

Less is Better When It Comes to Exercise and Weight Loss Program Design - A Very Special Interview with Dr. Phil Maffetone

LiveAwesome.com Interview with Dr. Phil Maffetone

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Kevin Gianni: Hi, this is Kevin Gianni, author of "The Busy Person's Fitness Solution" and founder of www.liveawesome.com. I'd like to welcome everyone aboard to today's www.liveawesome.com expert interview. This is the planet's hardest hitting, no fluff, health and fitness interview series. In each interview, I've picked the brain of one of the foremost experts in the health and fitness world and get real, ready-to-use information that will transform you into a healthier, happier, lighter and limitless person. These experts are not allowed to talk about their PhD certifications and plaques on the wall. They're only allowed to share with you what really works and how you can apply it to your life for maximum results in the least amount of time. So strap on and grab a pen and piece of paper. You won't want to miss this interview with Dr. Phil Maffetone. He's the creator of the Maffetone Method, a holistic, low-stress, no pain way to get exceptional fitness. For many years he's trained top-rate athletes and now he's actually taken an exciting turn in his practice which we'll talk about a little bit later. Dr. Maffetone is one of my mentors from a far, so it's really exciting to have him on board today. Dr. Phil, thanks for coming aboard.

Phil: Oh, thank you, Kevin. It's great to be here.

Kevin: It's hard to imagine a fitness program as low-stress and no pain, so why don't you tell us a little bit about what that means. It's pretty revolutionary.

Phil: Well, they're still calling it revolutionary. I think I was interviewed in 1980 or 1981 and the newspaper writer used that word 'revolutionary' and the revolution continues. You know, people have an image of fitness and it's not a good image. It's hard work, painful, miserable existence kind of image and some people get into that. The fact is, we have a great aerobic system in the body that incorporates certain muscles and certain parts of our metabolism and that system thrives on easy activity. Humans way, way back functioned on that easy level because they would hunt and gather and do things that were relatively easy. They didn't have to sprint after their food like a lion does; they kind of wandered round and that's how we have evolved and developed our systems. The easy approach is actually the best approach for our body and our metabolism.

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Kevin: How did the "no pain, no gain" philosophy come? Where did that come from, when did that become prevalent and why now are we saying it just isn't working?

Phil: I think it's been around for a long, long time. It was certainly promoted, if not started, by the marketing people, because it's an exciting thing when you show an image on the screen or in an ad of somebody killing themselves. People unfortunately really get into that, many of them and it's really sad. What's happened, is our youth, our kids, love to be injured. They love to be taped up, they love to be limping around after a game of basketball or whatever and that's very sad. I think there's a very strong marketing component to that, but there is a certain level of excitement that grabs people. So the marketing people take advantage of that and of course the notion that if you really want something, you've got to work hard is prevalent in our society. That feeds into the whole thing and that's just not true.

Kevin: Sure. I was recently talking to Danny Dreyer, the author of "True Running." He said that 63% of runners every year get an injury. That's just unbelievable.

Phil: It's very sad. You know the average, and I think this is a western world statistic, the average career of a professional athlete is 4.5 years.

Kevin: No kidding.

Phil: It's just very sad and unnecessary.

Kevin: Wow, so we see all these bulked up bodies. We see them on TV and we see them in the magazines and we see them just about everywhere, even at the gym. What are the consequences of that type of body? It's from the "no pain, no gain" kind of mentality, so what are some of the consequences that your body faces?

Phil: Yeah, that's where it comes from and it's the "more is better" attitude. If you look at football players, who are kind of the ultimate "no pain, no gain" sport individuals, and you look at what happens to them after they stop playing, it's a nightmare. A lot of these people get very sick and many of them even diabetic. Many of them have all kinds of metabolic disorders and a lot of them get overweight. Many, many are severely overweight. It's a consequence of what they did during their sport. They beat their body up, they attempted to get something that they would get by sacrificing their body and it just backfires in the long run.

Kevin: Sure one of your philosophies is less is more and it does bring sigh of relief to many people out there who are breaking themselves down everyday. When I tell people that, they have a hard time believing that. How is "less is more" really better?

