survival.

It didn't come from reality.

It's a modern invention.

If our ancestors waited to feel motivated, they died. No one woke up in the cold wondering if they *felt like* walking for food. No one debated whether hunting aligned with their mood. Action wasn't optional—it was required. You moved because not moving had consequences.

That hasn't changed. The environment did. The rules didn't.

Motivation is a feeling. Feelings are unstable by definition. They change with sleep, stress, hormones, weather, mood, and circumstance. Building a life on motivation is like building a house on sand. The moment pressure shows up, the structure collapses.

This is why desire fails people.

Desire disappears the first time things get uncomfortable.

The first time you're tired.

The first time you're stressed.

The first time life doesn't cooperate.

If action depends on wanting, it won't survive adversity.

Successful people don't operate that way.

They set a direction. They choose a path. And then they follow it day by day—regardless of how they feel. Rain or snow. Sunny or miserable. Motivated or flat. Not because they're special, but because they understand something most people don't: consistency doesn't come from emotion. It comes from necessity.

Discipline is not intensity.

It's not punishment.

It's not forcing yourself through misery.

Discipline is acting because it's required.

You brush your teeth without motivation.

You show up to work without inspiration.

You put clothes on without debating it.

Not because you love those things—but because they're part of the standard.

Movement belongs in that category.

When movement stops being something you *feel like doing* and starts being something you *do because you are alive in a body*, the negotiation ends. No hype. No guilt. No drama. Just action.

And something else happens when you live this way.

You start trusting yourself.

Every time you act without negotiating, you prove something to yourself: *I do what I say I will do*. That builds internal credibility. Self-trust compounds. The more you show up, the stronger that trust becomes. The stronger the trust, the less effort it takes to act.

Discipline isn't built through big heroic moments.

It's built through boring consistency.

Day in. Day out.

No celebration. No collapse.

Just standards.

Motivation will always fail you when it matters most.

Discipline won't.

Because discipline isn't a feeling.

It's a system.

And systems don't care how you feel.

That's not cruelty. That's clarity.

Something is running the machine whether you acknowledge it or not. While you sleep. While you're awake. While you're distracted, numbing out, or trying to think your way through things. Heart rate. Breathing. Hormones. Repair. Regulation. Healing. Balance.

Someone is doing all of that.

Call it biology. Call it the subconscious. Call it the autonomic nervous system. Call it whatever you want. The label doesn't matter. What matters is this: that system is always monitoring the state of the whole. And it is constantly sending feedback.

Fatigue.

Restlessness.

Tension.

Hunger.

Irritability.

Anxiety.

Calm.

Focus.

Strength.

Those aren't moods.

They're signals.

Most people never learn how to receive them.

They override them with distraction. With stimulation. With food. With scrolling. With substances. With noise. Or they wait until the signal becomes unbearable before responding. Over time, the system has to shout. Not because it's broken—but because it's being ignored.

This is where discipline actually matters.

Discipline is not about suppressing emotion.

It's how you become *better at processing it*.

When your actions are consistent, your awareness sharpens. You start recognizing changes in your emotional state earlier instead of being blindsided by them. You notice when irritability is really exhaustion. When anxiety is unprocessed stress. When heaviness is a lack of movement. When restlessness is your body asking for action.

Discipline creates a stable baseline. And from a stable baseline, deviation becomes obvious.

That's emotional literacy.

When your life isn't constantly negotiated, the signal comes through clean. You're no longer guessing. You're listening. Discipline becomes the vehicle that allows you to receive instructions from the system that's actually running the show.

And no—this doesn't mean becoming David fucking Goggins.

You don't need to dominate yourself.

You don't need to suffer.

You don't need to override your body.

You need to cooperate with it.

Your job isn't to overpower the system.

Your job is to figure out what it's asking for—and give it that.

Movement when it needs movement.

Food when it needs fuel.

Rest when it needs recovery.

Stillness when it needs quiet.

That's the entire mind–body–emotional–spiritual connection people talk about without ever explaining. It's not mystical. It's practical. It's communication.

Discipline is what allows you to follow those instructions day in and day out—regardless of mood, regardless of desire, regardless of motivation.

Because motivation is a lie.

Signals aren't.

The more consistently you respond, the better you get at hearing them. The better you hear them, the less chaos you experience. And eventually, something shifts.

