

From Viral To Virile

The Fountain of Youth Isn't Just Real...It's Reachable

Praise for John Cisna

Creator of the *McDonald's Project*

“John’s clarion call is more important now than when he first shocked the world just a few short years ago.”

—Neil Cavuto, *Fox News*

“John Cisna has been in the public consciousness for a few years now, and this new book brings his story full circle. You’ll learn everything that happened after his McDonald’s experiment went viral, and discover the secrets of his new diet and exercise plan. We keep rooting for John and his bold exploits because he’s one of us!”

—Zachary Hall, Author of *Don’t Sleep On Planes*

“John has done what very few ever do—commit to a simple program that will change your life. Most people start a food and exercise program but fail to stay with it, in part, because it’s not a sustainable program. John shows how easy and effective this program is without killing yourself at the gym or in the kitchen. Do yourself a favor—follow John’s example laid out in this simple and easy-to-follow book.”

—Brian Gaumer, Owner of *MuscleBoundUSA Gym*

“Every middle-aged person and older should read this book. Cisna takes health and wellness to another level. He describes his Fountain of Youth with such passion and energy that it makes you think, “I can do this!” His message of strength equals youth is spot on, and he delivers it with such simplicity it makes it believable and attainable.”

—Mike Morsch, Author of *The Vinyl Dialogues* series

“Once again, John is blazing the trail for a better life with diet, exercise, and attitude. He creates a roadmap to a happier and healthier life for all of us. An entertaining read with stories and science throughout. John’s enthusiasm and positive attitude is contagious!”

—Terry Garland, President/CEO, Garland and Associates

“John Cisna has a way of bringing everything to your level (no matter what that might be) in a very common sense manner. And now he’s at it again, educating us on a way to get stronger and live

longer, with himself as the guinea pig. As with his original McDonald's Project, John has the empirical data to substantiate his results and quantify his findings. It's a terrific, inspiring story!"

—Mike George

"I had the pleasure of coaching John Cisna and watched him distinguish himself as an All-State baseball player. John has always looked for new and better ways to present his ideas, so a book about fitness is no surprise to me. He's put a great deal of time, research, and his own experience into this book. Many people could and should benefit from it."

—Jim Mahoney, Retired Teacher/Coach, Johnston High School

"This book really brings home the point about life and the choices one makes about diet, exercise, health issues, learning curves, individual body differences, and commitment. You gave me a lot to think about!"

—Sharon Montgomery

"You can just feel John Cisna's enthusiasm—I immediately decided to incorporate the diet into my daily life. It's so exciting to think that working out and eating right doesn't have to be complicated."

—Ellen Feller

"This is the most important book for weight loss. It shows that eating less is not a good solution, because it slows down your metabolism. Instead, the Cisna lifestyle helps you lose weight permanently by improving your hormones. Highly recommended for patients and professionals."

—Dr. Salomon Jakubowicz, Endocrinology

"I've learned many valuable lessons from John Cisna about the importance of my decisions, whether in my life, in the classroom, or on the golf course. This book opens my eyes towards the choices I make concerning my health. I'm young and healthy, and I want to stay that way for a long time. Everything happens for a reason and I like to be in charge of those reasons."

—Zoe Risdal, former student

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John Cisna

With Ed Sweet

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Note to Readers

This book is sold with the understanding that the authors and publisher are not rendering medical advice of any kind. This book is not intended to replace medical advice, or to diagnose, prescribe, or treat any disease, condition, illness, or injury. Before you begin any diet or exercise program, receive full medical clearance from a licensed physician. The authors and publisher of this book claim no responsibility to any person or entity for any liability, loss, or damage caused or alleged to be caused, directly or indirectly, as a result of the use, application, or interpretation of the material contained herein.

This book is dedicated to the countless individuals who've struggled with finding their path to health. My hope is that this book will turn the light on in the attic for anyone who wants to experience the same "wow" factor that I have in discovering what really works. The Fountain of Youth is real, and, more importantly, it's attainable for everyone.

This book explains how I found that fountain and how you can too. I truly believe that living life to its fullest is a combination of the right food plan and being physically strong. Go get it—it's out there for you!

—John Cisna

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Foreword

*Fat Chance the Food Police Will Ever Admit
John Cisna Was Right, Even Now*

His story is now legendary. In a span of little more than six months, John Cisna lost 54 pounds, eating at McDonald's. Yeah, McDonald's. He thinned down going to the same place Morgan Spurlock famously pigged out. Spurlock got a hit movie out of it, *Super Size Me*, and with a single stroke of his fork, and more often a lot of paper wrappers, managed to alienate not only McDonald's but the entire fast food industry.