Phil: Well, less is more in many ways when it comes to fitness. If you understood the value you get, and this is for any athlete no matter what shape they're in. Athletes who are in tremendous shape and people who are completely out of shape who go on a 30 minute walk will get tremendous benefits immediately. Not six weeks later, but at the end of that walk. The value from the health standpoint is incredible.

Kevin: So that's for someone who's conditioned or unconditioned?

Phil: Yeah, I work with Mark Allen, who was six time Ironman Championship and probably one of the most difficult to sports to excel in because you're looking at swimming and biking and running and being top in all three of those sports and doing all three at one time. I would have Mark walk at various points in the season as part of his program and in the beginning he had a hard time. It was something he would almost be embarrassed to do, because he didn't want people seeing him, but the benefits are incredible. A lot of people bypass a lot of the value that they get out of those kinds of workouts and jump to the higher level of activity. It's like in second grade you say, "Well, I'm not going to spend all these years in school; I'm going to go right to my senior year, " and it just doesn't work. But people keep trying.

Kevin: Many people overtrain without knowing it. How can someone find out if they're overtraining, what are some of the signs that their body gives them and what effects, negative effects, does overtraining cause?

Phil: Overtraining is an epidemic and it occurs not only in the competitive athletes who are doing this for a living, but in the average person who goes to the gym hoping to get more fit, hoping to lose weight. Overtraining is really an epidemic and the most obvious indication that you're overtraining is that you're not getting the results you want. I've just heard so many people that say, "I've been going to the gym for eight months now and I've gained two pounds and I'm more tired. Maybe it's going to take longer?" No, it's not going to take longer. You went right from not training, to overtraining and it's not giving you the benefits. You should be feeling good very quickly in the program that is matching your body's needs and that's the key. Find something that "A, " you enjoy and "B, " matches your body's needs. So if your goal is to lose weight and get more energy and whatever, that should start happening very quickly.

Kevin: OK, so someone goes out and starts a program and they don't feel that right away, they're probably creating some sort of stress or adrenal stress or some sort of xx?

Phil: Exactly and that's what overtraining is, it's a adrenal problem. Certainly anyone who is injured is overtrained and injury means you've overtrained. When we think of an injury, we often think physical breakdown and you have knee pain or back pain and that's certainly a common injury, but we have chemical injuries too. Fatigue would be a common injury and would be an example of a chemical injury. If you get on a program, and six months later you're more tired, or two

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months later you're more tired, or you're not sleeping well, you're just agitated, you're depressed, and you weren't before - that's a chemical injury. And we also have mental emotional injuries - depression, people can no longer concentrate at their tasks. These are things we see in athletes all the time.

Kevin: Right.

Phil: And so that's a mental emotional injury. So any kind of injury indicates that you've been over-trained.

Kevin: You've worked with a lot of top world-class athletes, and how can you get across to them? What kind of technique or secrets do you use to get across to them and say, "Hey look, you are over-training, this is why." What sort of justification do you give them?

Phil: Boy, that's difficult. Many athletes are really obsessed with what they're doing, they're very much into it. Most of them love it, not all of them, but most of them love it and so, they don't have to work, they have to workout...

Kevin: Right.

Phil: ...and so they have all day, and that's dangerous. If you're a runner, and all you do is run in your sport, than how much running can you do in a day?

Kevin: Sure.

Phil: And so the potential for overdoing it is there, and to get their attention sometimes is very difficult. If they're injured, it helps me get my point across because I can talk about the injury being related to the way they're training, and the way they're eating. I can say, "Well, I can correct this injury, but unless you follow it up with proper training, and proper eating, then the injury will come back." An athlete who's injured, if you can correct their injury, they start taking notice and that...

Kevin: Sure.

Phil: ...that's what gets their attention the most. In the beginning that was really what I had to go on, and after a while reputation starts kicking in, and that makes it even easier.

Kevin: Yeah, sure, sure. And moving towards aerobic and anaerobic exercise, we've all heard about it. I don't think a lot of people know what's actually going on in their bodies. Can you explain a little bit about what types - basically simplistic type of way what's going on in their bodies, and why they should be concerned or conscious of anaerobic and aerobic?

