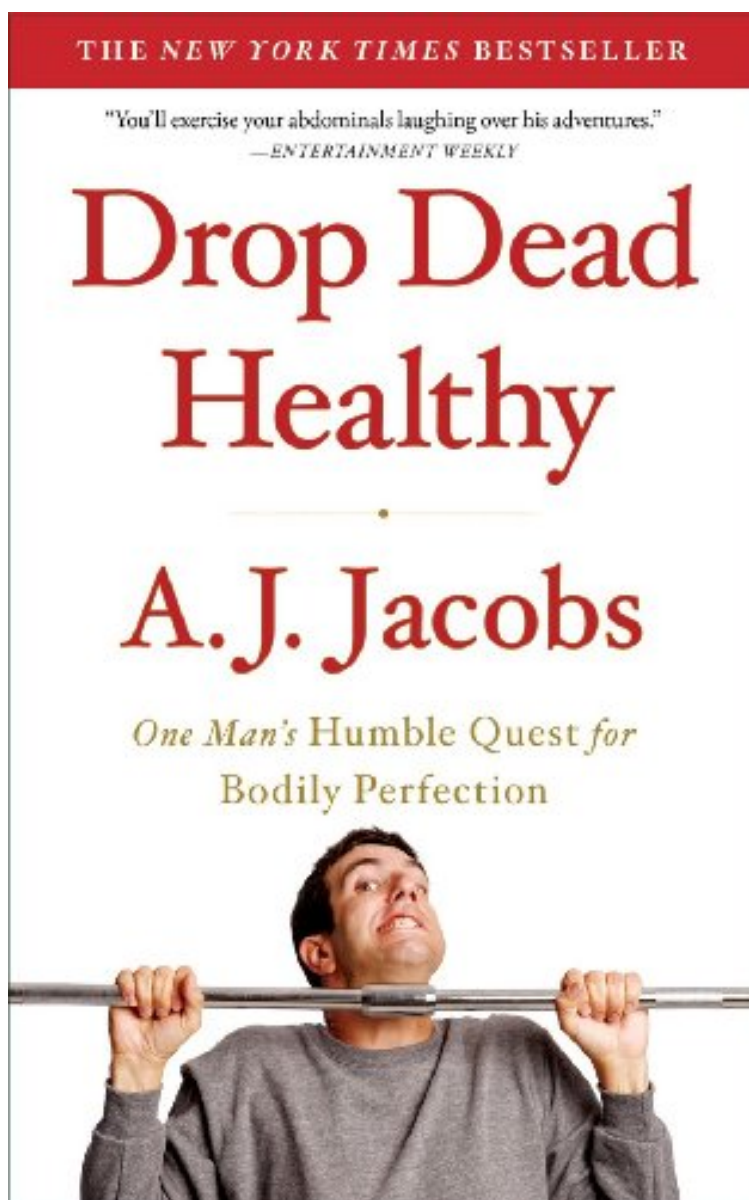


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Drop Dead Healthy: One Man's Humble Quest for Bodily Perfection (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the bestselling author of The Year of Living Biblically and The Know-It-All comes the true and truly hilarious story of one persons quest to become the healthiest man in the world. Hospitalized with a freak case of tropical pneumonia, goaded by his wife telling him, I dont want to be a widow at forty-five, and ashamed of a middle-aged body best described as a python that swallowed a goat, A.J. Jacobs felt compelled to change his ways and get healthy. And he didnt want only to lose weight, or

finish a triathlon, or lower his cholesterol. His ambitions were far greater: maximal health from head to toe. The task was epic. He consulted an army of experts sleep consultants and sex clinicians, nutritionists and dermatologists. He subjected himself to dozens of different workouts from Strollercize classes to Finger Fitness sessions, from bouldering with cavemen to a treadmill desk. And he took in a cartload of diets: raw foods, veganism, high protein, calorie restriction, extreme chewing, and dozens more. He bought gadgets and helmets, earphones and juicers. He poked and he pinched. He counted and he measured. The story of his transformation is not only brilliantly entertaining, but it just may be the healthiest book ever written. It will make you laugh until your sides split and endorphins flood your bloodstream. It will alter the contours of your brain, imprinting you with better habits of hygiene and diet. It will move you emotionally and get you moving physically in surprising ways. And it will give you occasion to reflect on the bodys many mysteries and the ultimate pursuit of health: a well-lived life.

