

LONGEVITY FOR THE REST OF US

Floors Before Flex: the honest, start-where-you-are program for people with a job, a family, and a life

Chapter 1: The Book the Rest of Us Have Been Waiting For

At thirty-eight I could engineer an outcome for everyone but myself.

I was very good at what I did. Good enough to run a room on four hours of sleep, deliver the project, and get on the next flight, and make all of it look like winning. I was not the most senior person in the building and I never needed to be. I was the one who delivered, the one they handed the hard problem to, the guy who could take a mess and make it work. If you have ever been that person, the reliable one, the one who quietly carries more than anyone gives you credit for, then you already know the trap I was in, because it is the same trap that hides it from you.

Underneath the suit was a different story. Two hundred thirty pounds. A forty-inch waist. A back that had already failed me once and would again, a herniated disc between my thirtieth and thirty-first birthdays that came with real nerve damage and a choice no thirty-year-old wants: surgery now, or a long conservative rebuild and a lifetime of maintenance. My physicians laid both paths out honestly, and I chose the rebuild, five years of patient rehab and a body I would have to run on purpose for the rest of my life. That was the injury.

The low point came later, and it was quieter. Somewhere around thirty-eight, functional again, back to full speed at work, I caught my own reflection and did the math. I was heavier than I had ever been, carrying less muscle than I needed and more weight than my frame or my arteries wanted, and somewhere along the way the word "fine" had come to mean "not in pain yet." I had optimized my career, my income, and my calendar, and let the one system I actually live inside quietly fall apart. I was the guy who could fix anything for anybody, and I could not fix the person in the mirror.

I tell you this on the first page for one reason. I am not writing to you from a mountaintop I was born on. I climbed up from roughly where you might be standing right now, and I kept the map.

You have read the books. You did nothing. Here is why.

If you are holding this, you have probably already read one of the big longevity books. Maybe you finished it, maybe you didn't. Maybe you loved it and felt, underneath the excitement, a small sinking feeling that it wasn't built for your actual life.

I understand that feeling, because I had it too. The best of those books are brilliant, and I will not pretend otherwise. But most of them are written from the top down. By a doctor optimizing patients who pay six figures a year. By a scientist with a stake in the molecule he's telling you to take. By a man spending two million dollars a year measuring himself into a headline. They hand you a standard that was set at elite, they assume ten hours a week you do not have and tests you cannot get, and when you can't execute it perfectly, they leave you feeling like the problem is you.

It is not you. It is the bar, and who set it, and why.

Here is the honest thing almost nobody in this space will say out loud. A lot of what gets sold to you as settled science isn't settled at all. A lot of what gets sold to you as the one true path is one path, the one that happened to work for the one person selling it. And a lot of the anxiety you carry about your own health, that low background hum of never quite doing enough, was manufactured on purpose, because a frightened reader buys the next thing. The whole machine runs on convincing you that optimization is a ladder with no top and you are always three rungs behind.

I am going to do the opposite. I am going to hand you the floor and tell you that standing firmly on it is most of the game.

The seventeen years the transformation actually took

I want to tell you how I climbed out, because the shape of it matters more than any single win inside it, and because the version of this story that would sell you a fantasy is exactly the version I refuse to tell.

It took about seventeen years, and it was not a straight line. From that low point I started doing the obvious things first, the things you would do too, and food and training came along before anything else did. Over a lot of years, with a job and a family the entire time, I got my

eating into real shape and I got my body moving again. By 2022 I was genuinely fit. Fit enough that a group of us set out to ride a thousand miles across Britain, end to end.

Now, here is where a lesser book would plant a flag. I rode a thousand miles, it would say, and so can you. I am not going to do that, because it would be a lie of exactly the kind this book exists to correct. Nine of us made that ride, and not one of us had ever gone much past a hundred miles before we started training for it, which is already a lot of bike for a normal person. To get there we gave up weekends, we borrowed against work, we spent evenings and early mornings our families would have rather had. It was a real accomplishment and I am proud of it. It was also not something most people could do, or would ever want to, and it is absolutely not the price of admission to a longer, stronger life. If you never ride further than the end of your street, this book still works for you. The ride was my flex. It was never anybody's floor.

And here is the part that actually matters, the part that turned into everything I now believe. I rode a thousand miles across Britain while I was still broken.

I was fit and broken at the same time. I had pushed the one pillar I liked working on, the aerobic engine, the long steady miles, harder and harder for years, and I had let the rest of me lag. I was still drinking more than was good for me. I had done almost no real work on my mind, on sleep, on stress, on the quieter machinery that decides whether any of the physical stuff actually holds. I was strong in one direction and quietly falling apart in three others, and I had trained hard enough to paper over it and call the result health. It wasn't. It was imbalance with good cardio.