You stop fighting yourself.

You stop outsourcing authority.

You stop mistaking noise for meaning.

That's not self-control.

That's alignment.

And that's what discipline is actually for.

It won't be easy at first.

And that's the point.

If it were easy, you wouldn't be where you are. You wouldn't be in the situation you're in. You wouldn't be reading this book looking for clarity. Difficulty isn't a sign that you're doing something wrong—it's evidence that you're finally doing something different.

I'll say this plainly: I was a fat kid.

At thirteen years old, I had manboobs. Big, ugly glasses. Thick lenses. Blind as fuck. Fat as fuck. And people reminded me of it every single day. From thirteen to seventeen, that was my reality. Getting mocked. Getting treated like shit. Being the joke.

Taking my shirt off anywhere—beach, pool, locker room—was a nightmare. Swim class. Gym class. PE. Those weren't activities. They were public humiliation. Daily reminders that I didn't fit in my own body.

I ate like shit because that's what I knew. Hot Pockets. Microwave pizzas. Corn dogs. Fast food. Carl's Jr. Jack in the Box. Taco Bell. If it came in a box or a bag, I ate it. I was five-eleven and two hundred fifty pounds.

And then one day, someone pointed out—mockingly—that I had dimples behind my knees.

That was it.

Not motivation. Not inspiration. Necessity.

Back then, the information wasn't there. The internet barely existed. There were no podcasts, no fitness influencers, no "journey" culture. Running shoes weren't a thing. Workout clothes weren't a thing. Running outside wasn't a thing unless you were on a track team.

I started running a quarter mile.

Not in gym clothes. In regular clothes. Drenching them in sweat. Wearing regular shoes because that's all I had. I would pick an object ten feet ahead of me, run to it, almost die, then pick another. Then another.

Quarter mile became half.

Half became one.

One became two.

Slowly. Brutally. Consistently.

I ate one Subway sandwich a day, cut into quarters. That was it. One quarter, four times a day. I drank a ton of water. I stopped drinking soda. I stopped eating garbage.

I lost eighty pounds in three months.

I don't recommend doing it that fast. But I'll tell you this: it's amazing what the human body can do when you stop feeding it trash and start giving it what it actually needs.

And here's why this matters.

That process wasn't driven by motivation. It was driven by discipline before I even had language for it. I didn't understand macros. I didn't understand metabolism. I didn't understand hormones. I understood one thing: *I cannot live like this anymore.*

That's how discipline actually starts.

Not as confidence.

Not as self-love.

As necessity.

At first, discipline feels clumsy. Awkward. Hard. You're bad at listening to your body because you've ignored it for years. You misread signals. You overdo it. You underdo it. That's normal. That's learning.

Over time, something shifts.

You get better at recognizing what your body is asking for. You notice emotional changes sooner. You respond instead of react. You learn the difference between discomfort and damage. Between hunger and boredom. Between stress and exhaustion.

You don't become perfect.

You become competent.

That's the real promise of discipline.

Not domination.

Not suffering.

Capability.

You become someone who can receive the signals your body is sending—and follow through on them day after day, regardless of mood, regardless of motivation.

That's how you get good at this.

And once you do, you don't need hype.

You don't need guilt.

You don't need a scale to validate you.

You just live inside a body that finally works with you instead of against you.

That's discipline.

And that's why it matters.

Chapter Seven: Redefining Success — After Weight

Once weight stops being the goal, a question immediately follows:

What does success actually look like now?

This is where most people get lost, because weight-based thinking doesn't leave room for what comes after. You hit the number—or you don't—and either way, you're stuck. If you reach it, there's no plan for what happens next. If you miss it, you feel like you failed. That's why people rebound. Not because they lack discipline, but because the system they were using was never built to last.

This is also why fad diets don't work.

Fad diets are built around short-term manipulation, not long-term function. They promise speed, certainty, and simplicity—but they never answer the only question that matters: *How do you live once the diet ends?* What do you eat when the rules disappear? How do you move when there's no countdown? What standard are you actually holding yourself to?

Weight goals have the same flaw.

A weight goal gives you a dopamine hit when the number drops and a gut punch when it doesn't. It turns health into external validation—something you check instead of something you live. And once you tie your sense of progress to a scale, you open yourself up to the entire emotional swing: pride when it moves your way, frustration when it doesn't, anxiety when it fluctuates for reasons that have nothing to do with your actual health.

