

Dr. Michele Reed

The Fit Doc's Guide To Real Life, Real Fitness, Real Health



Mentally Fit
Physically Strong
Revised Edition

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Dr. Michele Reed

Dr. Michele Reed is one of those special physicians who understands that good health begins with a mindset of fitness. In *Mentally Fit, Physically Strong*, Dr. Reed shares the elements of this mindset from her own life and from 20 years of serving patients. Through her accessible voice, Dr. Reed's writing compels and inspires us to get moving and embrace healthy living. Thank God for the gift of this book, and for the gift of Dr. Michele Reed.

Rev. Dr. Patrick G. Duggan, Pastor

Congregational Church of South Hempstead
United Church of Christ

Dr. Michele's book serves as an awesome reminder of the things I forget very often due to my hectic work schedule: health is just as much a priority as going to work. Eating healthy and working out is about lifestyle change not just losing inches and weight. It is about making time to put yourself first. As a friend of Dr. Michele, I am elated to be a part of this journey with her and strongly encourage other women to get healthy with us!

Loni Love

Comedian and Talk Show Host

The "R" in Reed stands for Real! Dr. Michele Reed is real in her commitment to living a healthy lifestyle and also inspiring others to do the same. She is real in that she not only "talks the talk," but also "walks the walk" and "runs the race." I am real glad that she started me on the journey.

Wilma Holmes Tootle

Lifelong Mentor

My mother said, “You can have everything - just not all at once.” Then I met Dr. Reed, a mother, wife, doctor, business owner, and marathoner to name a few. She has learned the formula for having it all, at once, without losing your mind. There are plenty of ‘superwomen’ who are clearly juggling more than they should. *Mentally Fit, Physically Strong* teaches us how to not only navigate life’s terrain, but to thrive and truly enjoy the process. This isn’t a book for someone looking for a magic pill to make life go smoothly. Dr. Reed encourages us to first step up and be proactive about our health and fitness. She imparts bitesize portions of wisdom for sustainable change. I’ve watched her live by these principles. Those who have followed her lead go from frazzled superwomen to being grounded and confident in their ability to take on life’s next adventure.

Angelique Perrin

Syndicated Radio Personality

There are major benefits to the real life integration of self, health, family, and work for optimal wellness. *The Fit Doc* inspires real people to prioritize and experience success at improving and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. She envisions a world where individuals take charge and stamp out at-risk behaviors, own their health, and live their best life. Practical, motivating, and engaging, *The Fit Doc* encourages readers to take small steps to make a huge difference in overall wellness.

Larthenia Howard, Ed.D.

Author of Challenging Mediocrity

Mentally Fit, Physically Strong: The Fit Doc's Guide to Real Life,
Real Fitness, Real Health Revised Edition

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Dedication

*To my wonderful husband, Walter Scott Kershaw,
our sons Marcus and Stephen, and my family.*

*Thank you for your enduring support and patience.
Without you, this project would not have been
achieved. Because of you, I show up better and
healthier to serve the world.*

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Foreword

Dr. Michele C. Reed reminds us that health is not measured, or assured, by the absence of disease. She encourages us to secure health through the adoption of specific personal behaviors and lifestyle strategies.

Dr. Reed shares her personal journey to achieving 'mental and physical health' with the readers through stories and advice. This Fit Doc is not just a role model. She provides a roadmap with (frequent) cautionary warnings that achieving health cannot be passively accomplished. Dr. Reed emphasizes, throughout this wonderful book, that being healthy is an active and individualized process that requires personal focus, commitment, attitude, and sustained work.

Dr. Michele Reed's career in medicine is, and has been, an example of a sustained commitment to community and population health that we, in academic medicine, aspire to achieve in all of our NYITCOM students and alumni. As a black female physician, she represents the power of diversity and the importance of including diverse perspectives in the delivery of quality health and preventive care. I consider myself a privileged witness to who Dr. Reed is and the professional that she has become.

