

# Chapter 5

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SAMIR BECIC



## THE INTERVIEW

### David Wright (Wright)

Today we're talking with Samir Becic. He was born in Bosnia-Herzegovina but grew up in Germany. During the past five years he has been living in Houston, Texas. Currently he is employed as a fitness director in one of the largest and most successful clubs in the country with over seventy employees. His accomplishments read like a who's who: four times number one fitness trainer in America for Bally Total Fitness, twenty-two Number One Fitness Trainer in Texas for Bally Total Fitness, two times Fitness Director of the Year for Bally Total Fitness, and two times Fitness Trainer of the Year for Bally Total Fitness. In 2004 he was named among the top one hundred personal trainers in America by *Men's Journal*. He was one of the judges on Houston's *Biggest Loser* radio show, 96.5 (similar to the television show, *The Biggest Loser*). He has been a fitness expert on Fox 26 for two years, one of the fitness experts for Channel WB 39, and he has given interviews for many magazines and newspapers such as *Health & Fitness*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Men's Journal*, and

*Houston Health.* Since the age of ten he has been involved boxing and kickboxing. He ranks among the top ten fitness experts in America.

Samir, welcome to *Breaking Down the Barriers*.

So, why should we exercise?

**Samir Becic (Becic)**

There are many reasons why we should exercise. I could go on and on with all the positive benefits, but let me start by telling you why people do not exercise.

One of the reasons people don't exercise is because they're not aware of all the benefits that fitness can provide for them. They are not aware that fitness helps them be healthier, happier, and a more energetic person. The majority of people I've met—especially here in the United States—say they're not exercising because they have no time. They say, "I have stress—I have a stressful job. I work twelve hours a day."

Every single person I have personally helped to start exercising has told me after a couple of months that exercising has changed his or her life. To answer the question why people should exercise, let me start with a couple of things. One of them is that when you exercise you decrease the body fat percentage you have. We know that a majority of people in the U.S. have a problem with a high percentage of body fat. When you exercise you increase lean mass, which means that you build muscle and lose fat. Also, at the same time you decrease the risk of having high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Furthermore, you decrease by 200 percent your risk of strokes and heart attacks. You decrease the risk of having certain cancer like breast cancer in females and prostate cancer in men. These are only some of the things I'll mention. Most important is that when exercising you're strengthening your immune system and, as we know, people who have a strong immune system won't get sick easily because their immune system fights off bacteria and viruses that they come in contact with every day.

Exercise also helps decrease the risk of arthritis, osteoporosis, and diabetes. You decrease the risk of developing depression. If you have clinical depression, exercise will help you decrease it.

Another thing most people are not aware of that is very important is that exercise helps decrease stress and depression. This is very important today because a majority of people are complaining of stress because they have a very fast lifestyle.

Being from Houston and because Houston is one of the cities with most overweight people gives me the opportunity to work with people who have major weight and health issues. I have worked with many people and I can not name one person who was not happy and whose life has not changed in a positive way after starting exercising. I can also proudly say that all of my clients not only lost weight and body fat but they gained self-confidence.

### **Wright**

So how does obesity and overweight affect one's life?

### **Becic**

Both obesity and overweight affect people lives in many negative ways.

First, I just want to mention some numbers. One hundred and twenty-seven million people in America are overweight or obese. Three hundred thousand deaths in the U.S. on a yearly basis are due to people being overweight. As I mentioned before, I understand that people have stress on a daily basis and they are not finding time to exercise and play sports. Moreover, when stress increases, most likely weight will increase as well. People who are overweight are not in shape, which affects their daily lives. When people who are forty years old walk up two flights of stairs and experiences shortness of breath, they should take this seriously and consider changing their lifestyle. If they do not change the way they are living, by the time they are ten to fifteen older they will have many more problems. The biggest mistake people make is that they think only for today and they forget to think that they will be older. This is the time when they will start regretting not making smarter choices.

People who are overweight tend to have back problems and knee problems. This is because joints can support only so much weight and when exposed to more weight over a long period of time they start to "go on strike." Also people who are overweight have an increased risk of heart attack, strokes, and diabetes.

Exercise does not mean going to the gym and lifting weights but it means being active. If you have children, then go outside and play baseball or soccer with them. Another great thing to do is take the whole family and go for a bike ride or go hiking. All of these activities do the same thing as going to the gym and have the same impact on the body.

Weight loss and exercise is not only for people who want to look good in a bikini but for the most part it is for people who want to stay healthy throughout their life.

**Wright**

What risks come with stress?