That loop isn't sustainable.

Even attempts to “fix” it—weight ranges, maintenance phases, constant tracking—miss the point. You're still measuring the wrong thing. Weight doesn't tell you whether your body is getting better at being a body.

Real success has nothing to do with staying lighter.

It has everything to do with getting stronger.

Strength isn't just about lifting weights. It's about capability. Endurance. Resilience. Efficiency. A stronger body is easier to live in. It moves with less friction. It recovers faster. It handles stress better. It requires less mental energy just to get through the day.

This is the shift that changes everything.

Instead of asking, *How much do I weigh?*

You start asking:

- Am I stronger than I was last year?
- Can I move farther with less effort?
- Do I recover faster from exertion?
- Is my energy more stable?
- Does stress resolve instead of lingering?

Those are real health metrics.

And unlike weight, they compound.

You don't "maintain" strength by accident. In reality, there is no true middle ground. You're either getting stronger or you're getting weaker. The body is always adapting in one direction or the other. When people say they're "maintaining," what they usually mean is that decline hasn't become obvious yet.

Progress, in this context, isn't dramatic. It's subtle. It shows up as workouts that feel easier. Runs that go farther without panic. Lifts that feel more stable. Daily life that requires less effort. Over time, that physical efficiency spills upward—into mental clarity, emotional regulation, and a more grounded sense of self.

This is why routine matters more than goals.

Goals end. Routines don't.

A routine removes the question of *whether* you're going to move, eat, or recover properly. It turns action into a default instead of a decision. And once movement stops being an "activity" you hype yourself up for and starts being part of how you live, consistency becomes natural instead of forced.

Tracking can support this—but only if it's used correctly.

Tracking isn't about control. It's about feedback. Strength trends. Recovery time. Resting heart rate. Sleep quality. How quickly stress resolves. These are signals, not scores. They help you notice patterns, not judge yourself.

The moment tracking becomes obsessive or punitive, it's lost its purpose.

This is the modern advantage people miss. We don't need more rules—we need better awareness. The goal isn't to optimize every variable. It's to build a system that works quietly in the background while life happens.

Real success doesn't feel like a finish line.

It feels like momentum.

Your body gets easier to use. Your mind gets quieter. Your baseline improves. And without chasing it, weight often stabilizes on its own—because the system finally has what it needs to regulate itself.

That's what comes after weight.

Not perfection.

Not control.

Not a number.

Function.

Capability.

Longevity.

And a body that's built to carry you forward instead of holding you back.

That's where success actually begins.

Not with obedience to a plan.

Not with chasing someone else's definition of "healthy."
But with becoming your own advocate.

At some point, responsibility has to come back home.

You have to stop asking, *What's the right program?*
And start asking, *What does my body actually respond to?*

This is where maturity enters the picture.

No one lives inside your body but you. No app, coach, diet, or study feels your joints, your digestion, your energy, your sleep, your stress, or your recovery. They can offer information—but they cannot make decisions for you. Only you can do that.

Being healthy long-term means learning how to listen, interpret, and act.

You notice what foods leave you energized versus sluggish.

You notice what types of movement leave you grounded versus wrecked.

You notice when pushing harder helps—and when it's just noise.

That awareness is success.

This is why copying someone else's routine only works temporarily. What works on paper doesn't always work in a body. And what works in one season may not work in another. Strength training might be right today. Walking might be right tomorrow. Rest might be right next week.

Self-advocacy isn't indulgence.

It's responsibility.

It means making choices based on feedback instead of guilt. Based on function instead of aesthetics. Based on longevity instead of urgency.

And it's uncomfortable at first—because it removes excuses.

You can't hide behind a diet.

You can't blame a program.

You can't outsource judgment.

But what you gain is far more valuable.

You gain trust in yourself.

You stop second-guessing every decision. You stop bouncing between extremes. You stop chasing certainty from outside sources. You build a relationship with your body that's based on cooperation instead of control.

That's the real upgrade.

A body that communicates clearly.

A mind that knows how to listen.

A system that adjusts instead of panics.

That's what carries you forward.

Not perfection.

Not rules.

Not numbers.

Just alignment—day by day, choice by choice—between you and the body that’s been trying to work with you the entire time.