That is the lesson the bike finally taught me, and I will say it plainly because it is the spine of this whole book: no amount of training makes up for poor sleep, poor nutrition, and too much alcohol. You cannot out-train a bad night. You cannot out-ride a diet you can't stick to. You cannot buy back with effort in one place what you are quietly losing everywhere else. I had proof of it in my own legs. I could ride a thousand miles and still be, underneath, a man running his body into the ground in slow motion.

There is a harder layer under even that, and I only understood it once I looked at the evidence instead of my own ego. Even the pillar I was winning at, I was overdoing. The longevity payoff from aerobic work climbs fast when you go from doing nothing to doing something, and then it flattens, and it flattens at a small fraction of the volume I was piling on. Past a certain point the extra miles were not buying me more years at all. They were buying me a hobby, and quite possibly a quiet cost, a little more wear on the arteries and on the heart's own wiring than the

average person carries, the kind of thing you only find if you go looking for it. I am not going to hand you that as a scare. The point for right now is smaller and harder. I had taken the one thing I was genuinely good at and pushed it clean past the point where it was doing my longevity any good, and I had called it health because it hurt. Effort is not the same as health. It took me an embarrassingly long time to tell the two apart.

So I stopped optimizing one thing at a time. The turn had actually begun a little before that first ride, set off by something on the road to it that scared me out of just pedaling harder and into finally looking at my whole self, and I will tell you that story when we get to why normal is not the same as well. But the ride is where the imbalance became impossible to ignore, and the real work filled the years around it. I got my drinking into honest order. I started the real work on my mind, on sleep and stress and the inner stuff, work that genuinely continues to this day and that I am not going to pretend I have finished. I rode across Britain a second time in 2024, and my back relapsed on the second day, climbing out of a tent, which was the body's own blunt way of reminding me that a rebuild is never finished and the maintenance never ends. And I took the engine I had built too far in one direction and I balanced it, pulled back some of the endless aerobic volume and finally built the strength I had been skipping for a decade.

By this year all four parts were, for the first time, actually carrying their share at once. And at fifty-five I stepped onto a bodybuilding stage, not because a stage is the point, and not because you should want to, but because it was proof to me that the whole system finally held together instead of one corner of it holding up the rest. The work that made me capable at fifty-five is the same work that is supposed to keep me capable at eighty. Performance and longevity were never competing goals. They are the same goal, measured at different distances.

These days I am not chasing thousand-mile rides anymore, and if that kind of ride is your joy, I am not here to talk you out of it. But my own movement looks different now, and more honest. Maybe a century once in a while, because I still love a long day on a bike. Maybe five unhurried days rolling across the Dolomites for the sheer beauty of the place, which is a very different thing from nine brutal days grinding end to end across a country to prove something to myself. I still push. I just stopped confusing punishing my body with taking care of it, in either direction, on the bike or on the stage. The stage was the same kind of choice the ride was, a hard, beautiful, deeply optional thing I did with my eyes open and would never hand you as a prescription. That is most of what the last few years actually bought me, and it is worth more than any finish line.

That is the reckoning this book is built on. Not a thousand miles. Balance.

The whole idea, in one image

Everything I am going to teach you sits under a single picture, and it is worth putting in your head right now.

Picture a cairn, one of those small stacks of stone that mark a trail. Four stones, balanced one on top of the next. Each stone is a part of you. **Meals, Movement, Mind, and Molecules.** What you eat. How you move. How you sleep, recover, handle stress, and carry your own mind. And the supplements, hormones, and medicines you may or may not choose to bring in, the pillar I hold to the strictest evidence of the four because it is the one where hype does the most damage.



The cairn: four stones, one for each pillar, balanced one on the next. Pull one out and the whole thing comes down.

A cairn only stands when every stone carries its share. Pull one out and the whole thing comes down. That is the entire argument of this book in one image, and it is the exact thing my thousand-mile self got wrong. You do not advance one part of yourself at the expense of the other three. You advance the whole human, or you do not really advance at all.

The four are not ranked. No pillar comes first. I will tell you plainly that I usually stabilize Meals first with the people I coach, because food is where the fastest leverage lives and where the most gets won or lost early, but stabilizing it first is a matter of sequence, not importance. A perfect training program can't outrun a broken diet. The cleanest supplement stack in the world can't fix a life with no sleep and no peace in it. And a thousand miles of cardio, I can tell you from experience, can't outrun the three pillars you left on the floor. The whole system is the unit of progress. Not any one piece of it.