Phil: Yeah, it's amazing that the definitions of things, it's just amazing how things linger on in our culture. The definitions of aerobic and anaerobic in relation to

breathing and oxygen, and you know you walk away thinking, "Okay, if I'm going to do something anaerobic, I don't have to breathe."

Kevin: Right.

Phil: And it's just not practical at all. If you look at the practical definitions, it makes sense and everything kind of falls into place. Aerobic - refers to fat burn.

Kevin: Yep.

Phil: So if we want to burn more fat, you want to get thinner and lose weight, and by burning fat have really unlimited energy, then we have to build our aerobic system. That aerobic system works slowly, relatively slowly, and so the "no pain, no gain" approach is counter to that. Anaerobic IS - the "no pain, no gain" approach. That's the hard workout, and anaerobic refers to sugar burning, and if you're sugar burning, you're not fat burning. Now there's always a mix of sugar and fat in the metabolism.

Kevin: Sure, there's not a point where it just stops, and switches over.

Phil: Right, it's always a gray area, and there's a tiny bit of protein in there that you could put. Mostly we burn sugar and fat, and there's a mix, and the question is, "What is your mix?" And just sitting here now, we're burning a certain amount of fat, and a certain amount of sugar. In a healthier individual they'll be more fat burning, and less sugar burning. As a result there's more energy, because we have a lot of stored fat even in a lean person. We have enough stored fat to take us literally 1000 miles, it'd be walking, and so we have more energy, more fat burning. In the person who's burning a lot of sugar and not much fat, than they're actually storing fat, and their sugar is such that their blood sugar regulation is not very stable so they are hungry all the time. They crave sweet they need to eat a lot of carbohydrate on and on.

Kevin: Right and in the sugar stores I think there is somewhere between 2500 to 3000 calories of ready available sugar in the blood, is that correct number, is that what you..?

Phil: Yeah, you know it depends on the person and it really, it varies a lot not so much because of the blood sugar but because of glycogen which is the stored sugar that is in the muscles and the liver and that is important, we are not supposed to be tapping into those reserves because they are the last reserves, we are supposed to be using the fat, whatever glycogen for example is what keep the blood sugar stable all night long, if you have troubles sleeping a lot of time is that you have run out of energy and start breaking down muscle and wake up and it's just another no good situation. We have very limited amount of sugar to use for energy.

Kevin: Sure, and when someone does a hard anaerobic workout whether is in a gym or if they are running stairs at the stadium or whatever they are doing then

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their messing with their sugar store to a degree probably that is not healthy, correct?

Phil: Exactly they are switching literally just switch your body into a sugar burning mode, you don't burn much fat and you loose up all your reserves of stored sugar and then among the things you end up with then there is a fatigue as you have this raven fat type which is why at all the gyms they have sweet stuff that you can get, whether they are candy bars and machines they can help you at these days but mostly jump at there and it became a raven resource and they tap into that healthful thing.

Kevin: Sure, it's exactly one of the exact reason why I have stopped way lifting is because of the stress that I feel afterwards and I think that a lot of people when they tap into that they can recognize some of those feelings and really get some great results and feel good afterwards. When you..., would you talk about using your heart rate as a guide for exercise and you talk about your fat burning heart rate zone actually pushing up that zone to, for a little more intense work out and bring it back down, could you explain that just briefly?

Phil: Yeah we talked about the aerobic system and working out easy, relatively easy and what does it really mean? The best way to do all this is by feel but we have been influenced our whole life the wrong way. So we no longer have the intuition that our brain was meant to have and we need to get that back. One of the ways we can do it is by the feedback and that essentially is what using a heart monitor is. It gives that feed back about the body. If we look at someone who is forty years old wearing an heart monitor, doing a good aerobic work, we generally mean they don't want to raise their heart rate above 140 or there about 145, 147 somewhere in there. There is a formula that I developed called the 180 formula which narrows again and it enables a person to figure out exactly what their heart rate is. The research I did to developed that formula is based on the work I did in my clinic where I measured something called respiratory coefficient.' That tells you the amount of fat and the amount of sugar you are burning.' at any given moment and for that person at forty years age. Let's say 148 is their optimal level then they will be burning a fair a fair amount of fat up to 138, and as soon as they go over 138, that ratio quickly changes when they start burning more and more sugar and not so much fat. So the heart monitor, if you got the right number, becomes your coach that is always telling you to slow down or in same cases speed up.