Back to John, who seemed to conclude maybe Spurlock was eating all the wrong stuff, or too much of the wrong stuff. The difference was, of course, Spurlock's story fed a media narrative that fast food was bad, and McDonald's was the worst. Cisna's story didn't make sense, so it didn't garner nearly as much coverage.

It's a pity because Cisna proved something that should be so common sense, it needn't take a hit documentary to pound over your head—it's not what you eat, it's how much of what you eat that matters. French fries aren't evil. Maybe downing a couple of super-size servings of them every day is.

That was Cisna's agenda then, when he lost all that weight. That's his agenda now, as he miraculously maintains that weight and all the good health that comes with it. As he puts it, "I was perfectly happy overeating at fine restaurants and binging on food obtained at the grocery store. Trust me, if you eat too much of any food, I can guarantee you that you'll eventually become obese."

McDonald's proved his challenge because making McDonald's a target for all our health ills has become pretty much the media diet. Besides exploring personal responsibility, John this time gets into something else—personal freedom.

John Cisna

“Not everything on the McDonald’s menu is filled with salt and fat,” John writes now. In fact, he’s included the fast food giant in a common sense list of eating venues, recognizing the obvious. “Fast food is here to stay,” he concludes.

For one thing, it’s easy. For another, it’s fast. And in our time-crunched society that’s a fairly compelling business model that has and will continue to stand the test of time.

But what John reveals here is that the easy and fast choice needn’t be bad and dangerous. Far from it. Common sense choices that customers make, and not the choices the fast food police make, dictate how our bodies hold up and whether our weight stays down.

That’s why John’s clarion call is more important now than when he first shocked the world just a few short years ago. Take it from his success and his still trim figure. But more, take it from me. Back in 2016, I had open-heart surgery, a hastily arranged triple-bypass for which I wasn’t prepared and my common sense approach to food wasn’t anywhere near John’s.

I learned the hard way. Bad choices yield bad results. Good choices yield good results. Leave it to John to figure that out without having to have his chest ripped open. Word to the wise—don’t pay short shrift to a guy who’s laying out surviving for the long haul.

It’s what we eat, yes. But more, it’s how we live. John taught a nation discussing the former. He brings it to a whole new level now, expounding on the latter. I like to call it a blueprint for never being blue, for never letting weight or bad choices bog you down. Through diet, exercise, and just everyday common sense guidelines, John reminds us that it’s up to US.

Spurlock’s agenda was to target McDonald’s. I think John’s agenda is to target us. He wants us to quit making excuses, and start making choices. We control our fate—whether it’s staring at a filled fork or an unused treadmill.

It’s about persistence, but more, as John reveals here in this very handy guide to living right, it’s about being patient. Sadly, there are no short-term fixes. Thinking there are puts us in only a bigger fix. The only thing John is super-sizing here is practical advice—in heaping servings.

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McDonald's isn't his target. We are. We all are. He's not here to point fingers. He is here to point us all in the right direction. Without the cheap shots—without any shots. He's real. His advice is sincere, and his mission undeniable. It's reflected in the pastor-like zeal he brings to his purpose—not to have us answer to our better angels but simply, better health. Not bad, not bad at all.

Maybe because he's not angry or placing blame, John brings the fat and thin alike on a path toward "body peace." You can do that when you've done that. John's done that. John lives that. Look at him. Read him. Understand him. Imitate him. What have you got to lose, but some pounds and maybe some clogged arteries.

Take it from a remarkable lifestyle evangelist who practices the healthy lifestyle he preaches. But also take it from me, someone decidedly not, who's here to tell you it's never too late to say you still might have a prayer...just yet.

Neil Cavuto

Anchor, Managing Editor and Sr. Vice President

Fox News Channel

Fox Business Network

Introduction

No one can tell me that I don't have balls. At age fifty-four, I turned a high school science experiment into a viral media sensation that resulted in a two-and-a-half-year contract with one of the world's largest franchisors, McDonald's. I endured jealousy from friends and colleagues who resented my fifteen minutes of fame, and I was the target of an aggressive "food advocate" whose petition against my presentation for McDonald's led to a barrage of social media attacks that had me fearing for my safety.