**Becic**

Stress is one of the reasons why people gain weight. Stress is one of the reasons why people get heart attacks, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.

Stress in the body increases the level of cortisol. The level of cortisol immediately decreases the level of testosterone in the body. Decreasing the testosterone level decreases the lean muscle mass and increases the fat mass. That's one reason why the body gains weight when under stress.

During the time we are under stress we forget certain things like how important our health is. People believe that when they are under stress exercise will give them even more stress because it is another appointment on their calendar. What they don't realize is that the exercise appointment is actually a helpful appointment. Stress also makes people tired and unmotivated; but we should not forget that exercise will actually give a person more energy and motivation to do other things.

Because of stress people tend to eat fast food and go to restaurants because it is convenient; however, they do not realize that fast food and restaurant food is very high in fat and sodium.

Stress also makes people very unhappy. People whose bodies are under a lot of stress tend to have a low endorphin output, which leads their being unhappy and depressed. This further leads to being overweight, having low energy, and having a low self-esteem.

**Wright**

So how do tobacco and alcohol influence our lives?

**Becic**

A glass of red wine a day is healthy for the body. The problem with alcohol starts when, instead of drinking one glass a day, people start drinking ten, fifteen, or more glasses and they overdo it.

One of the biggest problems about drinking alcohol in large amounts is that the body metabolizes alcohol extremely quickly,

unlike the digestion of food which requires time to digest. Alcohol needs no digestion time and gets into the body very quickly and will metabolize before most nutrients. About 20 percent of the absorbed alcohol can reach the stomach and then the brain within one minute. This is why the body can come so quickly under the influence of alcohol. Alcohol is also high in calories. One gram of alcohol contains eight calories, which is very similar to fat—one gram of fat contains nine calories. Alcohol produces has a strong impact on the liver. This was evident with the famous actor, Larry Hagman. He was a perfect example of how alcohol impacts the liver.

Cigarettes are also very bad for our body. Cigarette-smoking is one of the major causes of cancer in the U.S. Obesity is fighting with cigarettes for the number one position. This has been said by the U.S. Surgeon General. We all know what smoking does to us.

When the Native American Indians found tobacco, they used tobacco to relax. Smoking three or four or even five cigarettes a week will not affect health drastically, it can even have an effect of relaxation. The problem comes when people smoke ten, fifteen, twenty, and even more cigarettes a day. Eighty-seven percent of lung cancer is caused by smoking. We age faster when we smoke. Even our skin color changes when we smoke a lot. In the year 2000, 8.6 million people were suffering from at least one problem caused by either being a current or former smoker. Cigarettes are very addictive. By smoking small amounts, you tend to smoke more and more. Nicotine is a drug.

Former smokers live longer than those who continue smoking. For example, a person who quits smoking at the age of fifty has about 50 percent less risk of dying within the next fifteen years than someone who continues smoking. Smoking has a strong impact on cancers like lung cancer. Smoking has a strong impact on heart attacks, stroke, and chronic lung disease.

A woman who stops smoking before pregnancy or during the first three to four months of pregnancy has less of a risk of having problems with the birth such as low birth weight than a woman who continues to smoke throughout her pregnancy.

### **Wright**

Will you explain what you mean by “calories in versus calories out”? I’ve always been told that if you take in fewer calories and exercise and expend more calories you’ll simply lose weight. Is that’s true?

**Becic**

That's definitely true. That's one of the best methods right now—you should take fewer calories in and burn more in order to lose weight. That's just a matter of simple mathematics. For example, if you eat two thousand calories a day and you burn twenty-five hundred calories, you will lose weight.

The calories in—calories out idea has much more to do with weight loss than just eating less calories than you're burning. For example, let's take exercise out of the picture. Metabolism for just normal function requires two thousand calories. A person who is taking in about fifteen hundred calories a day will lose about five hundred calories per day.

A different example is a person who needs about fifteen hundred calories per day for normal body function. If that person takes in about twenty-five hundred calories in a day, that person will definitely gain weight. It's a very simple mathematic equation. Some people have no experience with a healthy way of choosing foods.

**Wright**

I've heard of a lot of people who are thin who eat a lot and they say they don't gain weight because of their metabolism. What role does metabolism play?

**Becic**

Metabolism plays a large part in that it is responsible for about 65 to 70 percent of the calories burned on a daily basis. People with high metabolism can eat whatever they want and still be very thin. It doesn't mean they're healthy—they are thought to be healthy because we always associate being overweight with being unhealthy. I've had a certain percentage of clients I have trained personally who had weighed between three hundred to four hundred pounds and who have lost about one hundred and fifty pounds. Even though they weighed two hundred and fifty pounds they were in much better health than someone who is skinny.

