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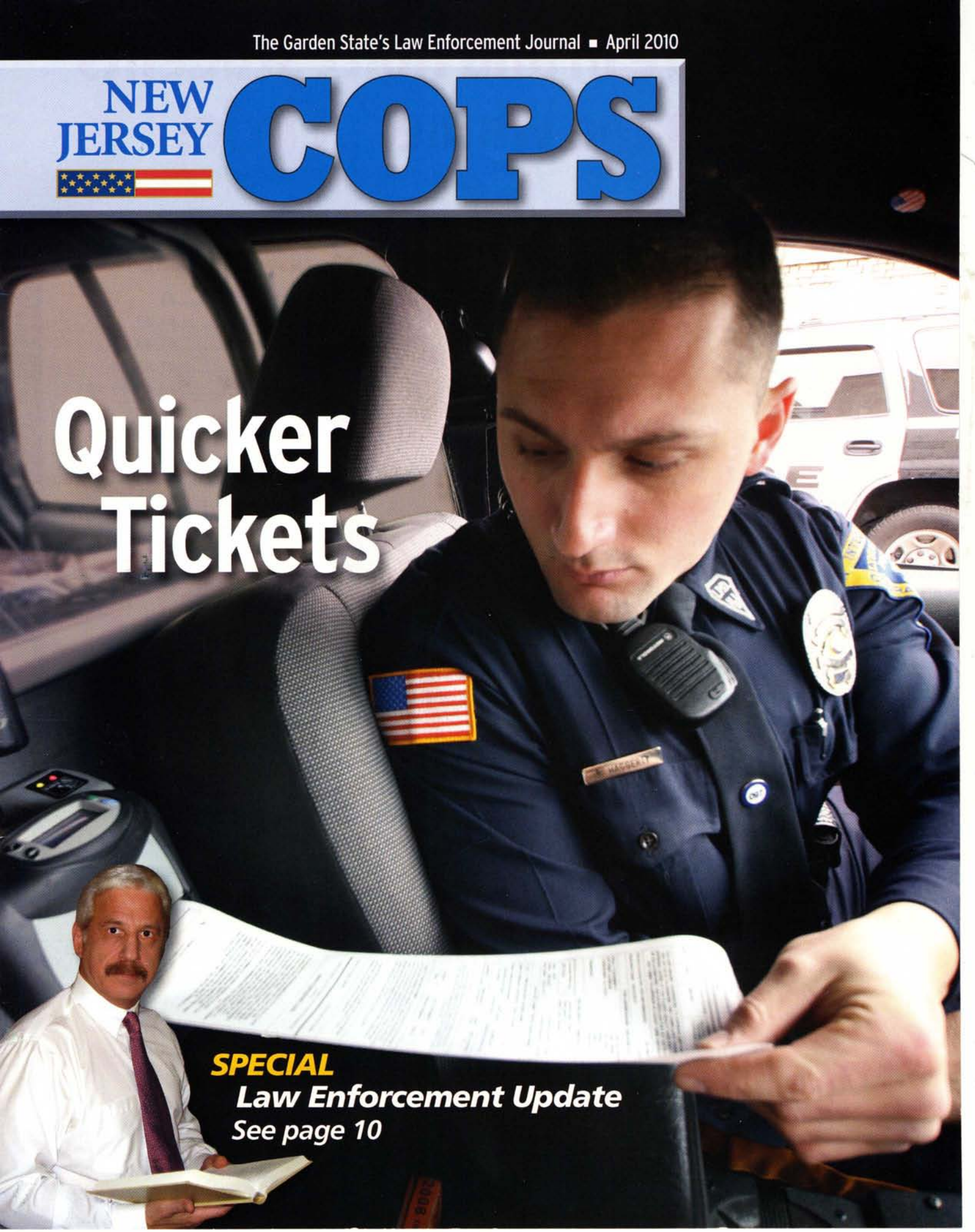
NEW JERSEY COPS

Quicker Tickets



SPECIAL
Law Enforcement Update
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Weight gain with aging

BY MATT BRZYCKI

For the moment, imagine that there's a 35-year-old police officer who graduated from the academy 10 years ago. Back then, he was in the best shape of his life. Since then, it has been increasingly harder for him to exercise. In addition, it has been increasingly easier for him to overeat. Yet, he just stepped on his bathroom scale and it showed that he only gained 10 pounds in those 10 years. The officer figures that adding an average of one pound per year doesn't seem all that bad. So why do the six-pack abs that he once sported now look like a 15.5-gallon keg?


