



Iron

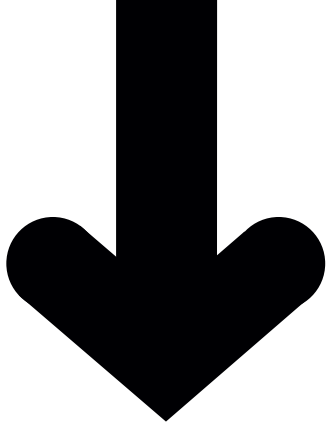
CHRIS O'DONNELL
HAS BEEN A SUPER-
HERO. NOW HE'S
A FITNESS BUFF,
DOTING DAD, AND
BEER DRINKER. NO
WONDER THE *NCIS*:
LOS ANGELES STAR
INSISTS HE'S JUST A
REGULAR GUY.

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ANDREW MACPHERSON

● O'Donnell was shot
exclusively for *Men's
Fitness* at Iron Gym,
in Santa Monica, Calif.





AT IRON GYM IN SANTA MONICA, CALIF., CHRIS O'Donnell is in good form. He's being put through his paces on the shoulder press machine by owner and trainer John Damon and is clearly riding an endorphin high. A slick layer of sweat coats his skin. This is no act. But the veteran actor insists he's still a work in progress—especially relative to his ultrapumped co-star on the hit naval cop drama *NCIS: Los Angeles*. “I’m not LL Cool J,” O'Donnell laughs. “I’m about to turn 40, and I have to work hard to stay fit. Todd Smith [LL's real name] has arms that are insane. Seriously, they're as hard as that wall.”

O'Donnell raps a nearby table for effect. “He has become part of my tour. When I have family in town, I say, ‘OK, here's the set, here's my trailer, and, oh, yeah, feel Todd's muscles.’ Then my kids go, ‘Dad, let me feel your muscle!’ They grab my arm and say, ‘Two of these aren't as big as one of Todd's!’” O'Donnell, a married father of five (from ages 2 to 10), mimics the delighted cackling of his children. “I tell them, ‘All right, already! I give up!’”

Judging by his three-hour effort in the gym today, he's done anything but. O'Donnell could easily pass for a decade younger than he is. He has the sun-touched look of an old college buddy who dropped out to chase powder in Vail and never returned. And he carries himself with the poise of a lifelong athlete, one who loves a cold brew after the game. In other words, yes, a regular guy.

His “regular” experiences include highs, lows, and frustrating plateaus in his career—and life. His breakout came at age 22 with his role opposite Al Pacino in 1992's *Scent of a Woman*. Three years later he was a blockbuster star as the Caped Crusader's masked sidekick in *Batman Forever* (and its 1997 sequel, *Batman & Robin*). “I had a lot thrown at me early on,” O'Donnell confesses. “It was overwhelming.”

DISAPPEARING ACT

As the '90s ended and his family grew, O'Donnell was badly in need of some balance. He chose to lay low for a while, passing on several roles to spend more time at home. “My head was spinning,” O'Donnell says. When he finally felt ready to return, the phone had stopped ringing. “I had so much success—a lot of failure, too. I've been around the block so many times. I don't think I fully appreciated how fortunate and rare it is for success to come around. It's part of being more mature and having more discipline.”

When he was approached to play special agent G. Callen, O'Donnell knew he had to step up in the gym to get the body you'd see on a career military man. “There's been opportunities where I think, ‘Did I really work as hard as I could have?’ And for whatever reason, I didn't—I won't say on which projects—but now I'm doing everything I can to make [*NCIS: Los Angeles*] successful,” he says. “I don't want to look back and think I could have done this harder.”

O'Donnell's exercise regimen includes twice-weekly



● O'Donnell fights through one final set of single-leg presses.

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visits to a Brentwood cardio/weights class called Burn 60, weekly lifting sessions with a trainer, regular runs to prepare for his first marathon (the L.A. 26-miler in March), rowdy beach volleyball matches with his buddies, plus as many local golf outings as he can swing.

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES

Beyond his crazed schedule, a bad back also limits his tee times. A stunt that went wrong during his second stint as the Boy Wonder left him with a herniated disk. He has endured years of physical therapy and has tried everything to diffuse the pain, including kickboxing, Pilates, and yoga—which he now swears by, saying the practice is great for stretching tight back

muscles and strengthening his core.

He's also eating better. O'Donnell's weight would yo-yo 20 pounds, depending on his next acting gig, but as he got older, taking it off stopped being so easy. "I eat like a fifth grader," he says with amusement. "My wife looks at me and says, 'I don't know how you don't weigh 300 pounds.' I used to be able to get into great shape within a month of taking on a new role, but no longer. So I met with this nutritionist, Derek Johnson. I already knew how to eat well, but Derek got me on these cleanses. Not the kind where you sip fluid with maple syrup or some crazy thing. These are two weeks, eliminating caffeine, sugar, alcohol. You have two protein shakes