Barbara Ross-Lee, DO, FACOFP
New York Institute of Technology
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Introduction



Introduction

The Making of “Fit Doc”

For an overwhelming number of people, there is a belief that the actors seen on TV “have it all together.” I want to set the tone straight before we begin this journey together by saying, “I am not superwoman!” I am a regular person just like you, with my own beauty and blemishes. Far too often we believe what we want is not possible. We believe our lives are fixed and we cannot control our destinies. I will admit, my life is hurried at times and I feel as if balance, or harmony, is an elusive target. In this increasingly fast paced world, finding time to catch your breath and relax is difficult, let alone time to consider a plan for a healthy lifestyle. This book is not about a complicated set of exercise routines, or overcomplicating your life with a million things to do. My goal is to challenge your belief systems, shatter un-resourceful thoughts and behaviors, and guide you into creating better habits that will lead to a healthier lifestyle, both mentally and physically. As a result, I hope to help you make better choices with the foods you eat, uncover hidden motivations behind exercise, and identify reasons you want a better you.

You might be thinking to yourself:

- *I work 90 plus hours a week. When do you want me to work out?*
- *I would work out more if I did not have this hairstyle or did not sweat so much.*
- *Gym memberships cost a lot and my funds are already tapped to the max.*
- *Eating healthy requires more time to prepare. With a family to feed, I do not have time for all of that.*

No matter how overwhelmed life may seem, we all, ultimately, have a responsibility to take care of our health. It is a matter of choice. You can choose to practice unhealthy habits or choose to practice habits that render better health. The commitment you make with yourself, for yourself, is one of the most important decisions you can make. Most of us would agree that the benefits of health and wellness far outweigh the challenges. With proper goal setting and a plan of accountability, I believe a healthy lifestyle is attainable.

As a physician, I have been on this grind for almost twenty years, helping patients, and the communities I serve live healthier lifestyles. My philosophy on healthy living comes from a number of experiences that I will personally share with you throughout this book. Prior to the start of this journey, it became apparent that there was a clear disconnect between my patient's perceptions of what it meant to have a healthy lifestyle, and the research that supported overall health and wellness. I noticed an alarming trend throughout threads of conversations; there was this notion that good health was purely contingent on DNA, or only achievable if a person is wealthy.

This thought process was real for so many of my patients. The definition of healthy habits seemed obscure and was totally off the mark in some cases. One of my patients believed eating shrimp fried rice everyday was healthier than eating chicken or pork fried rice, simply because it feels lighter on the stomach. Unbeknownst to her, she was sending her cholesterol levels through the roof and putting herself at a greater risk for a stroke or heart attack. Still, a great number of patients resolved to accept their temporary conditions and ailments as permanent. It would seem as if little or nothing could be done to resolve their present existence.

Many of the new patients came to me for a prescription, rather than preventive counseling or treatment. A paradigm shift had to occur. I felt confused and was disheartened by the unhealthy mindsets of my patients. At the same time, I became more and more dissatisfied with my own health profile. I ran and exercised, but I needed to do more to keep myself engaged. Oftentimes our hearts are in the right place when attempting to achieve a goal. However, if we are not totally committed to the process and the follow through, we risk reverting to old habits that are counterproductive. Fitting into a smaller

dress for that twentieth year high school reunion may not be inspiring enough to get you to LA Fitness every morning for circuit training. On a personal level, you might want to look your best for the peers who knew you in the eleventh grade, but if you are not connected to the process, you will default to unhealthy routines.

Like so many of my patients, I was operating in default, and needed a change. Quickly.

Sometime after having a heart to heart with myself about my own need to change some of my health habits, I witnessed the most inspiring thing. During Sunday brunch with my husband (one of my favorite pastimes), I noticed women from all over the country flocking into the lobby of the Long Island Marriott. The majority of them were wearing tutus, tiaras, and boas while carrying a single red rose. They had just completed either a 5K or Half Marathon. I guess I was so intrigued by it because my preconceived notions about the “ideal runner” were shattered. In my mind running, on that level, was a sport that attracted only thin, slender women. But these women looked like me! They were tall, short, full-figured, slim you name it. Before I realized it, I

was thinking out loud, “I would love to do that.” It was in that moment that my earth shifted. My love affair with running revived just like that.

