

# When Less is More:

## Capt. Pendergrass Gets Fit to Save a Life

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Call him Captain Fitness: a 53-year-old Navy Reserve captain who drastically changed his life and shed half his body fat for the opportunity to win \$1 million as part of an international fitness contest. But Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) Denver Commander Capt. Russ Pendergrass wasn't motivated by money. The real goal: saving his son's life.

Capt. Pendergrass, of Highlands Ranch, Colo., entered the Body-for-Life Challenge, run by the fitness company EAS, Inc., as a way to lose weight so he could donate part of his liver to his ailing son, Michael. Michael was born with biliary atresia, a congenital condition in which bile flow from the liver to the gallbladder is blocked, leading to liver damage and cirrhosis of the liver. According to doctors, it is likely that Michael will require a liver transplant in the future. And while dad was a willing donor, his 240-pound, 44-inch-waist body wasn't up to transplant standards.

When Capt. Pendergrass learned that Michael and his wife were expecting a child, he got serious about slimming down. "I could picture my grandson being raised without a father," he said. Consequently, in July 2005, Capt. Pendergrass entered the fitness contest. At that time, his body fat was 24 percent — a body fat percentage of 25 or above is considered obese. In 12 weeks, he lost 30 pounds, knocked eight inches off his waist and slashed his body fat in half, he said. He attributed the bulk of his success to a strict new diet that banishes bread

and sugar. The dietary changes, in which he ate six healthy meals per day were "the most challenging aspect of the program," confessed Capt. Pendergrass. "The workouts consumed only a total of four hours a week. Exercising constraint and discipline in my eating habits consumed 16 hours a day."

In addition to getting into transplant-worthy shape, his storied transformation helped make him one of six fitness finalists. Though the contest winner was 33-year-old Aaron Ferguson of New South Wales, Australia, Capt. Pendergrass has won something, too. "I am stronger and healthier than I was when I was a college jock at 21. At 53, that's saying a lot," said Capt. Pendergrass. "There is a newfound freedom in liking what you see when you look at yourself in the mirror. Money can't buy that kind of freedom." And, best of all, Capt. Pendergrass knows that he is in the best shape to help his son: "I know that if I get the call, my liver is the right size for Michael."

You can view Capt. Pendergrass' success story at: <http://www.bodyforlife.com/challenge/vote.asp?voteId=2>. To learn more about the Body-for-Life Challenge, go to: <http://www.bodyforlife.com/challenge/index.asp>.



**(Above)** DCMA Denver employees, from left: Mr. John Mavis, Navy Reserve Capt. Russ Pendergrass, Ms. Karen Cleaves and Mr. Henry Noble (Photo by Ms. Catherine McConchie, DCMA Denver)