Extrait Drop Dead Healthy Chapter 1 The Stomach The Quest to Eat Right IVE MADE A LIST of more than a hundred diets. The Mediterranean diet. The USDA diet. The Michael Pollan eat-what-your-grandparents-ate diet. The Blood-type diet. The Paleo diet. The Okinawa diet. Veganism. Raw foodism. Not to mention the more outr ones, like The Cookie Diet. The Rastafarian diet. The Master-Cleanse diet. I want to try them all. Well, maybe not The Taco Bell Drive-Thru Diet (it exists). But most of the others. Eventually, that is. The thing is, studies show that if you switch habits too rapidly, the changes dont stick. So my plan is to wade into my new diets slowly, like my five-year-old son entering a chilly pool. Which is how Ive decided on my first dietary reforms: more chocolate, booze, and coffee. Salud, I say to Julie as I pour a cup of Starbucks Gold Coast on my first morning. That night, our friends Paul and Lisa who are visiting New York from D.C. come over for an informal Thai dinner. Before the meal, as we wait for the delivery guy, I hand out glasses of Pinot Noir, and dig out a Toblerone bar from the fridge. So when does your health thing start? Paul asks. It started today, I say, breaking off a triangular chunk. Paul gives me a questioning look. He also had two cups of coffee this morning, says Julie. Thats his new health plan: chocolate, coffee, and wine. All very good for you, I say. Huh. Sounds like youre really committing yourself to this project, says Paul. How about heroin? asks Lisa. I hear that its loaded with antioxidants. Everyone has a good laugh. Clever. But Paul and Lisa have to acknowledge, science is on my side. Consider: As the Mars Corporation gleefully and regularly points out, dark chocolate is, in fact, loaded with antioxidants and has been shown to cut the risk of heart disease and stroke. It also might be good for the eyes: According to at least one study, chocolate improves contrast sensitivity. A bunch of studies has shown that alcohol is good for your heart in judicious amounts (one glass per day for women, one to two for men) and that moderate drinkers live longer than both teetotalers and heavy drinkers. That includes drinkers of beer or liquor, not just the highly trumpeted red wine, though red wine does contain the much beloved resveratrol, which might have age-resistant effects. Coffee lowers the odds of several types of cancer (bladder, breast, prostate, and liver) as well as Alzheimers. It has some downsides (more than two cups can cause sleeplessness and raise cholesterol), and isnt quite as healthy as its cousin green tea, but drunk in moderation, coffees benefits outweigh the risks. Sadly, I do understand my Vice Diet wont lead me to everlasting health. Chocolate, alcohol, and coffee are outliers. In general, food that tastes good is bad for the body. As Jack LaLanne liked to say: If it tastes good, spit it out. Which is a bizarre situation. Evolution has betrayed us here. The human body as miraculous as it can be is in many ways a malfunctioning machine, a biological version of a 1978 Ford Pinto. If evolution worked perfectly, healthy food would taste delicious and unhealthy food would make us gag. On Halloween, kids would fill their pails with quinoa and cauliflower. Dairy Queen would sell millions of bok choy Blizzards. The problem is, we live in a modern world, but were stuck with caveman taste buds. When our ancestors roamed the plains, our preferences actually did make sense: Our tastes aligned with healthy foods. We evolved to like sugar because its in fruit. And fruit which is rare in the wild is high in nutrients, fiber, and calories. We evolved to like salt because the body needs salt to retain water. Salt also rare in the wild was an occasional lifesaving treat. But then we figured out how to extract sugar from plants and put it in pastries and Frappuccinos. We mined salt and stuck it in our soups and burritos and neon-orange cheese snacks. And in large quantities, sugar and salt are not so good for you at all. We also started to live longer. We cured a lot of infectious diseases, but this presented a new problem. Foods that were healthy in the short run like those loaded with fat to allow the caveman to survive the famine until the next kill turned out to be damaging in the long run. My question is, can I reprogram myself to love healthy food? And can I figure out how to prepare and buy healthy food that doesnt taste like a roll of double-ply Bounty? The answer, it turns out, is yes. Sort of. But not yet. Right now Im still comforting myself with my holy trinity of chocolate, coffee, and booze three of the rare foods that are