Inspired by what I had witnessed, I continued to run on my own for some time. Then I remembered one of the ladies in the lobby was wearing a t-shirt with the words, “Black Girls Run” inscribed across the front. One of my patients had told me about the group, but up to that point I had not bothered to find out more. Upon further investigation of the group I came across the organization’s vision statement:



*“We aspire to take a
comprehensive and creative
approach to improve the
health statistics of
women of color.”*

BLACK GIRLS RUN VISION

This truly resonated within my soul. The organization was in full alignment with my healthy lifestyle goals as a health professional, wife, mother, and an athlete. Black Girls Run was on a mission and was dedicated to helping Black women (just like me) on their quest to healthy living. Through the process of self-awareness, the pieces came together and I was off and running towards a new lifestyle. This was exactly what I needed - a supportive and nurturing group of like-minded people to help me reach my goals. Fast forward three years, I am a few pounds lighter, a few dress sizes smaller, and I have run two world major marathons - the New York City Marathon and the Chicago Marathon.

But that is not the real story. Along my personal journey to better health, I met some of the most amazing people. My life has certainly been enhanced and my ability to help my patients has changed for the better. Not only do I continue to improve my health, but have also increased my capacity to affect desired change in others. By sharing my experiences, others are inspired to set goals for healthier lifestyle changes. My sphere of influence has allowed me to help people like Dionne, a member of Black Girls Run

and Merrick Bicycle Tri Team, who is also one of my patients. She came to my office with a very high cholesterol level, and sought advice on the next logical move to improve her health. After an examination, I offered her two options: she could begin medication to lower her cholesterol, or she could begin to make healthier changes to her lifestyle. It did not take her long to make a decision, especially considering the possibility of taking medication for the rest of her life. We immediately started a conversation around lifestyle changes that could make a big difference, not just in her cholesterol numbers, but in her overall wellbeing. To date, Dionne is healthy and she makes decisions regarding life choices in different ways. She went from running as purely a form of exercise, to becoming a triathlete and participating in Ironman competitions. My impact on Dionne and others led to the brand “Fit Doc,” a name I was affectionately given by my Black Girls Run team. The name has stuck like glue. The more I consider the health epidemic of our nation and the unhealthy habits of those I see on a daily basis, the more I become committed to live up to the meaning of “Fit Doc” to the absolute best of my ability.

The *Fit Doc's Guide* is designed to be used as support as you begin and continue to tweak your overall health and wellness regiment. It is not a substitute for routine doctor visits, or information and medical advice you have received from your personal health care provider. Each chapter is a short discussion, in practical and easy to follow language, of topics that have supported my wellness goals the most. After each discussion, I offer several tips for you to consider on your journey to experiencing life at its peak. There is space below each tip for you to jot notes and thoughts. By the end of the book, hopefully you will have developed a personal plan of action that you can commit to and continue to monitor, and one that you can share with your health care provider as a sign of your dedication to wellness. Be open to sharing your authentic self on this journey. It takes work on all levels to change yourself into the person you want to become. Rate the degree to which you are or are not applying different practices. My ultimate desire is that you seriously ponder where you are physically and mentally and make adjustments as necessary.

So, as I mentioned earlier, I am not a superwoman. I am not the fastest, I am not the strongest, but I am in the best shape of my life. I am setting personal bests and personal records along life's amazing race. I am a real physician, providing real medicine, living a really full and productive life. I invite you to come and run with me, "Fit Doc," in the race for better health and a more optimized life. You can do it! I am a living testimony and so are you!

CHAPTER ONE

The Starting Line

*"I'm always nervous.
If I wasn't nervous, it would be weird.
I get the same feeling at all the big
races. It's part of the routine,
and I accept it.
It means I'm there and I'm ready."*

ALLYSON FELIX

Unknown Territory

For many people, the starting line has always seemed like a leap into the unknown. The range of emotions cycling through the body during this time can cause many people to either not start the race, or to run it poorly. As a runner since elementary school, I have always been challenged, mentally, at the starting line. Questions in my head would toss about feverishly.

- *Did I train hard enough?*
- *Will I get tired and be able to finish?*
- *How will I run this race? Should I be aggressive or passive?*
- *Will I win or lose?*

As I approach the start of any journey in my life, I, like others in similar situations, am unsure of the outcomes. This feeling of uncertainty is normal. It is a sign that you are aware and present in the moment. This inner dialogue might seem like noise in a place where you need to be calm, but it is only a reminder to focus solely on the goal at hand.

The starting line is a lonely place at times. The “oomph” that you have when you first set out to change your life will flicker. Smiles that once lit up your face at the thought of you eating right and exercising consistently will be flipped upside down every now and then. And, there will be many times when you may feel as if you are in this race by yourself.

You Are.

