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REPORT

Jack LaLanne

"Godfather of Fitness" Still Going Strong at 91

By Dave Tuttle



For more than a half century, the name Jack LaLanne has been synonymous with fitness, proper diet, and good health.

Often referred to as the "Godfather of Fitness," Jack is not only one of America's original exercise and nutrition gurus, but also a successful businessman, celebrity, lecturer, and motivational speaker. He has published books and made videos on fitness and nutrition, appeared in films, and recorded songs. He markets an electric juicer under his name, and used to market vitamins and nutritional supplements. Now approaching his 92nd birthday, this American icon remains the picture of health and well-being.

A LIFE TRANSFORMED AT 15

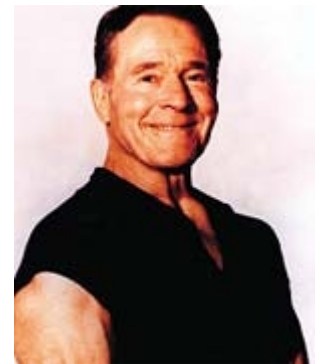
Jack's early life hardly prefigured what was to come. Born Francois Henri LaLanne in San Francisco in 1914, he grew up addicted to sugar and sweets "As a kid, I was a 'sugarholic' and a junk food junkie," he recalls. "It made me weak and it made me mean. I had boils, pimples, and suffered from nearsightedness. Little girls used to beat me up."

Jack's life was transformed at the age of 15, when he and his mother attended a lecture by a nationally recognized nutritionist, who promised Jack that if he gave up sugary foods, ate well, and exercised regularly, he could regain good health. Jack took on the challenge with the zeal and tenacity that would come to be his personal trademarks. He began lifting weights at the local YMCA and sought out all the information he could find on human anatomy, bodybuilding, diet, and fitness.

"I became a voracious reader and I absorbed everything that would help me to improve myself," he says. "Gray's Anatomy was my bible."

Although Jack took pre-med courses in college and also attended and graduated from a chiropractic college, his newfound interest in personal health steered him away from the idea of treating disease for a living. Instead, his focus became helping people to avoid disease by achieving optimal health and fitness.

At the age of just 21, Jack opened the nation's first modern health studio in Oakland, CA. "I was 40 years ahead of my time, but by then I knew more about the workings of the muscles in my body than most doctors," he says. "People thought I was a charlatan and a nut."



Indeed, in those early days, it was not unusual for doctors to warn men that lifting weights could cause heart attacks and diminish libido. Even varsity coaches banned their athletes from lifting weights, and LaLanne recalls having to lend some athletes keys to his studio so they could come in at night and secretly work out at the gym. According to Jack, "Time has proven that what I was doing was scientifically correct: starting with a healthy diet, followed by systematic exercise."

CAREER IN FITNESS TAKES FLIGHT

As Jack continued to formulate and refine his approach to physical fitness and nutrition, he began to develop the first prototypes of exercise equipment that is now standard in virtually every modern-day athletic club. His inventions included the first leg extension machine, the first pulley machines using cables, and the first weight selectors. He continued to buck the conventional wisdom, encouraging women to lift weights and urging the disabled and elderly to exercise for health.



As his reputation spread, Jack received his big break in 1951, when he was invited to host the “Jack LaLanne Show” on the popular new medium of television. Jack’s program was an immediate hit, and he used this new platform to urge millions of Americans to get off their couches and exercise. Jack continued to dispense exercise and dietary advice on television until 1984.

Today, the man often credited with inventing the jumping jack continues to preach the fitness lifestyle. One of the original adherents of the life extension philosophy, Jack approaches the 100-year mark with no apparent signs of slowing down. He continues to follow a strict regimen of diet, exercise, and supplementation that has helped to keep him youthful even in his

nineties.

WORKING AT STAYING HEALTHY

Greater longevity, however, does not just happen on its own, as Jack would be the first to admit. “You have to work at longevity,” he noted in an exclusive interview with Life Extension. “Exercise is king and nutrition is queen: together, you have a kingdom. My ‘secret’ is that you have to plan for your life. Some older people are now starting to exercise, but there are too many fat people. They spend time watching TV and drinking at the bar, then they say they don’t have time to exercise. People need to get their priorities straight.”

“To live a long life, you have to work at living,” he added. “Most Americans work at dying. You wouldn’t give your dog a donut and coffee for breakfast. Yet people fill their bodies with junk and then wonder where their physical health has gone. Life is like planting seeds. Put junk in, junk comes out. Exercise is also essential. Exercise increases your life expectancy and gives you a reason to get up in the morning. With a sound program of physical fitness, everyone can lead healthy and productive lives in their golden years.”

Achieving a long, healthy life span means more than just working hard at diet and exercise, according to LaLanne. Equally important is taking personal responsibility for your health.