While I had the cajones to weather the whirlwind that was my life from January 2014 through December 2016, what I didn't know was that my testosterone levels were on the low end of normal. Like most middle-aged men, my body's supply of this essential hormone probably began decreasing in my thirties, bringing me to about half of what I had when I was in the prime of my life.

I was on an emotional high with the success of my McDonald's experiment, but I didn't know about the physical low that plagued me at the same time. I've since come to realize how dangerous having low levels of testosterone can be, for both men and women.

For guys, low testosterone doesn't just lead to a low libido. Insufficient testosterone is one of the major contributing factors to the deadly belly fat that often accumulates as we get older. We don't get those spare tires just from overeating! Low T can also result in poor cognitive function, and has been linked to serious conditions like type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and prostate cancer. As you'll learn later in this book, a shortage of testosterone in men makes death—from ANY cause—much more likely.

Women need testosterone, too, and while they don't need a lot of it, it needs to be in the right balance to keep their bones

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healthy, manage pain, preserve cognitive function, and even increase sex drive after menopause.

The Pinnacle of Health Is Possible

After my experience with McDonald's ran its course, I began to think about what I could do to really make myself healthier. If I could lose 54 pounds eating nothing but McDonald's for six months, imagine what I could do if I looked for a food program specifically designed for my individual physiology to maximize health and combined it with a great exercise program!

One of the most important lessons I learned from my McDonald's experiment was that it felt a whole lot better to weigh 226 pounds than it did to weigh 280. So, after my commitment to the Golden Arches came to an end, I decided to try to make myself as healthy and as strong as I could possibly become.

This new experiment has been so wildly successful for me that I just had to share the news. So now I'm on a mission to reach as many people as possible with the message that the Fountain of Youth is real. Anyone who can't see how a few simple choices are game changers when it comes to health and vitality has got to be a few fries short of a Happy Meal!

I know that eating right and exercising isn't easy, but I'm here to tell you about a training regimen that fits into any schedule and a healthy diet that tastes good and lets you eat mass quantities of food.

At fifty-eight years old, I'm stronger, healthier, and happier than I've ever been in my life. I can deadlift 385 pounds. My romantic life with my wife of thirty-seven years is fifty shades of awesome. And, at a time when most guys my age are dreaming of a leisurely retirement, I'm working two jobs, writing books, speaking all over the country, and helping men and women just like me find practically unlimited energy by making better choices about exercise and nutrition.

I'm not here to brag about myself. I'm no different than anyone else. And if I can reach my own personal pinnacle of health, you can do it, too. While I'm proud of my accomplishments, the real reason I talk about them is to inspire people—specifically YOU, my

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friend—to take charge of their own lives and live them to the absolute fullest.

Strength by Numbers

I've always loved science, because data doesn't lie. The reason my McDonald's project went viral is because the results were real and went beyond my obvious and significant weight loss. In addition to the 54 pounds I lost, my ongoing blood work through the course of the experiment kept moving in the right direction.

Ninety days into the experiment my total cholesterol was down 32 percent, my triglycerides were down by 49 percent, my LDL was down 34 percent, and my cholesterol-to-HDL ratio dropped by 20 percent.

My current health and fitness experiment is also data driven. You'll not only see the results of my blood work, but I'll also impress you with some phenomenal strength gains achieved by a middle-aged guy who never lifted a weight before. Just take a quick look at how much I improved in four months in the core exercises that make up my new program:

- Military Press—130% strength increase
- Bent Over Row—150% strength increase
- Bench Press—153% strength increase
- Deadlift—170% strength increase
- Squat—182% strength increase

While the raw data is compelling in and of itself, it's really the real-life impact that provides the true meaning behind an experiment like this. In my current journey, I've met lots of people who've used the techniques I've been applying to my own life to better themselves physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

How Far Can You Take Yourself?

As human beings, we have the potential to use better health to improve so many important aspects of our lives. In this book, I'm going to share some powerful stories from my own life, and the lives

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of others, to show you what's possible and inspire you to achieve great things. I'm driven to find answers to many of the problems men and women face at any age, particularly as we get older. You know, things like these:

- How can we feel relevant in the career world?
- How can we rekindle romance?
- How can we win at the wonderful game of life?
- How can we maximize our time spent exercising?
- How can we eat for optimal health?
- How can we deal with the haters in the world?
- How can we handle fame and notoriety?

In addition to being a story about my journey toward ultimate healthfulness, this book is also a commentary on the media machine that tells us what's cool, what's good, what's inappropriate, and what's controversial.