both tasty and healthy. At least somewhat healthy. The more I research, the more I realize the situation is complicated. Consider chocolate. Whats really healthy is the 100 percent cacao chocolate. No sugar, no butter. I click onto rawcacao.com and order a bag. The mouthwatering write-up says its certified organic, raw, low fermentation, non-fumigated, fair traded, strict farming standards, training and equipment provided, fair wages, profit reinvestment plan, purity testing. My bag of certified-organic-raw-low-fermentation-etc. chocolate arrives three days later. I take a pinch of the sprinkle-size nibs and pop it in my mouth. I can taste the chocolate I know from Hersheys Kisses, but its faint and muffled, like a clock radio stuffed under a heap of pillows. Mostly I taste the bitterness. Whats that? Julie asks, walking into the kitchen for a snack. Natural chocolate, I say. Reflexively, I offer her the bag. She takes a handful and puts it in her mouth. I probably should have mentioned the tastes-like-detergent part, but, well, it happened so fast. Also I was curious to see her reaction. A second. Two seconds. There it is: the same face she made when our friend showed us an Internet video of two women violating several cultural and hygienic taboos. Taming the Portion In my quest for healthy eating, I know Ill have to do better than my Vice Diet. But I still havent committed to veganism or Atkins yet. Im still too overwhelmed by choices. I do, however, notice that theres one thing almost every nutritionist agrees on: We eat too much damn food. We have a size problem. You can see it in the puberty-like growth spurt of portion sizes. In 1916, a bottle of Coca-Cola was 6.5 ounces. Today, its 20 ounces. A hamburger used to be about 300 calories. Now you can enjoy Hardees Monster Thickburger with 1,420 calories, not counting fries. (The average man should eat about 2,500 calories a day.) So Ive decided to split up my food reforms. First, Ill deal with quantity. Then Ill take on quality. How to eat less? One idea is to suppress my appetite. Ive read reputable studies saying a glass of water before a meal reduces the average number of calories people consume. Same goes for cayenne peppers. And an apple. And a handful of walnuts. So thats my breakfast this morning: cayenne peppers, water, an apple, and walnuts. I wont be hungry for days! Or at least until 10 a.m. when I get the urge to snack again. Im going to need some professional help. Which is why, on a Sunday afternoon, Julie and I drive to a house in secluded hilltop Westchester. Im here to meet the leaders of the Calorie Restriction movement. You might have heard of CR, as its called. Its the most extreme diet you can find that isnt technically a psychological disorder or human rights violation. The idea is that if you live on the edge of starvation, you will increase your life span. If you can survive on 30 percent fewer calories a daysay 1,750 instead of the usual 2,500 for an adult maleyoull slow down your metabolism and be free of disease. You can easily break the century mark, maybe even the 120 mark or more. Its not an insane notion. Actually, theres a good amount of scientific data behind it, going back to a Cornell University study in 1934. Researchers were able to double the life span of mice when they fed them extremely low-calorie diets. Similar results have been found for worms, spiders, and monkeys. Scientists still arent 100 percent certain why calorie restriction lengthens animal life spans. One theory is that the famished animals produce fewer cell-damaging free radicals. Another says that their bodies sense starvation and switch into a defensive state, slowing their metabolism. Does it work on humans? Studies are under way, but its too soon to tell. The prospect, though, has attracted thousands of Calorie Restrictors, folks who weigh their food on digital scales, plot precious calories on spreadsheets, eat two meals a day, and treat their mouths like an exclusive SoHo VIP club where only the most deserving morsels can enter. The house is perched on a steep hill atop a series of perilous turns that leave Julie frazzled. If they want to live forever, they might want to move to a safer street, she says. Julie drops me off, and drives away to visit some friends nearby. She says I can fill her in later. A man answers the door. Hes Paul