Kevin: Okay. So say someone is sitting on the couch right now and they are listening to this interview on their iPod or on the website and they say, "All right, I think I want to start a program." A lot of people get very, very confused about how to do it. What is the best, easiest way for someone to maybe start using their heart rate and just start getting out there and start moving? What would be the three or four things that you could give them as advice?

Phil: Well number one, start right away. Don't say, "OK I am going to get an heart monitor. Maybe I will get one next week and just go up and go for a walk." What tremendous benefits for your brain and for your body, like I said before, immediately. So that first 20, 30 minutes, 40 minutes of walking slow...the value begins right away. When you're finished -- if you don't have a monitor yet, when you get one you'll see how this works -- but when you've finished that workout, it should almost feel like you haven't done anything.

Kevin: Wow. Pretty novel concept, yes.

Phil: Yeah, you come back and you say, "Gee, did I do anything?" That's the way it should feel. That's what the aerobic system gives us.

Kevin: So that's how someone might know that they're in that fat-burning zone, if when they're done they're energized afterwards?

Phil: Yeah, it's one of the indicators. There are some people who have -- and I think it's mostly people who have sprinting ability -- who can get mildly anaerobic and still feel pretty good after that workout.

Kevin: OK.

Phil: So it can be tricky, but when in doubt do less in terms of effort because you're really not going to lose anything and the risk you run when you're [He probably meant to say "you have"] a little higher heart rate and into that anaerobic zone is significant.

So when in doubt, even go slower, but get a heart monitor. I've been using them since the 70s, and they weren't very user-friendly back then, but now you can get them everywhere and everybody uses them. Unfortunately, everybody uses them more as a game...I often will ask somebody what they do with their monitor and they say, "I just see where my heart rate is."

Kevin: Yeah. [laughing] I can get it.

Phil: Yeah, a lot of that's a game...let's see how high we can get our heart rate.

Kevin: Right. [He is still chuckling.] One of the things that I encounter frequently is that someone -- and I don't even want to get into nutrition, [because] we have some other things that I really want to talk about first -- but one of the things that I encounter is that someone will overeat and then they'll go out and try to make up for that with exercise.

Phil: Right.

Kevin: Tell me how that's a bad practice.

Phil: Boy, now we get into the whole issue of calories and calories burned and the old idea that a lot of people still cling on to, including scientists, which is calories in, calories out...

Kevin: Yeah.

Phil: ...and if you shift that balance to where you're putting out more calories, then you lose weight, and if you have more calories coming in, then you gain weight. Well, my first question is, "Calories of what? What are you burning when you say I'm burning calories? Calories of what?"

That's when they will also do a... I don't go to the gym. I do everything from home, but if I am in a gym -- if I'm on the road or something, I'll use the gym sometimes if the weather's not good -- I'll invariably see.

Someone who is screwing themselves up and it's hard not to say anything.

Kevin: Sure.

Phil: A lot of times they'll say, "I need to burn so many calories" and I say, "Calories of what?"

Kevin: Yeah.

Phil: It usually ends the conversation. They don't know what to say. The whole issue is that you're burning both calories of fat and calories of sugar. You want to burn calories of fat. If you present it that way, they say, "Yeah, I want to burn calories of fat." If that's the case, then you've got to slow down.

Kevin: Yeah.

Phil: So that's the problem: people are under this illusion, this myth -- it's the calorie myth. It's still very, very prevalent.

Kevin: Sure. You have a book called "Fix Your Feet." A lot of people don't realize that the shoes they are wearing or the way their feet have deteriorated, at least muscular, is a reason they're having pain. Can you give us a quick...some advice as to how someone can go about fixing their feet?

Phil: Sure. It's amazing that...and here we are again with another social issue, cultural issue, and a marketing phenomenon that has taken over for common sense. Back in the 50s, they showed that wearing shoes weakened the muscles in the feet and the calves.

Kevin: Particularly the arches, right?

