



# Fitness After Forty

*Hal Higdon*

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In the first edition of *Fitness After Forty*, *Runner's World* Contributing Editor Hal Higdon quoted Plato: "Man is in a constant state of decay and renewal." True, 2,500 years ago and true today, as Higdon releases a revised edition of his best-selling work.

Statisticians can state absolutely what the Greek philosopher writing at the time of Pheidippides only surmised. Man reaches his peak, at least in terms of athletic efficiency at age 22, if he is a sprinter; 25 for milers; 29 for marathoners. From that point, it is all downhill. "They tell you that things change at 40," commented retired NFL quarterback Johnny Unitas, "but they don't tell you how much."

The same statisticians who describe man's peak can also predict the rate of his decline: 1% a year in ability to swim or run fast, a steadily sloping line that parallels man's loss of man's pulmonary efficiency.

But author Hal Higdon denies the reliability of such statistics, because they measure only what man has done, not what he is capable of doing. Higdon points to the performances of super-athletes such as New Zealand's Jack Foster, who ran 2:11:18 for the marathon at age 41. At the World Masters Championships in Toronto, Higdon won his first of four gold medals for runners over 40, setting an American masters record in the 3000 Meter Steeplechase unbroken today. His fourth gold was 2:29:27 for the marathon at age 49.

"We all must slow down sometime," Higdon concedes, "but probably not as much as we now do."

In *Fitness After Forty*, Hal Higdon describes how man develops, decays, and eventually dies, most often from coronary artery disease, which kills more than 600,000 Americans each year—unnecessarily, he claims. "Heart attacks are almost completely preventable."

Higdon is no Messiah. He does not exhort others to do the few things middle-aged men and women can easily do to greatly increase their fitness, and their capacity to enjoy life. But he does describe how many people have changed their lives, including members of Dr. Kenneth H. Cooper's Aerobics Center in Dallas. He tells of David H. R. Pain, the San Diego attorney, who started the masters movement. Higdon also shows how the average individual can extend his lifespan by six to nine years. And simultaneously improve the quality of that life.

*Fitness After Forty* is must reading for individuals past that age who want to get in shape, or stay in shape. Originally published in 1977, it is as valid today as it was more than four decades ago.

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