

Why am I a Fat Bugger?

By S.L.Hughes

You might be a fat bugger, but it's not your fault... you're fat by design.

"What the *hell* are you talking about?" You shake your head as you yell at these pages. Your blood pressure suddenly spikes as you consider this crazy statement, while slightly intrigued to see if your current health issues might be someone else's fault.

Let's face it... your body is a beautiful piece of work. I'm not talking about the type of body that adorns the cover of magazines and make you feel like shit about yourself. I'm talking about your body and what it is and what it can do. In simple terms it is an organic machine that requires miniscule amounts of electricity to make it work. And the incredible part is your body converts food into energy to keep those tiny organic electric motors contracting and expanding. And to make sure your body has enough fuel in the tank... it stores that energy in the form of fat...

"Shit!" I hear you say.

But don't panic. This is no time to throw down the towel and reach for the corn chips. This simple guide will reveal why being fat is not really your fault. It will give you knowledge, power and the key to unlocking who, why and what the hell is going on in this modern world and why the western world is getting bigger and bigger.

Chapter 1

Let us begin.

Simply, the skinny ones that are walking around eating whatever they like when they like and not putting on a single kilo are not the norm... they wouldn't have survived the harsh winters thousands of years ago. Which leads us to the beginning of your journey. I'm going to take you back to where you began. Where you were a product of your rouged environment, survival of the fittest... you are MAN!

Image one: Facing forward, lean, bemused expression, bit of sinewy muscle.

You've been around a while... 250,000 years according to science. So why do we look so different today? Our brains are the same size. We haven't grown an extra finger, developed telepathic communication or grown an eye out the back of our head... So why are we fatter, slower and have more chronic stress than ever before?

The simple answer is we haven't changed... it's the world we live in. But don't kid yourselves, life back in the day was no picnic either.

Image two: Man walking across a barren desert. Swirls of sand blister at his face.

Life was hard. So hard that if you got to celebrate your fortieth birthday it would have been like winning the lottery. And as for your existence... that was a contract renewed every ninety-six hours at best. In the past, food and water was everything. You could survive almost two months without food but only four days without water...

Image three: Modern man juggling bills, relationships, self-image and work.

Future:

You're too busy for breakfast. A coffee and a hash brown via your favourite drive-through is all you've got time for. Skipping lunch is also a regular... and a piece of fruit — what's that stuff? As you chomp down on your fast food the *Jaws* sound track erupts from your phone. The boss is busting your balls to get that thing done that the temp bloke forgot to do and now you're under the pump and sinking fast... Arghhh! The decision to change jobs for an extra \$20,000 per year suddenly doesn't feel worth it.

Breathe... Take a deep breath and let's go back to easy days and watch the camp fire transport our minds to ancient... happy land.

Reality check. You haven't eaten for a week. You finished your water yesterday and the vultures are making shadows around your skinny body that look like a whirlpool of death.

But wait! You look up... A familiar smell wafts downwind. You raise your chin to get a better look... Yes!

The smell of raw meat sends your survival instincts into overdrive. The kill's fresh... two hours at most. Your brain pumps a small amount of endorphins into your blood... serotonin to be precise. It counters the stress chemical cortisol — but more about that later. You forget about your swollen stomach. Serotonin blocks out the pain of your broken toe and the thumping headache from dehydration — you start to run. You're desperate need for food outweighs the risks... The risk that whatever killed your lunch could still be nearby — "The hell with it!" you grunt, "I'm starving!"

You dig in to the still-warm carcass because your survival depends on it. You also hear running water nearby... double bonus points.

The colour red makes you hungry. You chew and rip and swallow. More endorphins flood your body — they tell you, "Yes! Yes! You will survive! Doesn't this protein and fat taste great! Keep eating, keep eating — more, more and more!" You want to binge eat as much as possible as quickly as possible. If there was a magical machine where you could shove coins into it and get packets of high calorie food from, you would do that too. Energy, energy, energy!