And here’s the part that people don’t like hearing:

This isn’t a vacation.

Health is not something you do *for* an event. It’s not a six-month project for a wedding. It’s not a New Year’s resolution. It’s not a temporary phase where you “lock in” and then go back to normal life once the date passes.

That mindset is dangerous.

When you treat health like a vacation, you treat your body like something you can ignore until it’s convenient. Imagine doing that with sleep. Imagine saying, *I’ve got a big interview coming up, so I’ll sleep well this week — the rest of the time, who cares.* It sounds ridiculous when you apply it there, but people do the exact same thing with movement and food.

You only get one body.

That's not motivational language. That's a fact. There is no replacement. No reset. No upgrade later. Every shortcut you take is paid for by the same system you're trying to improve.

Once you understand that movement isn't optional — that it's a requirement built into the design of the human body — the framing changes. This isn't about becoming extreme. It's not about being David Goggins. It's not about training six days a week or living in a gym.

It's about respecting what kind of organism you are.

You are the result of thousands of generations of bodies that survived because they moved, adapted, carried load, walked long distances, and responded to their environment. That history didn't disappear because life got comfortable. Your body still runs on the same expectations. Ignoring them doesn't make you modern. It makes you misaligned.

This is where education matters.

The information is not hidden anymore. The science is accessible. We know how sleep affects hormones. We know how movement affects mental health. We know how food quality affects inflammation, energy, and recovery. There are people publishing legitimate, evidence-based information every day for anyone willing to look.

There are no more excuses based on ignorance.

Being your own advocate means educating yourself. Learning how your body works. Learning what inputs it responds to. Learning what helps and what harms. Not blindly following a plan, but understanding the principles

well enough to make good decisions when life gets messy — because it always will.

That's what real health looks like.

Not rigidity.

Not obsession.

Not temporary effort.

Just a long-term commitment to giving your body what it requires to function well — so it can support your mind, your emotional life, and your connection to the world around you.

This isn't a phase.

It isn't a program.

It isn't a vacation.

It's how you live inside the only body you'll ever have.

I'm not a scientist.

I'm not a doctor. I'm not a researcher. I'm not running labs or publishing papers. What I am is someone who pays attention to what works—and to who is actually doing the work of explaining *why* it works.

If you want a clear, evidence-based place to start, look up Andrew Huberman.

He's a Stanford professor. A neuroscientist. A researcher who spends his time educating people on sleep, health, food, exercise, supplementation, and behavior—and who actually applies these principles in his own life. He doesn't just talk theory. He talks mechanisms. Cause and effect. Inputs and outputs.

You don't have to agree with everything he says. That's not the point. The point is that the information is real, accessible, and grounded in biology. And it reinforces the same theme you've seen throughout this book: when you give the body what it evolved to need, the mind follows.

There are others who've shaped this conversation in different ways.

Joe Rogan, for example, has spent decades talking openly about training, discipline, and physical effort—not as aesthetics, but as a way to reduce resistance in everyday life. The idea is simple: when you do hard things voluntarily, normal life feels easier. You're less reactive. Less fragile. More capable. That's not philosophy. That's conditioning.

And then there's David Goggins.

Whatever you've heard about him, strip away the caricature. At his core, what he represents is accountability. Radical ownership. A refusal to negotiate with excuses. He's not a prescription. He's an extreme example of what disciplined action can do to the human mind when it's applied consistently and without self-deception.

You don't need to live like him. You don't need to train like him. But you can't ignore the lesson: sustained physical effort rewires how you handle discomfort, stress, and adversity.

And here's the key point.

No matter what you think of these people—no matter how they're portrayed or criticized—when you listen to what they say about movement, discipline, and physical effort, and then actually *implement* those ideas in your own life, the difference is undeniable.

You feel it.

Your energy changes.

Your stress response changes.

Your tolerance for difficulty increases.

Your day-to-day life feels lighter.

Not because you became tougher overnight—but because your system is finally operating the way it was designed to operate.

The message isn't to follow personalities.

It's to pay attention to patterns.

When people from different backgrounds—science, athletics, endurance, combat, performance—all point to the same inputs producing the same outcomes, it's worth listening. Not as belief. As experiment.

Try it. Apply it. Observe what happens.

The body doesn't care who you learned it from.