McGlothlin, the director of research for the nonprofit Calorie Restriction Society, and coauthor of the how-to book *The CR Way*. Hes skinny, but not the POW skinny I was expecting. More like lead-singer-of-an-emo-band skinny. Welcome, he says. Would you like some tea? I agree to some naturally low-calorie dandelion tea. Were in a room with minimal decorations and a huge window overlooking a forest of oaks. An event organizer by day, Paul is slope-shouldered but sprightly for a man of sixty-four years. Hes got piercing green eyes, a deep voice with a little twang from his native Tennessee, and is partial to wearing tracksuits. We sit at the table with his wife and coauthor, Meredith Averill, sipping our tea. The goal of calorie restriction is not to lose weight. Its to be as mentally and physically healthy as possible. But you will lose weight. Paul went from 163 pounds to 136. Paul eats a big breakfast (e.g., salmon, barley, lots of vegetable soup), a smaller lunch (e.g., veggie smoothie, veggie spread, and sprouted grain bread)and no dinner. I have to restrain myself from making the same joke I know theyve heard a thousand times. Yes, maybe youll live longer, but without lasagna and waffles, who the hell wants to? (Or the alternate: You may not live longer, but youll sure feel like youve lived a century and a half.) Paul shuts down that cynical line of questioning before I get to it. He loves his gorge-free life.

Loves it. I literally get high from it, he says. Calorie restriction makes me feel better in every way physically and mentally. His hand is resting on his chin, the wrist at a sharp ninety-degree angle. I can see a road map of blue veins in his arm. Among other things, says Paul, the diet clears him of brain fog he competes in chess tournaments against people half his age. I played this one guy a grand master who was overweight and scarfed down three pizzas. I knew if I could just hold on, his body would crash. So that's what I did. But I'm still puzzled as to how they can sustain the diet in a world that is so food-centric. Humans organize our very lives around meals. There's such an unbelievable myth that eating a lot is a way to have fun, says Meredith. But of course, it isn't. When you're around CR people, they're usually quite active and elated. Paul jumps in: On Christmas and Thanksgiving, he likes to fast instead of feast. No eggnog necessary: If you're on CR, you're kind of high because you're feeling good in the first place. You feel like interacting with people and that brings out great conversations. When you're doing CR, you have to make every bite count. Which is why Paul invented something called savoring meditation. I had read about the practice in his book, and ask if we could try it out. Paul obliges, and gets a bowl of blueberries from the fridge. We close our eyes and breathe in and out for a few minutes, like leaves blowing in a wind. Then he starts. And can you imagine in your mind's eye that someone has left you a gift. Paul speaks soothingly, in a Mr. Rogersish tone. And that gift is going to nurture your body in very special ways. And as you enjoy breathing in and out, you're coming to know that gift is a blueberry. Can you imagine reaching into a bowl and taking just one blueberry, just one, and putting it up to your lips? You begin to smell what that blueberry smells like. And how does it smell? Would it be musty? And so in your mind's eye, you take that blueberry and put it into your mouth... and imagine how it might get from your lips to your teeth. And without biting into it, just have it there on the tip of the tongue... By this time, Paul has me salivating. He's a tongue-tease. Could you taste it on the back of the tongue? On the roof of your mouth? Can you let the taste sensation permeate your entire brain, your entire mouth, your nose? I. Want. That. Blueberry. And now, can you actually put one blueberry into your mouth in slow motion, just like they do on those instant-replay cameras in sports? And hold it there without biting it? And your brain and your tongue and the roof of your mouth and your cheeks are all participating in the experience. And when you're ready, can you begin to bite into it? Just very slowly. Can you taste the very subtle skin of the blueberry and how it meshes with the fleshy inside? Oh man, can I. It went on like that for several minutes. I tell you, a blueberry never tasted so good. It's an odd and goofy ritual, if not bonkers, but if you can't appreciate a blueberry