“You control your life,” he says. “My dad died at 50, but your genetics don’t control your longevity. Do the things that are under your control. Man can live to be 150. Common diseases like diabetes can be controlled by diet and exercise. Stay away from animal fats and processed foods. Read every food label, and if you can’t pronounce the ingredients, don’t buy it. Buying nutrient-empty foods is like putting water in the gas tank of your car. But good food by itself is not enough. You need a healthy lifestyle as well.”



Thirty Years of Extraordinary Feats of Strength

Jack LaLanne achieved notoriety throughout the decades for accomplishing feats of strength that are no less extraordinary today than when he first performed them.

- **1954, age 40:** Swam the length of the San Francisco Golden Gate Bridge underwater with 140 pounds of equipment, including two air tanks... an undisputed world record.
- **1955, age 41:** Swam handcuffed from Alcatraz to Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco, CA.
- **1956, age 42:** Set a world record of 1,033 pushups in 23 minutes on the television show, “You Asked for It.”
- **1957, age 43:** Swam the treacherous Golden Gate Channel, towing a 2,500-pound cabin cruiser. This involved fighting the cold, swift ocean currents that made the 1-mile swim a 6.5-mile test of strength and endurance.
- **1958, age 44:** Maneuvered a paddleboard 30 miles over 9.5 hours non-stop from the Farallon Islands to the San Francisco shore.
- **1959, age 45:** Completed 1,000 pushups and 1,000 chin-ups in 1 hour and 22 minutes.
- **1974, age 60:** Swam from Alcatraz Island to Fisherman’s Wharf for a second time, handcuffed, shackled, and towing a 1,000-pound boat.
- **1975, age 61:** Swam the length of the Golden Gate Bridge, underwater, for a second time, handcuffed, shackled, and towing a 1,000-pound boat.
- **1976, age 62:** Commemorating the “Spirit of ‘76,” swam 1 mile in Long Beach Harbor, handcuffed, shackled, and towing 13 boats (representing the 13 original colonies) containing 76 people.
- **1979, age 65:** Towed 65 boats filled with 6,500 pounds of wood pulp while handcuffed and shackled in Lake Ashinoko, near Tokyo, Japan.
- **1980, age 66:** Towed 10 boats in North Miami, FL, filled with 77 people for over 1 mile in less than 1 hour.
- **1984, age 70:** Handcuffed, shackled, and fighting strong winds and currents, towed 70 boats with 70 people for 1.5 miles, from the Queen’s Way Bridge in Long Beach Harbor to the Queen Mary.

DAILY REGIMEN BRINGS RESULTS

Jack not only understands the value of diet, exercise, and supplementation, but also how important it is to put these beliefs into practice. He works out from 5 to 7 a.m. each day, and eats two meals daily, at 11 a.m. and 7 p.m. His morning meal consists of four to eight egg whites and five pieces of fresh fruit, often prepared with his juicer. He and his wife normally dine out in local restaurants, most of which have developed special dishes for him and other health-conscious patrons. Dinner usually consists of a salad with at least 10 veggies and minimal lettuce, plus fish or occasionally turkey for protein. If he has grains at all, they are whole grains. He avoids red meat and dairy products.



A self-described “huge believer in vitamins,” Jack also recognizes the need for dietary supplementation. “Even though I eat right, I take supplements as an insurance policy,” he explains. “I take everything, from A to Z, and it’s all from natural sources, including things like fish oil, cod liver oil, all of the vitamins and minerals, and enzymes.”

STILL ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Jack had to fight the medical establishment back in his early years, when conventional medical wisdom held that weightlifting would make athletes muscle-bound and inflexible, turn women into men, and put the elderly in an early grave. Today, he is hopeful for the future, because medical professionals now recognize the importance of daily exercise as part of a prescription for good health.

“Medical schools are now putting more emphasis on the value of nutrition and exercise, so future doctors can help people live longer,” he notes. “Young doctors are now prescribing these things and the older ones are slowly realizing their importance. People need to change their patterns if they are going to increase their longevity. Even people in their eighties and nineties can benefit from exercise.”

Despite the considerable progress made in the last 60 years, LaLanne recognizes that there is always room for improvement. “Even with all the scientific knowledge we have on the benefits of exercise, there are more fat people than ever,” he notes with regret. “What we need is consumer education. People in the health field need to bind together to overcome the brainwashing that results from hawking junk food on TV. We have to start with the educational system, to teach our youth the right way to lead their lives. Kids are creatures of habit, so you have to get them to do the right thing and forget all that negative advertising they see on television. Until that’s done, we won’t make real headway in our campaign.”

Still, Jack LaLanne remains the eternal optimist. He has seen so much improvement since he started his crusade that he remains idealistic about the eventual triumph of the fitness lifestyle over a sedentary existence with its video games, junk food, and early death.



“Nutrition and exercise should be an important part of everyone’s life,” he says. “Life should be a happy adventure, and to be happy you need to be healthy. Just take things one step at a time, and remember that everything you do takes energy to achieve. You need to plant the seeds and cultivate them well. Then you will reap the bountiful harvest of health and longevity!”

Jack LaLanne endorses only those products that bear his name. To learn more, please visit www.jacklalanne.com.

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