Image four: You look up when the sound of a twig snaps behind you.

"Snap!"

Suddenly, there's a new endorphin — adrenalin! It dumps into your nervous system. Your fight or flight response is activated. Your contract for survival is up for renewal. Your senses are on high alert for good reason.

You don't need to turn around to see what's about to make you lunch while you eat yours. Half a tonne of sabretooth tiger is galloping your way and it's not coming for a tummy rub.

The adrenalin makes you quicker than you've ever been in your entire bony-arse life. You look around and evaluate everything. "The gorge? The forest?" You're designed to cover vast distances through walking — but not today. You start sprinting for your life. You've got fifty metres at 30kph if you're lucky — today you are! The dull thudding of the tiger's paws turn into a gallop. The big bastard's so close you can smell it! 50 metres, 40... 30... You're buggered but the fear of death keeps you running. With one final burst of energy you hurl yourself over the gorge. It's a twenty metre drop into the river but it's a small price to pay for survival. You glance up at the cliff edge as you fall.

The killer snarls and hisses. It clings at the edge tempted by your audacity to come after you but it's not that hungry.

You hit the water hard. You claw towards the surface and gasp for breath. "Errrhhh!" The air feels sweeter than ever, you've survived the day. Your contract has just been renewed.

Serotonin... the same chemical that's in antidepressants pump into your blood, a reward from sudden explosive exercise for outsmarting a killer. The human race has just benefitted because your survival has been blueprinted into your genes and if you find a partner and reproduce your offspring will also benefit.

The Future

You chew on a chocolate bar while you wait for the traffic lights to change. Your phone bursts into life and plays the Jaws ringtone — it's another text from your boss.

"Shit!" You shake your head. "That stupid bloke from dispatch has stuffed the order again!" The boss'll want your left nut if this isn't fixed by four and you know she means it this time.

The situation feels hopeless. It feels like there's no way out. The acute stress causes your kidneys adrenal glands, located on the top of each kidney, to release the organ-killing hormone cortisol into your blood stream. It's the same hormone cocktail that ancient man experienced when he hadn't eaten for a week. Just like him you crave fatty, sugary food to ensure your survival. Unlike him... is that you're spoilt for choice.

You lift your chin like you're on the plain in search for food. Your hunter's forward-set eyes scan for what you know is out there. "Red!" It's no accident that the large fast-food giant has chosen this colour — most of the large food chains do. Red evokes emotion, hunger and desire.

You change lanes without indicating.

"Arsehole!" someone yells.

You're not concentrating. Food is the answer to your current dilemma and you want it fast.

"The drive-through?" you say out loud. "Good... no lining up and feeling judged. The pretty girl behind the counter is always pleasant and never judges... not out loud at least." Your mouth begins to water when you stare up at the images of burgers, fries and shakes. "Yes!" you whisper.

You park under a tree out of sight. The first bite is the best. The bun magically melts away in your mouth. It's full of sugar to speed up digestion and to make you come back for more.

The momentary pleasure is everything. Your primal-designed mind rewards your courage and skill to satisfy your stress with a big dose of morphine-like endorphin, serotonin.

Ancient man would be no better. If he was in your shoes and pants he would be digging in for dear life. He would eat the place clean.

The Past

You survived. Five years have passed and you've renewed your survival contract many times over. You found a female who survived the harsh winter like you so she must be a good match. Her name is Pony. She was given her name because she likes to watch wild horses and can stare at them for hours.

You study her curvy lines and instinctively know she can make babies. You stretch out your hand and hold two dead rabbits as an offering. She's completely impressed. Not only have you survived the winter like her, but you throw meat around like it grows on trees. You are the man for her and her future babies.

Your son's birth was a difficult one. He has just turned five and you're teaching him how to find water, trap a rabbit and stay away from those big sabretooths with teeth the length of his arm. You're a good dad and am preparing him well for the future. During your hunting adventures you find a small blue stone that's easy to carve. You see something in it and smile, that night by the fire you carve a piece of jewellery in the shape of your woman's most favourite animal... a pony.