after doing twenty minutes of savoring meditation, you have a tongue made of stone. I leave Paul's house with this lesson: I need to be mindful of what I eat. Maybe I don't need to spend fifteen minutes contemplating a blueberry. But focusing on what I put in my mouth is a key to health. As Cornell psychology professor Brian Wansink points out in his book *Mindless Eating*, one of the major causes of the obesity epidemic is that we thoughtlessly shove omnipresent food into always-open maws. We love to multitask while eating, a sure way to get fat. Studies show that we eat up to 71 percent more when we're watching TV. (And the number also varies depending on what we're watching; one study showed that subjects who watched Letterman ate more than those who watched Leno, which seems a good marketing opportunity for NBC.) We eat more when we eat while driving, and working, and walking. I know whom to blame for this epidemic, incidentally. When I read the encyclopedia, I learned about the father of distracted eating. He was an eighteenth-century British gambling addict who invented a food he could snack on without interrupting his card game. His name was John Montagu, the Fourth Earl of Sandwich. So the humble sandwich, much as I love it, has caused a whole lot of trouble. The Most Mindful Eater in the World I get home, determined to be the most conscious and aware eater in America. That went to hell the next day. I was busy with an article for *Esquire* magazine where I work as a writer and at about 11 a.m., I noticed an empty plastic container and spoon on my desk. Somehow, I had managed to consume an entire cup of syrupy peach slices. It wasn't me, actually. It was some semisentient, high-fructose-loving, zombified version of me. I need help. What I need to do is treat myself like a lab rat. I need to work from the outside in. I need to change my food environment. I call up several behavioral scientists including Sam Sommers at Tufts University, who wrote a book called *Situations Matter* to figure out how to design a fat-fighting apartment. On Wednesday night, I invite or force the family to join me for a special dinner. It's my wife and I, and our three sons Jasper, who is five, and his twin brothers, Lucas and Zane, who are three. That's quite a setup you have there, Julie says. Thank you. My place setting consists of: My son's plastic dinosaur plate, since it's only nine inches across. (We tend to eat whatever's on our plate, so smaller plates mean fewer calories.) A cocktail shrimp fork, since that will make me eat more slowly than if I had a big fork. (The more slowly we eat, the less total food we stuff in. This is because the body, God bless it, is dumb and slow. It takes twenty minutes

for the Im full message to go from the stomach to the brain.) A small makeup mirror propped up by my place mat. (Studies show you eat less if you watch yourself doing it.) Tonights dinner is whole-wheat pasta with tomato sauce and carrots. Ive plated my food in the kitchen so as not to have extra on the table, tempting me. Were not a religious family. We dont say grace. But I want my kids to realize the food didnt spontaneously generate on their plates. Should we talk about where this food comes from? I ask. The grocery store, says Jasper. Well, yes. But even before that, someone had to grow the tomatoes. And someone had to pick them. Someone else had to put them in a box, and someone had to drive them in a truck. So we should appreciate how much it takes to get food on the table. My sons pause. And after we eat it, it will go in the toilet, Jasper says. For the five-and-under set, this is a bon mot worthy of George S. Kaufman. They are off and laughing. And after its in the toilet, it goes into the ocean, adds Zane. Im still amazed at my sons ability to convert any topic not just food, but airplanes, LEGOs, Australia into scatology. I guess its better than nothing. Food mindfulness doesnt have to stop in the stomach. I take a bite and chew. And chew some more. Ive been reading these pro-chewing websites on the Internet. Its a surprisingly passionate movement. One member calls it chewsdaism. They quote Gandhi (chew your drink and drink your food) and pro-chewing poems (nature will castigate those who dont masticate). They sell chewing aids, such as a CD that chimes every minute, directing you to swallow. They revere the grandfather of the pro-chewing movement, a nineteenth-century health guru named Horace Fletcher, who counted John D. Rockefeller