It only cares whether you finally gave it what it needs.

I mention these people for a reason.

When you're starting out, it's not only okay to copy others — it's smart.

My dad, John Gardener, used to say: *if you want to learn something, find someone who's really good at it and copy them.* That's good advice. Simple. Practical. No ego in it.

He also used to say your body is a temple. That you only get one. When I was younger, I brushed that off. As I've gotten older, I've realized how fucking wise that is. The man's seen a lot of moons. Honestly, he should probably be the co-author of this book.

This book is really the culmination of things I've learned, things he's learned, conversations we've had, and all the information that's now freely available if you're willing to look. In fact, he pushed me to write this book off a conversation we had yesterday — about how exercise should be treated the same way as breathing... or taking a shit.

And yeah. That's exactly right.

You don't overthink it.

You don't negotiate with it.

You don't wait for motivation.

You just do it because that's what a functioning human body requires.

So here's the practical part.

However you build your routine — build it. And then hold yourself accountable.

Write down what you did.

What exercise.

What weight.

How many reps.

How many sets.

Not for validation. Not for social media. For *you*.

Watch yourself progress. Compare this week to last week. See the numbers move. Feel that earned dopamine — not the cheap hit from a scale, but the kind that comes from knowing you did the work and your body adapted.

Then do it again.

And again.

And again.

Something shifts when progress becomes tangible. When you're no longer riding the emotional ups and downs of a number on a scale, life starts to feel easier.

Getting out of a chair.

Carrying groceries.

Moving through the day.

Everything takes less effort.

Not just physically — mentally.

You handle stress better.

You tolerate discomfort better.

You deal with people better.

And before you realize it, that strength you were building in the gym starts showing up everywhere else. In your work. In your relationships. In how you move through the world.

That's real success.

Not a number.

Not a plan.

Not a phase.

Just a body that works.

A mind that can handle life.

And a routine that keeps you moving forward.

Chapter Eight: Coming Home

This isn't a long book.

Honestly, it's barely a book at all. It's closer to a pamphlet. A manuscript. Maybe even a manifesto. And the truth is—it doesn't need to be longer than this.

Because almost everything in here is common sense.

Not “easy,” not “comfortable,” but *obvious* once you stop avoiding it.

If you really think about what's being said—if you actually sit with it—none of this is outside your understanding. You don't need a PhD. You don't need credentials. You don't need to memorize studies or optimize your life into a spreadsheet.

This is low-hanging fruit.

The core recognition is simple:

You are an animal.

You live inside an animal's body.

And that animal body evolved over a very long period of time to do physical things.

Move.

Carry load.

Breathe deeply.

Adapt to stress.

Recover.

Those physical requirements are not optional. They are the foundation. And everything else—your mental state, your emotional stability, what people like to call “spiritual connection”—rests on top of that foundation.

When the foundation is neglected, everything above it wobbles.

Garbage in, garbage out.

That's not judgment. That's mechanics.

Food is fuel.

Movement is maintenance.

And the only meaningful way you can directly affect the health of your body—under your own control—is through what you eat and how you move.

Not mindset hacks.

Not affirmations.

Not shortcuts.

Exercise and diet are the levers. Everything else is downstream.

It's not about turning into a monk, a warrior, or a biohacker. It's about recognizing reality and cooperating with it instead of fighting it.

Once you see that, something relaxes.

You stop searching for secret answers.

You stop waiting for permission.

You stop assuming you're broken.

You realize you were never lost—you were just disconnected from the body you live in.

And coming home isn't dramatic.

It's quiet.

It's steady.

It's obvious in hindsight.

It's simply remembering how to live inside yourself again.

That's where this all leads.

We may not know where we came from.

There are a lot of theories. Some scientific. Some philosophical. Some spiritual. Can we be absolutely certain about any of them? Probably not.

We may not know why we're here.

Same problem. Same question humans have been asking since the beginning.

And we might not even be sure where we're going.

We know the sun is flying through space.

We know the universe is expanding.

We know the earth is moving around the sun at an absurd speed.

These questions have been studied, debated, argued over, and written about since the dawn of time. And honestly? I don't know the answers. And you probably shouldn't trust anyone who says they do.

Especially cult leaders who want your money — and, for some reason, always want to fuck your wife. It's a weirdly consistent pattern. Huge red flag.