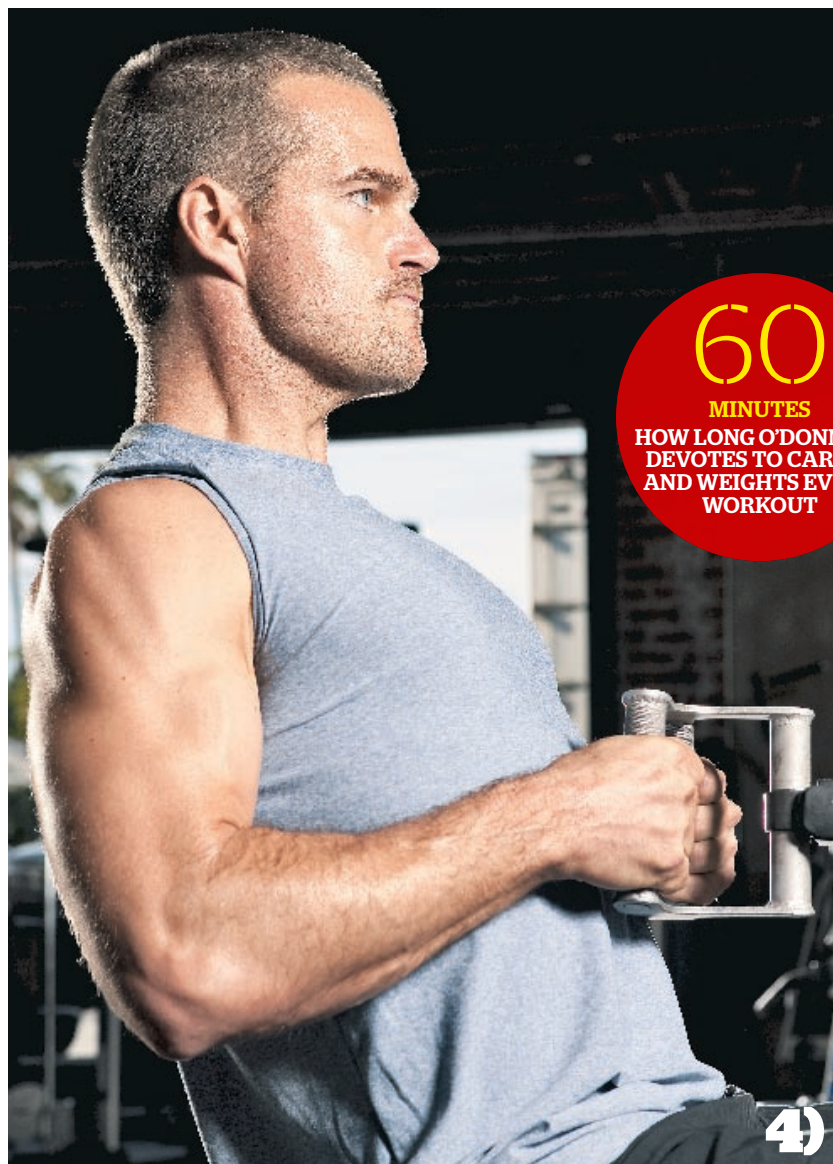


● O'Donnell keeps his training versatile with a mix of strength exercises, including the chest press (1), medicine ball throws for abs (2), stretching for improving his hip mobility (3), and cable pulls (4). Above, with co-star LL Cool J.

a day, a snack, and one sensible meal. When you finish, you feel so good.”

This detox program also helps battle the other downside of turning 40: slower recovery. “I don’t bounce back as I used to,” O'Donnell says, laughing. “If I have a big night out now, it has to be on a Friday because I need the entire weekend to recover. It’s just not worth it!”

O'Donnell's new fitness emphasis is most crucial for his biggest role: father. “I’m not here to be Mr. Olympia,” he says. “I’m your average guy trying to keep my body in good condition so I can still do the things that I love. I don’t want to give up sports. I want to move around with my kids and play football in the backyard. [But] I’ve gotta condition myself!” **MF**



60

MINUTES

**HOW LONG O'DONNELL
DEVOTES TO CARDIO
AND WEIGHTS EVERY
WORKOUT**

4)



THE REGULAR GUY'S PLAN

Derek Johnson, a nutritionist and founder of New Metabolism in Santa Monica, Calif., specializes in cleaning up his clients' lives. “I have some easy rules you should follow daily to clear your body of toxins, reduce risk of disease, and improve your sleep. You might drop a few pounds, too.”

DEREK'S ESSENTIALS

- 1▶** Eat something within 45 minutes of getting up. It's the best way to kick-start your metabolism.
- 2▶** Sit while you eat. It'll ease digestion and help you get the most out of your meals.
- 3▶** Avoid sugar wherever you can. It leads to plummeting insulin levels, increased fatigue, and cravings.
- 4▶** Never go more than five hours without eating a small meal—key word “small”—unless you're sleeping. A healthy metabolism needs fuel.
- 5▶** Drink more water. You need at least 64 to 80 ounces of H₂O daily.
- 6▶** Spend at least 15 minutes in the sun each day. The only way to get all the vitamin D your body needs is through direct sunlight.
- 7▶** Get eight hours of sleep a night. Study after study shows the damage that comes from skimping on shut-eye.
- 8▶** Exercise! Enjoy fitness in all its forms. Lifting. Cardio. Sports. Outdoor adventure. Mixing up your activity will help to keep you healthy and energized and help ensure that your system is running in peak condition.