The Reset I Needed

After giving birth to my twin boys, it was hard to shake off some of the excess weight from the pregnancy. Although I had immediately started to train by running and biking, I was not losing

the weight like I wanted. This was one of the most frustrating experiences for me to date. However, I was not in it alone. Several of my patients were experiencing similar frustrations. You know it is bad when you and your patients are not eating for health benefits. During this same time, I was working long hours at the practice and it completely threw me off my eating and sleeping schedule. Sometimes, I would not leave the office until 10:30 p.m. or later. My husband, Scott and I would eat dinner late at nights and then go straight home and hit the bed. Not the recipe for healthy living right? I needed help!

Implementing just a few of the changes I found during my research, I was able to make a lot of progress. My regular routine seemed as if it had been supercharged. The results were amazing to say the least. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard, “Oh my God, you’re losing so much weight,” or “You’re so skinny. This can’t be healthy.” I will be the first to admit, it was hard to ignore some of the talk, especially coming from friends who knew my mission. But, instead of taking it personally, or getting offended, I used the comments as fuel and feedback. It gave me fuel to keep going

because I was receiving the benefits of my new lifestyle plan, and feedback to increase muscle toning for an even healthier look.

The journey seemed lonely at times, but I knew I was on the right track. The results were all the proof I needed. Family and friends meant well in their responses to my changes. They continued to encourage me, but the truth is, I was on the road to self-improvement alone. No one else around me was altering their lifestyle or eating habits. Nope. I was in it alone. The journey was mine, and I had to own the process for myself.

Inspiration for Change

I shared a snippet of my lifestyle challenge and change to encourage you at the starting line. Similar to my experience, you may start solo - just you and your goal. There is a lot of value at this stage. This is the opportunity for you to get crystal clear about your goals, dreams, hopes, and desires. What is it, exactly, that you want for yourself? Alone, you can quietly reflect and converse with yourself. Ask

yourself, “In all honesty, am I doing the best I can to be the healthiest version of myself?” Sit still and wait for the response. I have a sneaky suspicion that intuition will nudge you to consider the areas in your life where change would result in an even better you.

Relationships Play a Key Role

Sometimes even the smallest adjustment can make the biggest difference. In my quest, one of the changes that really paid off was in altering the way I interacted with close companions. Although I started solo, I eventually wanted to connect with others who had an interest in better health. As relational beings, connecting is very important in obtaining overall wellbeing. If you are aspiring to become a better teacher, it might be wise to surround yourself with other educators. It does not mean that you will not hang out with your friends who are not educators, but the interaction within the relationship may shift as a result of your newfound goals.

If you are concerned about being the “funny acting friend” to some people, do not worry. This race is about YOU. The people who care about you will understand. I interject here because I had to change the way I interacted with my friends and be aware of the challenges in many cases. If I was going to embrace this new healthy way of living, I could not be at a happy hour indulging in 2-for-1 appetizers every week with my girls. I am not saying that I will never grab a hot wing or two, but I am more conscious and mindful of how I spend my time and the choices I make concerning my health.

With this new goal of mine, I started to suggest that we engage in more physical activities such as running, or any type of physical activity that would make us sweat, instead of always meeting up to eat and socialize. Some friends came along for the ride and some did not. Ultimately, I made the necessary changes to support my goals, and managed to enlist a few supporters along the way, who are happier and healthier because of the shifts we made together.

Discover the Vision – Set a Goal

The point of all of this is, the race is a personal quest for your freedom. It may require a lot of mental toughness and fortitude but you must be vision oriented in order to stick through the tough times. Having a goal in mind when beginning any process is critical. Without a predetermined destination, you are open to arriving anywhere, thereby exacerbating dissatisfaction. I challenged myself to eat healthy, and set daily goals to achieving it. This included a progress tracker and weekly check-in with my accountability partner for motivation, and a reminder of my 'big picture vision' for both health and wellness. My random workouts turned into a more crystal clear, focused, and attainable game plan for success. This preparation at the starting line helped me to conquer bigger goals like the New York City and Chicago Marathons.

Identify Your Support Systems

Support is always readily available when you're taking steps in the right direction. My neighbor, Cheryl, soon became my 5:45 a.m. running buddy. I am thankful for her support during the mornings when it was tough to get up and face the brisk morning air. Cheryl and I also joined other members of Black Girls Run on weekly running outings. This helped support my goals immensely. Throughout the process of training for the marathon, which is one of the most daring feats for an individual, I also became a source of inspiration and strength for other women. Just as much I helped them, their presence kept me lifted throughout the process.