and Kafka among his followers. They say chewing will cure stomachaches, improve energy, clear the mind, cut down on gas, and strengthen the bones. Those claims are overblown. But chewing does offer two advantages: You can wring more nutrition out of your food. And more important, chewing makes you thinner, as it forces you to eat more slowly. Julie wants to ask me something, but I keep my finger in the hold-that-thought position. I chew thirty times, until my noodles are so liquid they slide down my throat. After fifteen minutes, the kids have abandoned the table. Julie is in the other room checking her e-mail. But Im still here, alone, chewing my food and watching myself in the mirror. Slow food and children under six thats a tricky combination. Something to work on. Eating for Longevity Maybe Ill have better luck with a meal with my grandfather. Hes ninety-four, so I figure perhaps hes got more patience. And better yet, I can learn a thing or two from him about longevity. He lives in a small apartment on Sixty-first Street, where I have visited him every couple of weeks for the last ten years. I open the door, and find him in front of his huge computer screen, glasses perched on the tip of his nose, tapping out an e-mail. The font size looks to be seventy-two, about two characters per page. But the point is, hes approaching the century mark and still typing e-mails. He gives me his usual raised-fist salutation. Give me one second to finish this up, he says. My grandfather is a remarkable man. His name is Theodore Kheel, and he has the relentless energy and hearty build of Theodore Roosevelt, for whom he was named. If I want to feel insecure, I need only think about his CV. His job was a lawyer. But that doesnt begin to describe his range. He worked as a labor mediator, helping to resolve hundreds of strike transit workers, bakers, conductors, you name it. He supported the civil rights movement and threw fund-raisers for Martin Luther King, Jr. He owned a midget-pony dealership. Well, that last one didnt work out so well. But the point is, he continues to be involved in an absurd number of projects. He promotes education in rural areas via computerized lectures. Hes investing in an eco-friendly hotel in the Caribbean. He encourages sustainable cuisine and fights overpopulation (though he did have six kids before he converted to that cause). Naturally, in the last couple of years, hes slowed down. But not totally. At age ninety-two, he started a campaign to make the New York subways and buses free, arguing in op-eds that it would ease traffic congestion. He is not going gentle. And thats no doubt one of the secrets to his longevity. The MacArthur Study of Successful Aging a respected eight-year-long study of more than one thousand New Englanders concluded that one of the keys is to stay active, connected, involved, and cognitively challenged. You can retire, but you must find something youre passionate about in your retirement. You need some reason to wake up in the morning. My grandfather shuffles over to join me at the table. Hes stooped over, but he still has a full head of hair. His eyebrows are thick, shaped like arrows that point to the ceiling. We eat our meal unhurriedly. Ive brought my shrimp cocktail fork, which I use to spear a salad. Usually, when hes finished with lunch, my grandfather smacks his hand on the table. But weve been chatting and dining for an hour, and so far theres no hand-smacking. We would make those slow-food Europeans proud. We talk about mass transit and the legacy of highway booster Robert Moses (my grandfather is not a fan). We discuss the movie he watched last night: one of his all-time favorites, *Inherit the Wind*, based on the life of another accomplished lawyer, Clarence Darrow. Did you ever meet Clarence Darrow? I ask. My grandfather shakes his head. But I did see him speak once at City College, he says. You remember anything he said? I do

