

# 2 Pages on Programmers Physical State

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## Introduction

*Should programmers play the muscle-flexing gym game that the big (dumb) broilers do? Is it really reasonable to expect runners to share their tracks with engineers listening to Weird Al Yankovic's "White and Nerdy" on their iPods? And if that is indeed the case, what's in it (I mean, really?) for those brainiacs that are suddenly turning into slim, good-looking, and all-too-healthy people? Read on for some truly shocking claims about the Real World™ and what exercise could do for **you**.*

## High-performance Athletes

Perhaps you have watched sports and noticed that the people who play are often in really good physical shape. Have you ever wondered why? Or do you think it is only natural that in order to play at the top level in any game, you need to have a body that can take on the challenges you give it? Sure, when it comes to weight lifting, running, long jumping, and so forth, even an anti-sports type of programmer will acknowledge that it's obviously beneficial to have lots of optimized muscle. However, most of the elite in non-physical sports are also in very good shape; snooker players, bowlers, pistol shooters, and even golfers (sorry swingers, but there you go). No big conclusions yet, but keep these focused athletes in mind as we travel on.

## High-performance Thinkers

Moving away just a little bit from sports, there are lots of games that require quite heavy thinking. Take chess, for example, which is a game that requires you to employ both sharp tactics and cunning strategies for several hours. A mistake will quickly cost you the win, so you have to stay sharp at all times. As it turns out, most of the really successful chess players are in excellent physical shape. For some reason, they work out several times a week. Why? **Because it makes a hell of a difference** when they play chess! Being in good physical condition makes it possible to stay alert much longer. They can keep their focus for hours. Players that are out of shape, on the other hand, do not last very long.

## High-performance Programmers

You don't have to be an anorectic marathon runner to be a good programmer. I know some really big-boned coders that are much smarter than I will even pretend to be. But I have also had the luxury of seeing some programmers go through different life-altering stages in their life. For example, some have started to work out on a regular basis, and also changed their eating habits (read: disorders), and their general lifestyle (read: drinking habits). If they were smart to begin with, I can tell you right now that exercise made them a hell of a lot smarter! Not only do they stretch (a little pun intended) the limits for their best achievements, they also substantially reduce the number of mistakes they make. Rather than try to prove this to you, I challenge you to closely observe your surroundings and gather your own empirical evidence. When you do, feel free to tell me what you've discovered. (Of course, I already know.)

## High-performance Fat<sup>1</sup> People

Like I said, you don't have to look like a tooth pick to be able to perform, or stay on the other side of the scale, resembling the green guy on TV (no, not Kermit). Some of the smartest people I know are fat<sup>2</sup>, drink excessively, sleep too little, and never ever work out. But I do worry about them for other reasons. In fact, I used to be one of them (apart from being really smart), so I know that it's a dangerous game to play. (I would also like to see what phantom developers they could become if they surrendered to my powerful and charmingly unfair reign of whipped-until-you-cry-for-mercy exercise program.)

## High-performance Team Players

One of the nice surprises when people start to work out is that their mood swings fade a bit. They are able to sustain their focus for much longer, and they have better patience with others. Due to the stress-reduction from exercising, they can also see the big picture even when the pressure builds and chaos lurks around the corner. In essence, programmers who regularly work out become much more valuable to their teams and colleagues.

## High-performance You

If you haven't given exercise a chance as a way of improving your mind and becoming a better programmer, please give it an honest try. The best way is to immediately go out and tell a few of your friends that you are going to start a new life and become a better (wo)man. Once you've done that, the pressure of having given such bold promises will force you to actually do it – and if you keep going for a couple of months, the inspirational results will make sure that you don't stop. Trust me.

As I've already mentioned, one additional benefit of working out is that you become healthier, which in turns lead to longer lives and other trivial matters, but more importantly, you'll avoid the modern plague of being burned out. And you don't want to burn out, 'cause then how will you write the code that brings food to your table?

Thank you for reading,

Bjorn Karlsson

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, I can say fat if I want to. I used to weigh 100 kg. No muscles involved.

<sup>2</sup> And some of the fattest people I know are smart, but I doubt that it proves causality. Oh, statistics, it's so hard.