You return to camp to a welcoming hug from eight-month-pregnant Pony. Your son holds up his first catch and is greeted with praise from his mother. He places his head on Pony's stomach and feels the patter of tiny limbs. You hold out a small blue horse attached to a thin leather strap. Pony stares at it then realises what it is. Two tears well up in her eyes as you place it around her neck... she's never been more loved, more protected than right now.

You feel overwhelming pride coursing through your veins. Mother Nature is rewarding you for doing the right things in life. Serotonin is on tap and life couldn't be any better. Cortisol hasn't been in your blood for five years now and this is how you want the rest of your life to be.

Image five: Pony in labour by the fire.

If life was hard for men it was even harder for women. If you made it to child-bearing age you then had a terrible statistic to deal with, mother and child mortality rates were 40%.

You do what you did during your son's birth. You kiss and comfort Pony. She's in pain... unbearable pain. You look into each other's eyes. Her stare is panicked... you stay strong.

Pony is strong, but weak from the long winter. You study her drooping eyes — *Pony?* You try your best... but it isn't good enough. With your son watching-on, you grip her hand and hold it to your mouth... you kiss it but there's nothing there. At twenty-five, Pony, the mother of your unborn child and son dies.

"RAAGGHHHH!" You cry and punch at the heavens for taking the one good thing from your life. A crushing hurt fills your chest with paralysing pain. "Nooo!" You yell... Cortisol is suddenly back times ten.

You scream at your ancient gods. The one woman that was everything is gone before her time — stolen by the harsh lands and the time period you live in. You're angry, sad and devastated. Cortisol takes hold and burns the loss into your soul... life will never be the same.

Future

The boss loses it. This was your big chance to shine, but instead the order never left the factory and now the company has lost it largest contract — you're fired!

Your temples pulse. Your primitive mind is dealing with stress from cortisol. Your arteries tighten causing your blood pressure to spike. How do you tell your wife that you've lost your job? You've only got enough saved for three month's-worth of mortgage repayments. The car you bought when you got your pay rise no longer seems special. What about that trip with the kids you planned? A deadly cocktail of chemicals swirl through your blood. Your heart rate increases and so does your blood pressure. The Sabretooth Tiger of your past is lurking in the grasses. You decide to stop at the

pub to get drunk. Alcohol mimics the production of the feel-good chemical serotonin but is a suppressive and you only feel worse, the real problem is still there.

The three big reasons for depression are: financial distress, broken relationships and the death of a loved one. You're heading for two out of three!

Past

Image six: Burying Pony under a tone grave

You tried for twelve hours to bring her back. Your tears did nothing. You held her in your arms until wild animals started to circle... it is now time to let her go.

You gently remove Pony's necklace. You stare at it tempted to destroy it. You glance at your son's tearstained face. You take a deep breath and place it around his neck. Pony will now live on in him.

The hunting grounds are no longer what they were... You have to move on.

Your son is young but strong. Your DNA is in him and it's the best gift you can give him. You break up the long journey across the plains by carrying him — you both haven't eaten or spoken in days. The loss of Pony weighs heavily on your mind, but the act of trekking for miles keeps the cortisol to a minimum. You don't let your son see your tears — you think you're just wasting water.

You cover vast distances with your determined walking. You start to notice other groups of people making the same march but you keep to yourself. "I don't need anyone", you tell yourself.

Future

Image seven: An argument erupts between modern man and his wife in the kitchen.

You leave the car at the pub and try to sneak inside. Your relationship was already stressful. What with school fees and that electricity bill that came from nowhere... and now you don't have a job.

"Where have you been?" your wife demands when you sneak into the kitchen. "Do you know what time it is?"