Matt Brzycki

DYNAMICS OF WEIGHT GAIN

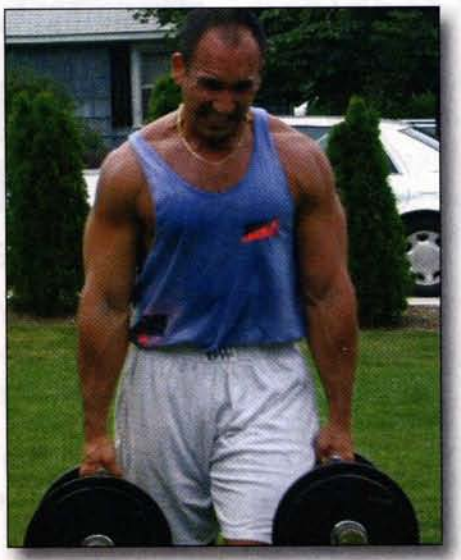
At this point, let's talk about the dynamics of how an increase in weight occurs. Two factors have a direct impact on your potential to gain weight: Expending calories and consuming calories. If you expend more calories than you consume, your weight will decrease; if you consume more calories than you expend, your weight will increase; and, of course, if you expend the same number of calories that you consume, your weight will remain the same.

The officer exercised less thereby decreasing the number of calories that he expended. And the officer ate more thereby increasing the number of calories that he consumed. Doing either one of these can be problematic; doing both of these can be catastrophic. He did both.

A CLOSER LOOK

What happened in this hypothetical situation is actually quite common. But there's more to the story than meets the eye.

Wayne Westcott, Ph.D., the Fitness Research Director at Quincy College and a consultant/lecturer/trainer for the Police Academy Directors of Massachusetts, states, "Most people gain about 10 pounds of weight per decade. However, the 10-pound gain in weight is from a 5-pound loss in muscle mass and a 15-pound gain in body fat."



Let's return to the 35-year-old officer and see how this comes into play. Suppose that a decade ago, at the age of 25, he was 180 pounds and his percentage of body fat was 10 percent. This means that he had 18 pounds of fat mass and 162 pounds of fat-free mass.

And now, at the age of 35, the scale shows that his weight has increased by 10 pounds to 190. But it's really a 20-pound change as his fat mass has increased by 15 pounds (to 33 pounds) and his fat-free mass has decreased by 5 pounds (to 157 pounds) meaning that his percentage of body fat is nearly 17.4 percent.

If we extrapolate these numbers for another decade, at the age of 45, the scale would show that his weight increased by another 10 pounds to 200. But it would really be another 20-pound change as his fat mass will increase by 15 pounds (to 48 pounds) and his fat-free mass will decrease by 5 pounds (to 152 pounds) meaning that his percentage of body fat would be 24 percent.

So in a matter of 20 years, the officer would be 20 pounds heavier but it's really a 40-pound change: He'll have 30 more pounds of fat mass and 10 less pounds of fat-free mass. In effect, his percentage of body fat would more than double, going from 10 percent to 24 percent.

A SOLUTION

The real villain here is the decrease in muscle mass. Losing muscle mass slows down the metabolic rate (the rate at which you use calories). "When the metabolic rate slows down," says Dr. Westcott, "calories that were previously used by muscle tissue are now routed into fat storage."

How can you put the brakes on the inevitable decrease in muscle mass and increase in body fat?

First, do more physical training, especially strength training. Of all types of physical training, strength training represents the best way to increase muscle mass and decrease body fat. As a result, your body composition and appearance will improve. Strength training is also the best way to increase muscular strength and that, of course, can be a valuable commodity for a police officer.

Second, reduce the number of calories that you eat. Let's face it: Most of us aren't as active as we were when we were younger. That alone suggests that we need to consume fewer calories in order to manage our weight more effectively.

THE BOTTOM LINE

As you get older, it's natural for you to lose muscle mass and gain body fat. But by engaging in a regular program of strength training, you'll be able to slow down the increase in weight that's associated with aging.

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