

DON'T BLAME IT ON YOUR GENES

By Richard Bell

Families are excellent laboratories. You grow up in one, you see biology at work. At a recent get-together back east, I got a chance to socialize with my brother, sister and father. My father's always been fit and lived healthy. My mother, on the other hand, died from the complications of her own lifestyle, and it wasn't pretty. My sister looks fantastic, as if she's been working out hard and eating right. My brother? Well, he's large.

"It's genetics," he said. "I guess I'm just meant to be big."

Excuses. I hear a lot of them. Lose your job? Your boss has it in for you. Your kid's a delinquent? Must be the music he listens to. And your body? Well, for better or worse, you're at least partly to blame. So don't tell me that if you can't gain muscle and lose fat, it must be genetics.

We in the fitness business are partly to blame for this misconception. Last year at a conference, I heard a respected trainer say: "If you want to jump high and run fast, you better choose your parents wisely." Is this really true? Only up to a point.

Your genes are sort of like the construction materials you use to build your house. Some of it comes direct from the factory, with no substitutions allowed: the color of our skin and hair, our height and basic body type. Some people, for instance, are born with thick ankles, narrow feet or a tendency to put on weight around their midsection. That last one is only a tendency! Whether or not they add the extra weight is their choice.

On a more technical note, some people have more "fast twitch muscle fibre" than others, which makes it easier for them build muscle—but it's not impossible for the rest of us. If you're a science freak like me, you look for ways to overcome these imbalances.

From what I've seen, 95 percent of the population has the potential to gain lean muscle to a significant degree. Maybe not at the elite rate of 20 pounds in six months, but certainly 10 pounds per year. The keys are proper nutrition, adequate supplementation, rest, and of course, training smart.

Program variation is key. I used to change programs for my clients every three weeks—now I do it every four workouts. And it's not just variety, it's intensity. You need to challenge your body if you want it to change.

If my brother asked, here's what I'd tell him:

First off, start losing that extra fat. Your heart will thank you.

At the same time, hit the weight room. Don't get stuck in the same workout. Here are some ways to change it up:

1. Do the same workout, but lift heavier weights for fewer reps.
2. Keep weight the same, but do more reps.
3. Add an extra set or two.
4. Reduce the rest between sets.

And forget your parents for now. This is up to you.