There's a strange pain spreading across your chest as you start to explain. The doctor's advice about exercise seems to linger in your thoughts. The ache gets stronger. You think, *It must be from the gardening... or that box I was lifti—* "ARGHH!" The pain and pressure hits you like a Mac truck. You struggle for breath and slump to one knee. You look up with the realisation you're having a heart attack.

Your wife rushes forward. Her eyes say it all. She holds your cheeks but you can't hear her words — you're about to blackout... this is it. This is where all the other shit in your life seems insignificant.

Past

Your loss fills your world. It's been over two months of trekking to better lands and still you see Pony everywhere. The thought about finding dinner or becoming dinner hasn't been a priority... until now.

Your son stirs in your arms. He notices something you didn't.

"Shit!" You chastise yourself realising that you didn't see the large paw prints in the sandy soil only a few feet away. They're fresh... one hour at most. You scan the small tufts of grassy patches that spot the arid landscape. There's nothing there at first... but you wait and listen. You glance at a small group of humans nearby and wave at them to stop. You point your spear towards the patches of

green. A small group of birds suddenly take flight from a near-by tree. You keep staring at the distance — so does the other group. The grasses suddenly sway then stop. Then you see it — Sabretooth!

You evaluate everything. Adrenalin floods your body. Your blood runs cold and the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. You've outrun this beast before and you can do it again — but? Your son. He'll never make it. You can carry him but you'll both die. You have to make a choice. You make that choice in less than a millisecond as the adrenalin makes your heart rate triple. You've lost your Pony and your unborn child. You've lost a future that you dared to imagine. You look down at your son's terrified eyes. He knows danger and remembers the stories you've told him... what had happened to the ones that didn't out run the mighty sabretooth.

The man-eater picks up speed. He's the top of the food chain for good reason. Top speed 60kph, 12 inch long canine teeth designed for puncturing its pray. It glances at both groups of people. It weighs up the odds — ten humans verse two — you lose!

Your son grips your lower leg, scared to death of what is approaching.

A deathly... confident calm takes hold — you are Man. Something in your DNA has predetermined you as a survivor. You're forty years old and won't shy from death again when it becomes personal. You've already lost everything. You pick up your spear. You push the end of it into the dry earth and brace it firmly. The sabretooth launches into the air at over 60 kph — you're ready!

Your grip tightens. Adrenalin courses through your muscular, life-harden body. You can see the beasts green eyes. He means business — so do you.

The tiger roars! You roar louder! This is it. You take action. The small group of humans nearby stand paralysed by your bravery.

You grip the spear for dear life.

THUDD!

The spearhead plunges through the beast's chest. Its eyes don't reveal the fate of its actions. The claws swipe at your body but you stand strong. A row of razor-sharp cuts leave a trail of red across your chest.

"RAGHHH!" You rage and push the spear deeper, harder. You yell again... and again. The pent up sadness from your woman's death flows from your eyes. Tears stream down your cheeks when you realise that you've saved your boy — your future. You use all of your brute strength to push the beast on to its back.

Your act of super survival skills hasn't gone unnoticed. Other humans have witnessed your bravery and love in the face of certain death... You're a winner in life.

FUTURE

Beep — Beep... Beep —Beep...

You're groggy. "Is this a dream?" you wonder.

You squint and can just make out the shape of your wife's tear-stained face. You don't know it yet but she performed CPR on you for fifteen minutes until the paramedics arrived... she saved you. It all suddenly comes back: the chest pain, the in-and-out of consciousness... the crushing pain across

your chest. You realise you owe your life to the person whom you were arguing with. A tear escapes and trickles down your cheek. You whisper a murmur, “I’m sorry... I love you... Honey.”

She bursts into tears and hugs you dearly. The enormity of the situation hits you both. The bills, the stresses seem to have disappeared. What matters most has been reinforced with a near death experience. The Sabretooths of this world have lost this round.

Image Eight: Modern man sitting in the sun at the hospital in his PJs.