Phil: Yeah. So all your arches and just potentially all the way up into the spine and up into the head. From that point, researchers began showing that, including the research from the 80s or 90s, many sport shoes were even more damaging because they were thicker, they were trying to support an arch. Just think about it. If you have to be in a wheelchair much of the day how weak would your muscles get? They get very weak and people in wheelchairs, people who have extended bed rest really have problems because of this significant muscle loss and that is exactly what happens to feet when you wear shoes. That's because the feet are meant to be free and we are supposed to be bare foot. The more bare foot we are the less deterioration or a lack of deterioration is what happened... As soon as you put on a pair of shoes, you start losing function in muscles and if you are wearing shoes a lot you are going to lose significant muscle function. And when that happens your knees become unstable, your hips become unstable, your low back, all of up your spine into the shoulders and neck. I have seen certainly with knee problems, the majority I would say of the knee problems that I have seen when I was in practice were from the feet. But I have seen the same thing in the hips and low back, plenty of musculoskeletal problems originating in feet and many times the feet do not hurt because they compensate so well. So, it is sometimes misleading if your feet hurt obviously there is a problem and many people say my feet never hurt except whenever I am out of my shoes. That is an obvious indication that you should not be wearing particularly those shoes. You should get the shoes that you feel comfortable immediately.

Kevin: And we can not walk around bare foot. So, what should we be wearing? We can to some degree.

Phil: We could walk bare foot a lot but if we are at work, we are in the office, in many cases we can take out shoes and walk around bare foot. I mean certainly for home we should be bare foot all the time. And in the warmer weather we should be bare foot outside and I spend most of my time bare foot when I walk out of course I put on shoes when I lived in Florida, I walked out bare foot because places are like to do that. It is difficult here in Arizona.

Kevin: Some sort of training gradual can eliminate some of those pains if you are doing very cautiously if you are doing something with bare feet right?

Phil: Yeah, being bare foot is incredibly strategic and so the first thing a person needs to do is there if they have feet better dysfunctional is to rehab their feet and the best way to do that is bare foot. There are various exercises they could do as well but none of them match to the value of being bare foot. That is a very important thing. So many people in shoes wear too small, that is very common. The thinner of the shoes the better they are. The thicker the shoes more weak your muscles are going to get. The research is incredible that is what I put in the book and for years like I could not get a publisher interested in publishing this book because the notion that all these running shoes are unhealthy was just too foreign to them. Lions Press took a chance and it is really a nice little book and

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giving a tremendous amount of scientific research about why shoes are bad. It is almost unbelievable.

Kevin: When I present information about shoes, the people, their mouths drop and they say, "No, it can not be true."

Phil: Yeah a lot of basic physics and just basic science when you look at some of the basketball sneakers high top sneakers, the study showed that high top sneakers increase the risk of ankle sprains which is the number one injury in basketball where everybody wears high tops. The high tops reduce your jumping ability if you are a basketball player, you certainly want to jump and it reduces your abilities like your ability to move back and forth quickly is reduced than that is another key component in basketball. If you are a basketball player, the last thing you want to do is to wear high top shoes. They all wear them and the reason they all wear them is because of money. They get a lot of money in promoting it. All the kids are wearing them and paying a hefty price for them as well as in terms of cash not to mention injuries.

Kevin: Sure. Let's now move into...There is a lot of great stuff about fitness and your approach has always been holistic and recently as we are talking about before last five years you were taking swing into a different type of therapy type of practice and I have listened to some of the stuff that you put together. I think it is fantastic, so let's talk a little bit about the music therapy aspect of what you have been doing over last five years. You have studied with Rick Rueben, is that correct?

Phil: I have. I woke up one day and decided to be a song writer. No one anything that music trying that stuff. I just had music in my head. A week later, Rick and I were talking on my song to an attempt that he was trying to get a hold of me for nutritional advice. The next thing I know I am helping him with nutrition and he is helping me with my music.

Kevin: That is double integrated.

Phil: If someone says, "Hey, I am going to go into music. I am going to find the best guy in music or the best woman to help me." There are not very many names. You maybe think of George Martin, of the Beatles all those years and probably after that you'd think of Rick Rueben, and Rick would choose George Martin as well. Rick has certainly got an incredible reputation because of the wide variety of music that he produces and the people he has worked with.