I'll take you through the highs and lows of the years I spent as a McDonald's brand ambassador. You'll learn why I was kicked out of schools, why franchise owners are among the best people on the planet, and how a company can try too hard to craft the "right" message.

And with no more connections to McDonald's, or any other entity, I'm going to explain some of the secrets I've learned about losing weight, gaining muscle, increasing testosterone, becoming stronger, and never being afraid to take a chance in life.

I'm living proof that you're never too old to reinvent yourself or take on new challenges that can lead to incredible personal growth. It all comes down to making informed choices that fit your age, condition, and lifestyle, and committing to those choices because the rewards of making them are so great.

Tap Into the Power of Choice

This idea of choice was often lost on people who heard about my McDonald's experience. Certain individuals were so conditioned to believe that fast food was bad that they couldn't see the simplicity

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of my experiment. Basically, all I was saying was that if you limit your calories to around 2,000 a day—after years of eating between 4,000 and 5,000 calories a day—you’re going to lose weight.

McDonald’s was just the attention-getting vehicle for this very mundane and logical fact. Indeed, it was the unique context of my particular experiment that definitely put people in two opposing camps. For McDonald’s supporters, especially the network of owner/operators around the world, I was a godsend. Finally, they had a counter argument against Morgan Spurlock’s popular 2004 documentary *Super Size Me*.

But for people who hated McDonald’s specifically, and fast food in general, I was the Antichrist. People who never met me or took the time to investigate what I was really saying launched a campaign that would eventually prevent me from speaking to kids in middle and high schools, despite the fact that the hundreds of teachers and thousands of students who had already seen me speak not only got my message of balance and personal accountability, but also gave me high marks for it.

Despite all the naysayers, my message is basically the same as it’s always been—that the choices we make in life largely determine our outcomes.

If you can understand this, then you’re way ahead of a lot of people. But don’t let the simplicity of this message fool you. If you can make good choices with intention, and if you can keep doing so, you can make powerful changes in your life.

You’re making a choice right now to read this book, and hopefully it will lead to a good outcome for you. You can choose to follow my program in a quest to become healthier, or you can choose some other program that works for you. You can even choose to think I’m an idiot and throw the book away, but I really hope you don’t do that.

Maybe the choices you make will work for you, maybe they won’t. But even choices that don’t get you the results you want can be teachable moments. That’s why I love data and rely on it so much. If my blood work goes bad, or if my strength gains disappear, I can make new choices in the form of adjustments. These might be small or they might be large, but I always have an opportunity to correct course.

John Cisna

Join Me on the Path to a Stronger, Healthier, More Youthful You

Regardless of what you choose to do, I hope I can inspire you to make good choices when it comes to living your best, loving your best, eating your best, and functioning at your best in a strong, healthy body.

I've discovered an exercise program and a food plan that have helped me gain energy and vitality, as well as lean muscle and increased testosterone. This is a total program that's working wonders for me, and I encourage you to talk to your doctor to see if it's right for you, too.

I can't stress how important it is to have a doctor to consult. I've had the same doctor do my blood work since I started my McDonald's experiment in 2013. As you'll see in the pages that follow, he's been a great resource for me, as were numerous other doctor friends.

It's my sincere hope that you can find your own Fountain of Youth that you can drink from for the rest of your days. Whether you follow my program or find another one that works for you, I hope that I can leave you with the knowledge that only YOU are in charge of your destiny. Only YOU can make the choices that will bring you a better life. Only YOU can push your limits, rise above your critics, and forge the change you want in your world, whether it's a healthier body, a better love life, a more interesting career, or just the freedom to be yourself despite anything anyone else has to say about it.

Let's get started

Chapter One

I Proved That Fast Food Isn't Fat Food
But There Are Still People Who Don't Believe It!

Conventional wisdom is funny. Sometimes things that are accepted as true are factual, but sometimes they aren't.

Take fast food, for example. If you ask most people, they'd probably admit that it's not the healthiest food out there. The idea that fast food is bad for you has become conventional wisdom, and that made it easy for documentary filmmaker Morgan Spurlock to find great success with a 2004 movie called *Super Size Me*.

This admittedly compelling movie showed what people believed all along—that if you eat fast food, you're going to get obese, lose energy, feel like crap, and dramatically increase your risk of a heart attack, liver damage, and other life-threatening and expensive medical conditions.