Your recovery hasn’t been easy... but something you didn’t expect has come from it — clarity. When you were about to lose your life — you suddenly got it back! Luckily you had the sense to keep your life and disability insurance current. The money will give you six months to get your act together. More good news... your old company takes you back in a heartbeat (pun intended). It’s less money than you were making before but something’s different. You’re more focused, the little things seem to count more: being at your son’s soccer matches, watching your daughter perform in her school play. Your wife notices the changes too.

The doctor tells you to start walking... so you do. You and your partner walk every day. You talk openly and honestly... Now it’s time for you to be honest with yourself. There’s another sabretooth lurking and it’s not behind any bushes... it’s in your own mind... it’s in the form of a choice. Your instincts are primal but your choices don’t have to be. This is your epiphany moment.

Image nine: Standing in the shopping centre aisle.

As you stand in the grocery shop aisle trying to decipher the contents label on a can of tuna it hits you! You look down the aisle and imagine the beast hurtling towards you. If you don’t act now it could all be over. Your family needs you, the world needs you to be the best man you can be.

The doctor has already laid out what you need and how to use it but at times it can feel overwhelming.

Where do you start? What do I eat? How do I exercise? What would ancient man have done?

Ancient man didn’t have a choice. His health was determined by his environment. What you need to do is recreate that very environment in today’s world. All things in this world are products of our environment... Don’t believe me? — Good! Check it out for yourself. Take a long... good look around and look at the things in your world.

Today’s world — I need food. I hop in the car, drive 2 kilometres and cruise through the drive through and buy something high in sugar or laced with fat.

Ancient world — I need food. You walk 2 kilometres, up hills, down hills. You run and jump to catch a rabbit, then you start a fire and cook it yourself. Or you thrash around in the river trying to catch a fish.

I’m not suggesting or telling you to dispel all the positive things that in today’s world that bring: medical technologies, science and clean drinking water. I’m not suggesting for one second that if you need a drink that you walk for miles to the nearest creek. It’s about recognising how we’ve changed because the world’s changed. We’ve become victims to our own advancements — it’s time to change.

You must see the world through ancient man’s eyes.

Your pantry *must* become like ancient man's. Look back down that shopping aisle. Find the things that would have been available in ancient man's valley or forest.

Have you ever seen lollies or chocolates growing from trees? No you haven't — skip that aisle.

Have you ever seen bread, muffins or crumpets laying on the forest floor — nope again. Multigrain bread is your best option here but no more than two to three slices a day.

Cereal aisle... now this one's challenging. Breakfast is so important that eating something full of sugar is setting you up for failure. Instead of eating sugar-laced dried corn chips or balls of coco go the way of oats. Mix your porridge with frozen blueberries, a teaspoon of honey and a tablespoon of pecans and you're on fire for at least four hours. On alternate days add ½ cup of sliced mushrooms, 4 sliced cherry tomatoes, sliced lean bacon and 1 egg to a fry pan. Pop a slice of multigrain bread to the toaster and lay the frypan mixture on to the toast. Presto! You've got protein and a few low carb vegies that will keep you satisfied until lunch.

What about the can-food aisle? There's canned tuna and salmon... it may not have come in a can but it's mostly unprocessed.

This is where you need to have your head at... in the forest. Close your eyes and imagine you're in the forest. Whatever you can pick, catch or hunt is okay to eat when applied to the supermarket.

Meats... in moderation are all good. Vegetables are great, in particular the darker ones. Herbs and spices are usually in their natural form. Fruits are also great but maybe keep it to two or three pieces a day. Eating a whole watermelon and calling it a piece of fruit is being unrealistic — get serious!

The Good News

Just like ancient man you can treat yourself. Every now and then is okay to eat calorie rich foods. 200,000 years ago, man would have knocked down a bee hive and eat the whole thing clean — it's all about balance.