But beyond all of that — beyond philosophy, metaphysics, religion, and speculation — there's something much simpler and much more immediate.

You wake up in a body every single day.

You wake up inside a mind we call consciousness every single day.

You download the files. Who you were. Who you are now. Where you think you're going. The story resumes. The identity boots up. And life continues.

But underneath all of that is something far stranger and far more important.

There's a mysterious guy inside your head who runs the show.

He pushes blood through your veins.

He tells your heart to beat.

He tells your lungs to breathe.

He heals you while you sleep.

He decides when it's time to eat.

And yes — he tells your brain when it's time to go take a shit.

You don't consciously do any of that.

And here's the main point of this entire book:

That guy is trying to tell you something.

All the time.

And if you feed yourself garbage, don't move your body, numb yourself with substances, drink excessively, or stay disconnected — you will never hear what he's saying.

Not because he stopped talking.

But because the signal is buried under noise.

That guy — your subconscious, your nervous system, your co-pilot (though honestly I'm convinced he's the pilot and we're just riding shotgun) — is begging you to work with him.

That's all he wants.

Not perfection.

Not suffering.

Not control.

Just a little help.

It's like he's saying: *I've got this part covered. Can you handle the rest?*

He communicates through emotion.

Through impulses.

Through thought patterns.

Through restlessness.

Through calm.

Through anxiety.

Through clarity.

Call it whatever you want.

And this book is about helping you become aware of that communication — and giving you the tools to get yourself into a state where you can finally listen.

Not mystically.

Not symbolically.

Physically.

Practically.

Daily.

Because once you can hear the signal, life gets quieter.

And when life gets quieter, you realize you were never lost.

You just weren't listening yet.

Now, you might be thinking:

this sounds fucking crazy.

This guy's off his nut.

Or I want some of whatever he's smoking.

Fair.

So here's the spoiler alert.

These thoughts didn't come out of nowhere.

They came from years of conversations — with strangers, therapists, and my father. From listening to podcasts and experts. From reading. From scouring the internet. From hallucinogenic experiences. From a decade of drinking and drug use. From being one semester away from a bachelor's degree in philosophy. From asking the same questions over and over in different forms.

And after all of that —

From a fully sober perspective.

With years of proper diet and exercise.

After reaching the highest level of physical, mental, and emotional health I've experienced so far in forty years on this planet —

This is what keeps showing up as true.

You might still say, *this guy is fucking crazy*.

And maybe I am.

But maybe — just maybe — being a human on a little blue rock, flying around a fireball, hurtling through an expanding, infinite universe... is a little crazy.

Maybe going to sleep and watching entire worlds unfold in your head, full of mystery and symbolism and wild shit, and then waking up as yourself again — day after day — is a little crazy.

And maybe giving up the one life you have — the one shot at this bizarre, beautiful experience — to sit at a job you hate for eight hours a day, then come home and drink yourself into oblivion, numb yourself with drugs and pharmaceuticals, and dull your connection to reality...

Maybe *that's* what crazy actually is.

Ignoring the gift.

Ignoring the experience.

Ignoring the body.

Ignoring each other.

Because when you really think about it, there's still that guy running the show.

The one pushing blood through your veins.

The one telling your heart to beat.

The one keeping you alive when you're asleep, distracted, checked out, or actively abusing the system.

Who is that guy?

And how do you thank him?

For showing up every day when you didn't.

For never quitting on you.

For doing his best while you shoved fast food, alcohol, drugs, and bullshit into a pristine system.

For still letting *you* call the shots.

After all this time, maybe the move isn't domination or control.

Maybe it's gratitude.

Listening to that guy.

Working with that guy.

Respecting that guy.

Hell — praying to that guy.

Because if he ever quits, we're all going home in a box.

So yeah. That's the book.

Thank you for reading it.

And thank you to my dad — John Gardener — for always pushing me to be better, even when it meant I never felt like I was good enough.

I know what you were doing.

I know what you gave me.

And this — all of this — is the result.

This is the gift I'm sharing with you.

The same gift he shared with me.

Thank you Dad.

I love you.

The Cure for Weight Loss

Written and dictated by **Cory Gardener**

Translated for human consumption with the assistance of **Artificial Intelligence**,

from the lived experiences of Cory Gardener

and daily conversations with **John Gardener**, my father.