There is no such thing as good or bad metabolism. Everybody has a unique metabolism. That means everybody has a metabolism that burns a certain amount of calories a day. For example, take a man who has never gone on a regular exercise plan in his life. Let's say he has an average metabolism—fifteen hundred calories per day. After that person starts exercising his metabolism will increase and he will burn more calories. However, a person with a high percentage of lean

muscle mass may burn more calories just by watching television than the first person who is exercising. That means the more lean muscle mass one has, the faster one's metabolism will be, which is one of the most important reasons why people should do strength training.

The key to successful weight loss is metabolism.

### **Wright**

How does one go about the process of setting realistic goals and being motivated?

### **Becic**

To set realistic goals is very hard but at the same time very important. Because people do not set realistic goals, when they start exercising, they lose motivation after a short time. Setting realistic goals is a key factor because it will mean the end result will be successful. I have realized that especially Americans, because of their busy schedules, want to achieve things that are not possible to achieve in a short period of time. For example, many people start losing weight as a New Year's resolution. But the bad thing is that majority of those people set goals that are not possible to achieve such as losing fifty pounds in two months. That's not realistic. By trying to do that they hurt themselves. They get sore, they'll hurt certain body parts, they'll become discouraged, and they'll stop training and exercising. They'll say, "I really tried and I hurt myself and lost my motivation." A majority of those people try very hard but they lose their motivation and they become depressed and they gain even more weight. They end up having a bigger problem than they had before because of their failure of trying and not succeeding increases negative thoughts and those negative thoughts, in some cases, lead to depression and weight gain.

If we set realistic goals it means that everything we do in life we should do step by step and very slowly to give ourselves time. You cannot undo twenty years of inactivity in three months. But using certain small steps and setting small goals, you can achieve success and change your perception of fitness. Be happy with small results. Setting achievable goals means that even if you start eating more fruits and vegetables, you've already set a realistic goal that can show results. Drinking more water on a daily basis, let's say between two and a half to three liters (one liter is the equivalent of 1.05 quart), is definitely a great goal to have. Exercising even once or twice a week

for fifteen to thirty minutes is better than nothing and the end result will be positive.

My suggestion to everyone who is trying to exercise is to take very small steps. Start exercising two or three times a week for thirty to forty-five minutes. Get your body used to exercising. Start sleeping more. The more you sleep the more weight you will lose because your body will be more regenerated and able to burn more calories. Take time for yourself. Spend about thirty minutes a day for yourself organizing your thoughts. That will decrease stress and is already a very realistic goal. Have a starting point and an ending point. Note the results and problems that you have. The first month the goal should be very small, the second month, a little bit more, and the third month even more. Every month you should increase those goals so that you can achieve them.

### **Wright**

Do you advise your clients to follow some fitness plan?

### **Becic**

Yes, definitely. Having a fitness plan is very important because it's the way you can achieve your goal. A fitness plan and how to set realistic goals are very synergistic. Having a fitness plan that can be tracked—when you started, progress in the middle, and the end. What is the end? There really is no end—fitness should be for life. Fitness should be like breathing and eating. Fitness is a part of our life. All fitness experts will tell you that fitness is the future. Fitness will drastically decrease the cost of your health care and medical treatments when you get older.

I cannot create a general plan for fitness to fit everyone, but my chapter here is about people who have never exercised before or people who have perhaps been on an exercise program in the past but who stopped and have not exercised for many, many years. My chapter here is to encourage that 90 percent of the population who don't exercise regularly—this chapter is for them.

A fitness plan should be very simple. We all work hard and time is an issue. First of all, find certain times during the week that you can dedicate to fitness activities. Fitness activities should be done between two to four times a week. In the beginning take fifteen to thirty minutes for exercise. Then later, increase the time to thirty to forty-five minutes for beginners.



Fitness exercises can include walking, lifting light weights, easy jogging, playing various sports (basketball, soccer, etc.). All sports that burn calories.

Before exercising you should always start with a warm-up by doing some cardio training. Warm your body up first. Then you can lift weights for forty to forty-five minutes. And then end your training with ten to twenty minutes of cardio exercises and stretching. This fitness plan is for someone who is more advanced.

For someone who is just starting, a fitness goal could be as simple as just going outside and walking. However, I believe that fitness clubs are the best solution to start working out because they have professionals who can help. My recommendation for most people is to burn at least two thousand calories a week. You can do that by exercising three to four times a week and decrease your rich calorie intake.