remember. And? Well, it was about the sheer improbability that we even exist. The strange fact that out of millions of people in the world, your mother and father met and decided to get married to each other. And out of the millions of sperm, that the one with your genes was the one that made it to the egg and fertilized the egg. Ill never forget it. Its a little weird to hear your ninety-four-year-old grandfather talk about sperm. But its still a great point. We should be amazed we exist at all. We ought to be in a constant state of wonder. Maybe we should spend fifteen minutes on a blueberry after all. Checkup: Month 1 Its been a month since I began Project Health. Heres where I am: Ive lost three pounds. The blue digits on my bathroom scale stop flickering at 169. In Julies estimation, Ive gone from looking four months pregnant to three and a half months. This mindful eating is working, at least a little. Mindfulness has been the big theme of the month. Its invaded every part of my life. Thanks to reading piles of books about health, Ive become excruciatingly aware of all my body parts. When I breathe, I picture the tiny alveoli sacs in my lungs swelling with air. As I type, I visualize the stringlike flexor muscles tugging on my finger bones. As I eat, I imagine the pancreas squirting out its enzyme-filled juice, which swarms the peanut butter in the small intestine. Its a mixed blessing, this mindfulness. Because with it comes anxiety. Lots of it. Im more aware of all the horrible ways my body can malfunction. The Centers for Disease Control lists hundreds of diseases, running alphabetically from abdominal aortic aneurysm (a ballooning of the aorta) to zygomycosis (a fungal infection). I watched a TED talk from a doctor who said that our bodies are made of 300 trillion cells, and each of these cells is constantly replicating, and it takes just one of those replications to go slightly awry and a cancer could be born. My mother warned me this would happen. She told me the story which is only half apocryphal that med students panic their first year when they learn all the diseases. Its not until the second year that they learn the cures. Im more aware of my bodys many imperfections, the aching lower back, the receding gums, the posture of an exhausted marathoner in the twenty-fifth mile. Im more aware of all the many, many changes I have to make to be optimally healthy. That fifty-three-page to-do list I keep on my desk, it haunts me. My overall strategy is to emphasize one body part at a time. That said, whenever theres an opportunity, Im also checking off items on the list no matter which body part is my focus that day. Last week, for instance, I passed by a plant shop, and stopped in to buy an Areca palm, a task on the fourth page of the list. Its supposedly good for air quality. Unfortunately, its fronds engulfed our entire living room. The boys had to eat dinner hunched over to avoid the branches. Julie made me return it. I replaced it with five smaller plants known, poetically enough, as mother-in-laws tongue (they got their name because of the sharpness of the leaves). Mother-in-laws tongue also effectively cleans the air, according to a NASA study. But there are hundreds of things left to do. I have to start sleeping longer. I have to eat better and stop swiping mac n cheese and pizza crusts off my kids plates. And exercise. Aside from an occasional quarter-mile jog in the park, which wipes me out for the next two days, I havent yet begun to sweat. Thats got to end. Or to start.

Revue de presse "Packed with fascinating information and studies from experts, the book is a highly entertaining and sharply written personal odyssey ... The perfect book to slip in the suitcase before exposing that shameful midriff on the beach." (Daily Mail) "A.J. Jacobs is very, very bad for your health. He will keep you up reading til 2 a.m., disturbing your circadian rhythms, making you sleep through breakfast and overeat at lunch. He is delicious. He's habit-forming. He will give you infectious titters and terminal glee. Don't let that stop you. Indulge." (Mary Roach, author of 'Bonk' and 'Packing for Mars') "Who wouldn't want to be fitter, happier, more productive? In this riotous, madcap book, AJ Jacobs sets himself an ambitious goal: to become the person we all wish we could be. It's vintage AJ. Do your future self a favour and buy this book." (Joshua Foer, author of 'Moonwalking with Einstein') "I couldn't wait to get my hands on this book, and once again, the brilliant A.J. Jacobs had me laughing out loud - and also deciding to change the way I live. Drop Dead Healthy is a rare mixture of the hilarious, the absurd, and the scientifically sound. Who knew it could be so entertaining to read about broccoli puree and shoeless jogging?" (Gretchen Rubin, author of 'The Happiness Project') "His quirky tone makes it undeniably hilarious Amongst the laughter youll find genuine fitness and nutrition tips from someone who is willing to try anything, no matter how embarrassing it might be." (Huffington Post)