What Morgan Spurlock did was provide evidence that fit conventional wisdom about fast food, and the creative way he did it really hurt McDonald's. Under pressure from the movie's message, the fast-food giant eliminated its supersize options just six weeks after the film's release and began adding healthier menu items at about the same time. More than ten years later when I came on the scene, the McDonald's owner/operators I encountered all told me that I was the answer to Morgan Spurlock they'd been looking for all that time!

Spurlock became the very public spokesperson for a long list of people who wanted to vilify the fast-food industry in general and McDonald's in particular. Passionate people really believed that McDonald's and other fast-food chains were responsible for America's obesity epidemic, and the fact that these heartless companies marketed food to kids made the whole industry's crimes that much more heinous.

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Morgan Spurlock actually got the idea for his film while watching a news report about parents who were accusing McDonald's of making their two teen daughters obese. Never mind the fact that the report was actually about the judge dismissing the lawsuit!

Spurlock Had an Agenda, and So Did I

When *Super Size Me* hit the theaters—big purveyors of popcorn, candy, hot dogs, pretzels, and other unhealthy foods by the way—the war on McDonald's and fast food intensified. What people didn't seem to understand about the documentary, however, was that all the physical problems Morgan Spurlock developed over the course of his thirty-day McDonald's consumption were related to the choices he made, not to the food itself.

Spurlock's experiment was designed to paint McDonald's as the bad guy. He didn't follow the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) dietary guidelines for calories or for any of the key nutrients for which the government provides recommendations. Instead, he decided he would agree to eat more food whenever a McDonald's employee asked if he wanted to supersize his order. In a free society, no one has to answer yes to that question every time it's asked.

But Spurlock had an agenda, which is fine. He was fit and healthy to begin with, and it wouldn't have been much of a story if he stayed fit and healthy after eating McDonald's. For stories to be compelling, people have to undergo dramatic change. And Morgan Spurlock wanted his health to get worse.

So he ate more than he normally did. A lot more. And it made him throw up. It made him gain weight. And it affected his liver. *Super Size Me* didn't show me that fast food is bad—it showed me that if you make bad choices with fast food, you could damage your body.

I rarely ate fast food before my McDonald's experiment. In fact, I didn't need fast food to gain excess fat. I was perfectly happy overeating at fine restaurants and binging on food obtained at the grocery store. Trust me, if you eat too much of ANY food, I can guarantee that you'll eventually become obese.

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When I did my McDonald's experiment, I also had an agenda. Not to say that McDonald's food was healthy, but to prove Morgan Spurlock wrong by making different choices with the same food. It's not the food that's bad, it's the choices we make with the food we have available that can hurt us. I'm not saying it's easy to make good choices, but it certainly is possible if you put your mind to it. What Morgan Spurlock and I both did was to show how different choices can lead to very different outcomes.

I Didn't Set Out to Be Controversial

I never dreamed there'd be so much controversy over the simple experiment I conducted. I just wanted to demonstrate, through empirical data, that it's possible to lose weight even if the only thing you eat is fast food.

To refresh your memory, from October 1, 2013, through March 31, 2014, I ate nothing but McDonald's for breakfast, lunch, and dinner and I lost 54 pounds—the equivalent of a small child. When I started the experiment, my stomach measured fifty-one inches around. To put that in perspective, that's pretty much the circumference of a hula hoop.

By the end of the six months, I had slimmed down to a waist size of forty inches and had to buy all new pants. It didn't happen because I was eating at McDonald's all the time. It happened because I was eating at McDonald's all the time and *limited* my calories to about 2,000 a day.

The McDonald's menu was simply my grocery store for half a year. And I had a lot more healthy options to choose from than Mr. Spurlock did ten years earlier. Egg White Delights and oatmeal were among my favorite breakfast choices. I had salads and Fruit 'N Yogurt Parfaits for lunch. But I wasn't shy about eating burgers and fries for dinner, and I sometimes treated myself to some ice cream. Everything was fair game as long as I stayed within my daily calorie count. In fact, I ate better at McDonald's for six months than I did for years before I started the experiment.

My outstanding weight loss and impressive blood work proved conclusively that food is not the cause of the obesity epidemic in this country. Yet critics of what I was doing just

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couldn't see the message. They were either blinded by conventional wisdom, or invested in destroying McDonald's for selling what they perceived as unhealthy food.



My before and after photos during my McDonald's experiment. I lost a total of 54 pounds eating nothing but McDonald's for six months.

Even before my experiment became a national media sensation, I should have seen the controversy coming. People at my school in Colo, Iowa, couldn't believe that I lost 54 pounds eating 540 meals at McDonald's. Even though I was shrinking before their