I think of the center of all this as balance, and I do not mean that as a soft word. Balance is the engineering. It is the thing that lets the system carry weight. It is what lets you push one part of yourself really hard for a season, a race, a cut, a deadline, and not have the rest of you fall apart while you do. Lose that center and you only get one direction. All push and no recovery breaks you down, which is the ditch I was in. All caution and no push leaves you stalled out, which is the other ditch. Balance is not the opposite of intensity. It is the thing that lets you spend intensity in either direction and still come back for more.

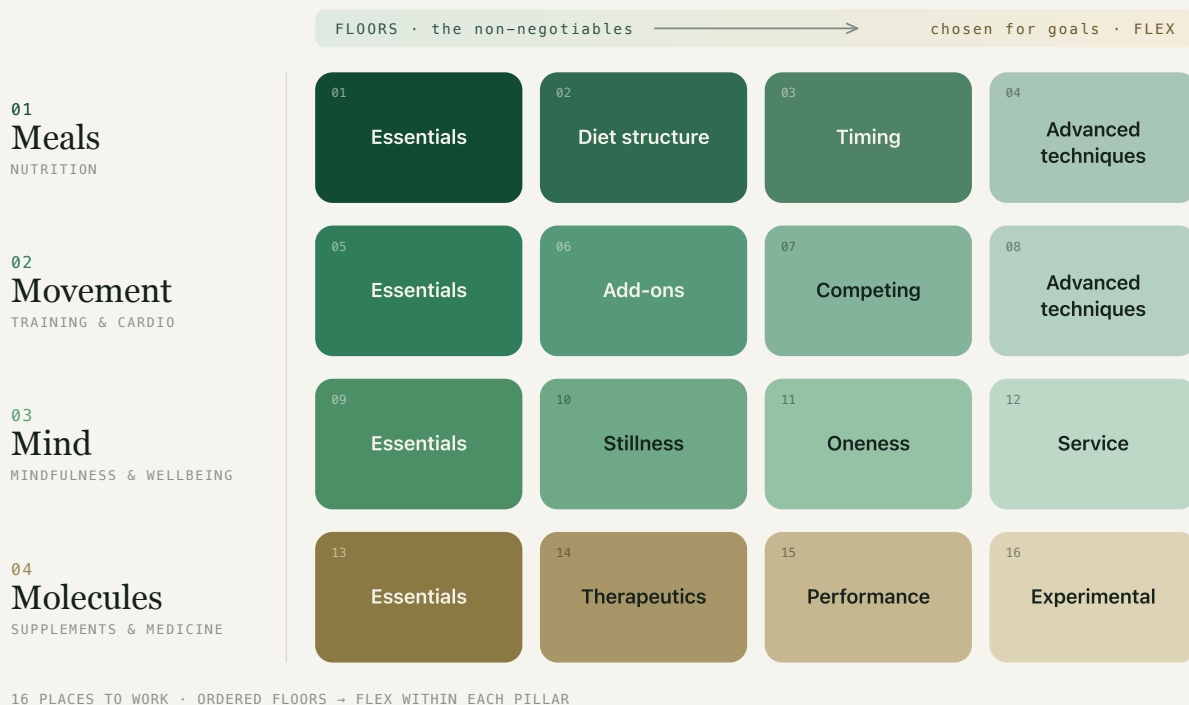
Floors before flex, and the evidence out loud

Here is how I am going to keep this book honest and keep it doable at the same time. Two ideas, and you will see them in every single chapter.

The first is **floors before flex**. Every part of your health has a floor, the non-negotiable basics that almost all of the durable results actually come from, and a flex, the optional edges you get to tune once the floor is solid. Protein is a floor. A little daily walking is a floor. Enough sleep is a floor. Getting your drinking honest is a floor. A seventy-two-hour fast, a carb-cycling block, an off-label molecule, a thousand-mile bike ride, those are flex. Start at the floor. Earn the edges. Any coach or any book that tries to sell you the flex before your floors are solid is selling you the wrong thing, and usually the expensive thing.

Four pillars. Sixteen places to work.

No pillar comes first — we advance the whole human. Left to right: the floors you hold, then the flex you choose.



Four pillars, sixteen places to work. The tiers run T1 to T4, left to right, so your floors sit on the left and your flex on the right. You start on the left, and you climb only as far as your life allows.