Eating the same food day in day out won't just become boring, it could also ostracise you socially. Join your friends for beer and pizza but don't follow that up with a second day of over-eating. Ancient man would have lived off those high kilojoules for a few days. All you have to do is eat a few less carbs the next day and you'll be right back on track.

Exercise

We use to cover vast distances through walking. How often would have ancient man had gone for a jog or participated in sprint and rest training? Probably to catch a rabbit or fish or to out run a predator. He didn't go for a run because he liked it, he did it because he had to. Go for a fast-paced walk for an hour and see how good you feel after it. Exercise in any form releases serotonin.

Back to Modern Man

You start eating better... Vegetables and fruit in particular. You dump the processed food and go natural like your ancestors. Your natural, antioxidant and potassium-rich diet has reduced your blood pressure so you don't need any more medication. You've followed the doctor's recommendations to a tee. He proudly announces you're healthier than you've ever been. Your heart attack may have just given you back your life.

You have taken the time to reassess your life. You down-grade your car but up-scale your life. You're coming back... You are Man.

Ancient man

Six months have passed since your kill-or-be-killed moment. Word has spread about the dark-haired man from across the desert who has skills and courage. Everyone knows you by the scar on your muscular chest. You are on the woman radar for good reason. You can hunt, take calculated risks, provide protection and have a body for war and love... What woman wouldn't want that DNA passed on to her babies... you are definitely the Man!

You are now part of a tribe which is a further guarantee of survival. You notice them too, but one takes your fancy, her name is River. She's cared for your son as though he was hers. She's not like you, her eyes and skin are different which means you're not related... that's a good start. And she smiles... that's different also because her teeth are all there which means she's healthy. Your heart quickens when you are around her... there's something about her which makes you human again... she's the one.

You marry by a large fig tree and make love under the stars. Life is good again.

FUTURE

Your walking has turned to trekking. You take the whole family with you and explore the country side. You're back to the weight when you were in your twenties but a whole lot healthier. Your son and daughter love the weekend activities that involve the outdoors. Your wife can't believe the difference either.

You rest at the top of the hill and take a deep, cleansing breath. As you sit down to take in the view something small, something blue amongst the dry rocks grabs your attention. You wet your fingers and rub the face clean — it's a calving of a small horse. "What the..." you wonder. A small smile edges up from the corner of your mouth when an idea hits you.

Image in a restaurant:

Your relationship with your wife has never been stronger. From the very moment you almost died you have a different perspective. Long walks, passion in the bedroom and the simple fact you value and respect each other. You reach into your pocket and pull out the small blue pony that's now attached to a simple leather strap.

You explain where you found it and when you saw it, that it reminded you of her for some reason.

Her tears trickle free. You've turned full circle as a man.

PAST

Many moons have past. You've fathered many children and are respected by your tribe. Your sabretooth scars have faded but never your will to survive. Your adult son watches nearby as your breathing becomes shallow. You hold out your hand to him. He grips it with love. You smile and nod at the small necklace of the pony around his neck... you are man. You have ensured the human race will grow strong because of you. Your son and his sons and his sons after that will be survivors. Your breath becomes shallower.

River holds your hand, you squeeze it back and look into her eyes. She nods to confirm everything that you feel.

You take one final glance at your people then slowly... reluctantly... close your eyes. Ancient man leaves this world but ultimately honours it with his existence. If it wasn't for his actions you and our kind would not be who we are today.

The tribe begin to wale. Your son rushes to your side. He grips your shoulders and throws himself against you... you are gone.

Image Nine: The tribe gather around ancient man.

This story may have ended but yours isn't over by a mile.

A cautionary tale this may have been... but... and I mean but! The next chapters are yours to write. This is your time. This is your time to face your choices with the same determination of your ancestors. Harness your new knowledge with the same courage that ancient man did with his spear against the mighty sabretooth. Honour all those whom have gone before you to be the best man you can be. Be healthy, be humble, make the choices in this modern world that will make you stronger in mind and body.

You are Man!