It is not easy lacing up your sneakers at 6 a.m. when everyone else is getting zzz's. It takes a special level of dedication and self-care to push past moments when you don't have a crew of cheerleaders to root for you. Your race in life, like my runs, is personal. Others may act as a source of support, but they cannot run for you!

Family, Friends, and Sometimes Foes

I am reminded of one of my colleagues who wanted to shed some weight. She started to cook with fresh vegetables, less sugar and salt, and she added exercise to her routine. Her health goal to shed pounds and change her lifestyle sounded like the right thing to do. However, her efforts were met with great resistance when she prepared healthy meals for her husband. Changes in the food preparation did not sit well with him. He wanted the same sodium laced, high fructose infused dishes he had grown to love.

· *Resistance. Tension.
Friction*

The sooner you grasp the idea that those around you simply play a role in your race but are not the race itself, the better off you will be. On your journey, some people will serve in roles as coaches, distractors, and cheerleaders, and

some will be of no consequence. My charge to you is to remain undaunted. Keep your eyes on the prize!

After a long conversation with one of my patients, she agreed it was time to seriously take better care of herself. She had been facing prediabetes and more complicated health issues from the year before. Changes were not optional if she wanted to experience health and longevity. She needed to work on changing her eating habits and start an exercise routine, immediately. Heeding my advice, her efforts were noticeable and her commitment was obvious. She reported feeling better and having the necessary energy to get through long days at work. Although it was clear that her changes were for the better, the moment she started to shed weight, her close friend told her to find a new doctor because she looked so “unhealthy.” As she shared this with me, I reminded her not everyone is going to be at her starting line with her, but she should keep doing what is best for her anyway. Thank goodness, for the sake of her health, she followed through and has been able to maintain a healthy weight since following through on her plan of action. Because of her perseverance, her friend has now become my patient and the two support one another

in an exercise regiment. Imagine if she had not made a sincere commitment at her starting line.

As you travel through life and experience positioning at the starting line, you may look around and notice you are the only person there. You might feel alone. But again, here is where you have one of the greatest opportunities to see the person you want to become. In that moment, choose to bring her along as your ride or die friend.

Start Well and Finish Strong

Each year I construct a vision board and determine a new starting line for moving through the different areas of my life. I review personal, health and professional goals. I consider my closest relationships, those with my husband, sons, family, and friends. In the professional corner, I consider risks and how to make gains in the upcoming year. I list particular scriptures to guide my intentions. On a personal level, I hone in on physical and

mental areas for improvement. My vision board serves as the guiding light for how I'll start my new year. These reminders help guide me on a journey towards rewards and greatness.

The goal is to start well and finish strong. A clear focus on what you want, combined with a dedicated plan of action, will help you achieve any type of goal you set. Remember, there will be noise, the road might be lonely, but a personal vision that compels deliberate action is able to confront any challenge.

I'll see you at the Starting Line.



Fit Doc Checkup

- » Do you see yourself in the same place you were last year, or are you at a different Starting Line? What can you do to impact a greater difference?
- » The Starting Line presents an inner dialogue that can be filled with a range of emotions: fear, excitement, anxiety, uncertainty etc. What emotions do you have running through your head when you are at the beginning of a life change or very big decision? How do your emotions influence your behaviors?
- » When you set goals, you are literally planting a seed. Planting requires digging. Dig deep within to decide what truly matters most to you. Prioritize ideas, projects, and action plans. Indicate what moves will get you closer to your goals.
- » Eliminate the weeds as soon as they are recognized.
- » Learn to truly relax. When you go through change and unwelcomed times in life, relax and get comfortable with the idea of different. In most cases, different is different. It is not better or worse, just different. Rest in the comfort of change and different. A conditioned body and mind is necessary. Identify an area in your life where change is necessary. What actions can you take to embrace this change?
- » Declare selfishness as an asset. This is selfishness in a healthy way. As we learn from air travel, it is advisable to place on your oxygen mask first so you are better able to help others. A healthy form of selfishness relates to attending to your needs so you are prepared to take care of the needs of others. What outside influences do you see as potential challenges to your new lease on self-care?