My professional recommendation to everyone is to seek professional help from a fitness trainer because the risk of injuries will be minimized and the success will triple.

### **Wright**

Along with a fitness plan, do you suggest a nutritional program as well?

### **Becic**

Definitely. First of all, I hate the word “diet.” Even the term “nutrition plan” indicates a structured approach. I believe, especially for beginners, to just start very slow. Even if you start eating more vegetables and fruits, drinking more water, having small meals versus big meals, and eating between four to six times a day will be a great nutrition plan.

My recommendation to everyone is to make healthy choices in choosing food. At a certain point in time when you start exercising, your body is rejecting certain types of foods. One of the reasons is because you’re telling yourself, “I’m exercising and I don’t want bad food because I will destroy the results of my exercising.”

My suggestion for a nutrition plan is very, very simple: Drink two to four liters of water a day. Eat four to six small meals versus three big meals. This will increase your metabolism. Incorporate more vegetables and more fruits in your full calorie intake on a daily basis. Eat more protein and take vitamins. Make balanced healthy food choices make 45 to 50 percent of your meals carbohydrates. Eat less

simple carbohydrates like sugar. Eat more complex carbohydrates. Twenty-five percent of what you eat should be protein and about 25 percent fats.

A majority of people are apprehensive of eating fats. The body needs certain fats. These fats come from products like olive oil and certain nuts, which are very healthy for the body. Use more olive oil in your nutritional intake.

The kind of protein choices you make should include fish, chicken, lean red meat, and tofu (a soy based protein product). It's very important for you to build your muscle mass. Building your musculature structure will dramatically decrease your body fat because your body will burn more calories if you have more muscle. You cannot go from being obese to being the perfect shape immediately. Maybe 5 percent of overweight people who work on fitness will succeed in that goal and 95 percent will struggle with it. Those who struggle tend to give up. My suggestion is to start making healthy choices on a weekly basis step by step. The most important thing is to understand that you can not achieve your goal overnight and that everything takes time.

### **Wright**

I know from hearing the things you talk about that you believe in celebrating results and being happy. Would you tell our readers what you mean by that?

### **Becic**

All the questions I answered today—why should we exercise, how obesity and overweight affects our lives, what risks come through stress—all the things I said about exercise and all the things we discussed today definitely have a reason. Most people are never happy with the result they achieve. When you're not happy you tend to be stressed and depressed. Even when we believe that we did not achieve very much we need to recognize that by doing *any* kind of exercise we become stronger our cardiovascular condition, balance, energy, and flexibility improves. All those are very important results and you should celebrate and be happy about each one.

To be able to celebrate achievement with a fitness plan, start with a certain point and measure your progress over a certain time, for example every thirty or sixty days. Establish a very small goal at the beginning and celebrate every goal you achieve. Maybe the first goal for a month should be trying to lose between three to six pounds,

increasing your energy level, increasing your strength, eating more fruits and vegetables, taking more vitamins, and drinking more water. Every single goal you achieve you should celebrate and be happy about because achievement and celebration makes you happy. What I mean by celebrating achievements is recognizing them and being proud of ourselves.

**Wright**

What an interesting conversation. Today we have been talking with Samir Becic. He was born in Bosnia but he grew up in Germany. He now lives in Houston, Texas, and is employed as a fitness director in one of the largest and most successful fitness clubs in the country with over seventy employees. He ranks in the top ten fitness experts in America.

Samir, thank you so much for being with us today and answering all these questions on *Breaking Down the Barriers*.

## About the Author

Samir Becic was born in Bosnia-Herzegovina but grew up in Germany. In the past five years he has been living in Houston, Texas. Currently he is employed as a fitness director in one of the largest and most successful clubs in the country with over seventy employees. His accomplishments read like a who's who: four times number one fitness trainer in America for Bally Total Fitness, twenty-two Number One Fitness Trainer in Texas for Bally Total Fitness, two times Fitness Director of the Year for Bally Total Fitness, and two times Fitness Trainer of the Year for Bally Total Fitness. In 2004 he was named among the top one hundred personal trainers in America by *Men's Journal*. He was one of the judges on Houston's *Biggest Loser* radio show, 96.5 (similar to the television show, *The Biggest Loser*). He has been a fitness expert on Fox 26 for two years, one of the fitness experts for Channel WB 39, and he has given interviews for many magazines and newspapers such as *Health & Fitness*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Men's Journal*, and *Houston Health*. Since the age of ten he has been involved boxing and kickboxing. He ranks in the top ten fitness experts in America.

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