

HEALTH & FITNESS

Power Crunch

Hockey tough guy Wendel Clark faces a new opponent: his weight



Wendel Clark at the Hockey for Heart tournament in Brantford, Ont., in April. For him, eating the right foods is a challenge: 'I love junk and desserts ? all desserts.' Roger Hallett/The Globe and Mail

To manage his weight, the former NHLer has found that ex-players can still eat – and don't train – like the pros

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Back in the 1990s, fans of Wendel Clark wore stick-on handle bar mustaches and nicknamed the hockey player "Captain Crunch" for his pounding style. Now retired, the former captain of the Toronto Maple Leafs shows a softer side as community ambassador for the team.

He regularly plays in charity tournaments and, on May 30, he will participate in the Walk to Fight Arthritis – in honour of his mother-in-law and former hockey mates suffering from degenerative joint disease.

When it comes to his own health, Mr. Clark works out occasionally and follows his version of the vegetable diet: carrot cake, zucchini bread and sweet potato pie. He knows he needs to rethink his definition of comfort food – and start to eat for pain relief.

My goal

"Maintaining my weight. I put on 18 pounds once I quit playing hockey. My weight is ballpark 218ish. When I'm 220, my body feels more soreness."

My workout

"When you finish playing [professional hockey], the workout is the first thing you quit. When you don't have to do it, you choose not to do it. Now, I'm on a maintenance health plan. I work out in the gym in my home. If I keep my weights light, I like doing it, but if I go hard all the time, I don't look forward to exercise.

"Three days a week I do cardio on the treadmill or stairmill, first. Then I do dumbbell squats, abs and upper body. The whole routine is never longer than 45 minutes.

"The only hockey I do now is a lot of charity games, that's 10 games a year. After the games, that's when I'm sore all over. The next day my body hurts – everywhere."

My lifestyle

"I don't have a desk job. My work is appearance related."

When it comes to diet, "I eat one-10th of the food I did when I played hockey. I'm the opposite of what you should be doing. My first meal is after lunchtime. If I eat in the morning, I feel like eating all day."

My motivation

"To feel better. If I keep my weight down, I feel 100 per cent. Otherwise, I carry weight and my body starts to hurt more. And I'm motivated seeing former players at events who are still active."

My anthem

"Country."

My challenge

"Eating the right foods. I love junk and desserts – all desserts."

The critique

According to Andrew Miners, a chiropractor and sports injury specialist at Medcan Clinic in Toronto, Mr. Clark does a fairly good job of meeting his exercise needs. But he could be challenging himself more.

Hit the pool

The goal of managing body weight is likely the most effective self-change that a person can make, says Mr. Miners, a kinesiologist and certified strength and conditioning specialist – and Mr. Clark has that part nailed. Decreasing body weight reduces excessive joint loading and, therefore, alleviates pain and increases function.

Still, Mr. Miners advises Mr. Clark to limit physical activity that involves high-intensity joint loading, such as jogging. Instead, he should mix mild weight bearing with non-weight bearing activities: walking, cycling and [swimming](#) .

Boost muscle endurance

Mr. Miners also suggests Mr. Clark slightly boost his volume of exercise to four days a week, recommending a split body-circuit training protocol. This would have Mr. Clark exercising both the agonist and antagonist (pusher and puller) muscles together, conditioning a major muscle twice a week with a few days rest in between.

“For example, Wendel could train his chest, back, and triceps on Monday and Thursday with an emphasis on resistance, and his legs, shoulders and biceps on Tuesday and Friday more aerobically focused, but still utilizing both aerobic and resistance exercise. He would effectively train his total body, allowing for ample rest and muscle recovery time in between muscle groups.”

He adds: “For resistance exercises, Wendel should lift 40 to 60 per cent of his one repetition max, and keep the reps to greater than 15 reps with short rest periods of less than 90 seconds. For his aerobic exercises, Wendel needs to train in the range between 65 per cent and 85 per cent of his age estimated heart rate maximum [220 minus age].”

Eat for pain relief

An additional tip for non-drug management of joint-related pain is switching to a diet low in animal fat and high in omega-3 fats. Another is consuming small meals throughout the day instead of two large meals, if he wants to lose weight.

“I recommend that Wendel try [to] eat breakfast in the morning. He could try, for example, a breakfast of [cluster-type] cereal with a sprinkle of Bran Buds and topped with a banana. He should also try some fruit flavoured low-fat yogurt with added omega-3 to help manage his sweet tooth.”

In sum, Mr. Miners says, “by monitoring his food intake to maximize the training effects, slightly increasing the volume of exercise and by trying some of the exercise suggestions, Wendel should achieve his goal of maintaining, and likely reducing, his body weight and improve his well-being. Then, having the occasional dessert is okay.”

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