This matters more than it sounds, because it is the exact antidote to the feeling those other books gave you. You are not required to reach the top. The whole system is built so that you start where you are, on the floor, tonight, with things that mostly cost nothing, and you climb only as far as your real life allows. Doing the floor well beats doing the ceiling badly, every single time. I am living proof of the opposite, a man who once had a spectacular ceiling bolted onto three broken floors, and I promise you the floors are what actually carry you.

The second idea is that **I am going to grade my evidence out loud**. When I tell you something is proven, I will show you that it is proven. When I tell you something is promising but unproven, a frontier I happen to believe in ahead of the data, I will say that too, right there on the page, and I will tell you it is my judgment and not a settled fact. You will never have to guess which is which. That one habit, keeping what is proven visibly separate from what I am betting on, is the thing this entire category refuses to do, and it is the thing that earns the right to your trust on everything else.

I will show you exactly how both of these work in the next chapter, the tiers you climb and the grades you weigh. For now, just know the deal. Floors before flex, and honest about the evidence, the whole way through.

Who I wrote this for

I did not write this for the man measuring himself into a headline. I wrote it for you.

Maybe you are the very good executive who feels invincible at the office and wrecked by Saturday. You can run the team on no sleep and still deliver, but the body under the suit is tired, heavier than it should be and a lot less strong than it needs to be, and "fine" started meaning "not in pain yet" a while ago. That was me. This is for you.

Maybe you are the weekend warrior whose game is starting to slip. Same league, same court, the same ride you have done for years, and now the recovery takes longer, the little tweaks hang around, and the gap between what you can still do and what you used to do keeps quietly widening. This is for you.

Maybe you are the road warrior who already knows the truth. Three drinks on the flight, the team dinner, the late night out, and you know it is the wrong answer, but it is the job and the relationships and the life, and saying no every single time just is not realistic. That was me too, for years. This is for you. I am not going to pretend the tradeoffs away. I am going to give you the honest version and let you make the call, because it is your call to make.

What all of you have in common is a quiet suspicion that there is more in the tank than your current trajectory is showing you, and a growing sense that conventional medicine is built to treat you once you are sick, not to help you get genuinely well. You are right on both counts. And you do not need another expert telling you what you must do. You need a map you can actually follow from where you are standing, made by somebody who started about there.

Earned, not borrowed

One more thing before we start, because you should know exactly what you are getting and who is talking.

I write this in the first person on purpose. This is not a product I am selling you on. It is a practice I live. I run the same protocols I am going to describe to you. I draw the same labs. I make the same hard calls on my own body before I would ever ask anyone else to make them, and there are lines I will not cross on myself or on anyone I coach, starting with a simple one: I will not knowingly introduce anything that might cause irreversible harm for a benefit that is still just a maybe. I rebuilt myself from the bottom, badly at first and then well, and only after I had lived it did I learn to do it with precision. Nothing in here is armchair theory. I earned it the slow, imperfect, seventeen-year way.

That is also the honest limit of what I am. I am not your doctor, and this book is not medical advice. The best version of this work happens with a good coach and a good physician in your corner, and you are going to hear me say "work this out with your coach and your physician" more than once, because I mean it every time. What I can give you is the thinking, the floors, the honest read on the flex, and the map I drew climbing up from about where you may be right now.

So here is the promise, and it is the whole reason for this book. Throw out the ones that try to force you to live a certain way. I am going to give you the principles, tell you honestly how essential or optional each one is, show you plainly where the evidence is solid and where I am out ahead of it, and then trust you to build a life you can actually adopt and hold on to. Not a heroic program. A durable one. The kind a person with a job and a family and a real life can start tonight and still be running twenty years from now.

That is the book the rest of us have been waiting for. Let's build it.

Key Takeaways

- You did not fail the longevity books. They were mostly written from the top down, set at elite, and built to keep you anxious. This one starts where you are.
- Your health is one connected system of four parts: Meals, Movement, Mind, and Molecules. You advance the whole human, not one part at the expense of the other three, and no pillar is ranked first.
- Being fit in one direction is not the same as being well. I rode a thousand miles while three of my four pillars were on the floor. Balance, not any single peak, is what actually holds.

- Floors before flex. Almost all the durable results come from the basics you can start tonight, for little or nothing, and you are never required to reach the top.
 - The evidence gets graded out loud, what is proven marked proven and what I am betting on marked as my judgment, so you always know which is which. This is earned, not borrowed. A practice, not a product.
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Chapter 2 teaches the two tools promised here: the tiers, T1 to T4, that show you how to climb from floor to flex, and the grades, A to E, that show you how sure the evidence really is, so you can read the rest of this book with your eyes open.