It was just a perfect match and I moved to LA and worked one on one with him for three and a half years, which was great. What was even better was the hanging out ideas in studios with all of the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Neil Diamond and Johnny Cash. It was just a dream come true to say at least. What I thought I was doing was changing careers when, in fact, I was still dabbling in biofeedback. I developed some biofeedback techniques and that kind of slowly

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got me to measuring brain waves and what I realized that some point this is maybe a year and half ago is that the music I was writing was very therapeutic. I began seeing how people's brains responded to it. And, of course, that is nothing new. We've known about music therapy for many years. The Chinese talked about it 5000 years ago. It is nothing new but I think the strength of certain kinds of music is so powerful that the therapy that one can get from it is just invaluable.

Kevin: What kinds of studies have you done? Have you done it for stress relief, done it with athletes, just everyday people? What have you done with it?

Phil: The full spectrum. Sort of that holistic approach. How does this fit into all the things that I have been doing? And it really applies to everyone and anyone so if you are an athlete you are going to get some tremendous value for your sport by listening to healthy music. If you are a corporate executive trying to control stress, the same thing. The studies are pretty clear that certain brain waves, alpha waves in particular, can reduce stress hormones. Cortisol. I have spent my whole career helping people reduce their cortisol, there are many ways of doing it and music can do it in such a powerful way in such a short period of time. I have something on my web site called the "Five minute power break."

Kevin: That was great. I read it the other day. It was awesome.

Phil: That is a lot of my research has ended up you can go to neuron therapy and do all this stuff and take meditation classes and trying to learn this but I tell you we've eliminated all the nonsense and in five minutes you can accomplish a tremendous amount by incorporating all the things that stimulating alpha waves and there are visual components or lack of when you close your eyes you should get more. There auditory components, certain music can do it, there are breathing components, certain breathing patterns, slow deep breathing will do it. And you put all that together and the amount of alpha wave stimulation you get is just phenomenal and the tremendous therapy you get from that is incredible. It's really one of the most incredible things I've ever done.

Kevin: So you're releasing this in a week or so, correct?

Phil: Well, I have in addition, I guess along with everything an album coming out. I never intended on being a performer, my thought was, I've got a lot of music in my head and I want to get it out and every time I get something out, I feel good. It's quite an amazing thing. When I started seeing how powerful the music was, I thought maybe I do need to put out an album. I've gotten some great people in the studio over the last year or so, John Frusciante from the Chili Peppers to play guitar and Brad Wilks from Audio Slave to play drums. And Johnny Kolonsky, who kind of does a little bit of everything or a lot of everything and just put a lot of stuff together. You know, songs that Rick said, "This is a great song." And over the period of time, I just accumulated a series of great songs and said, "Let's use these." So that album is supposed to be out at the end of this week actually so I'm very excited. And if you go to the web site you'll be

able to start hearing those songs because they start playing once you sign on there.

Kevin: Give us everyone the address here so people can start checking it out. I'll put it on the website.

Phil: www.philmaffetone.com.

What are your plans for the future with it. Is it something that you're going to do on a larger basis, are you going to incorporate the therapy with it or are you just going to perform for fun?

Phil: Well, I'm performing for fun and it's an incredible thing. I'm starting to do more lecturing, and when I lecture now, I also play my songs live and I've done some work with brain injured children and that's a lot of fun of sorts. I'll probably do some more of that. But I'm spending most of my time writing music and playing.

Kevin: That's great. So to find out more about you they can go to www.philmaffetone.com. Will that album be released in major record stores too?

Phil: I don't know how many stores are carrying it, but I think that anyone that goes in a record store and asks can order it. They can get it off the web site as well. Cdbaby.com is the distributor and they can also go there.

Kevin: Ok great. Well I want to thank you for coming on board. Again, you can find out more information on www.philmaffetone.com and you can find out more about the LiveAwesome.com interview series by going to www.liveawesome.com. Your no-fluff cutting edge resource for optimal health and weight loss information. Take care and we'll see everyone next time.

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