

## KIRKUS REVIEW of How To Be a Durable Human

A wide-ranging self-help guide explores the potential perils of the modern sedentary, screen-obsessed lifestyle and offers tips for achieving resilient health and memory.

Madden (*The Durable Human Manifesto*, 2013), a member of the National Association of Science Writers and the Society of Environmental Journalists, warns that with their current dependence on technology, humans are not only losing muscle mass and memory, but also opening themselves up to the possibility of being superseded by robots. She calls her proposed solution the “Triple Crown of Durability”: self-reliance, genuine relationships, and curiosity. According to the author, the barriers to healthy development are considerable, ranging from the metabolic diseases associated with a sedentary lifestyle to the eye strain caused by frequent screen use. She also frets over the energy emitted by Wi-Fi-enabled devices, which she rather whimsically refers to as “The Glow.” A possible association between cellphone use and cancer remains controversial, but a few high-profile cases have made it at least seem prudent to use hands-free devices whenever possible and not store cellphones and tablets on one’s person. Luckily, this book is not all doom and gloom: rather than leaving it at plain scaremongering, it lists straightforward mitigation strategies at every turn. Madden enumerates simple ways to add more walking and standing to each workday and suggests that cutting time with gadgets by spending more moments outside contributes to better health and sleep, especially for children. Many problems boil down to having an overloaded brain, she explains, so mindfulness and decompression through music, conversation, or exercise are essential. Anecdotes and everyday metaphors help to drive the lessons home. For instance, Madden was forced to pay better attention when she fell off her folding bike because she didn’t secure the handlebars properly. She deftly equates sleep to the body performing a thorough cleanup of its systems like a dishwasher and compares working memory to an often leaky bucket. Sometimes the book seems overly indebted to opinions and quotations from other authors, but that doesn’t significantly detract from how useful a compendium of knowledge it should prove to be.

An all-too-relevant and eminently practical book that offers health strategies in a gadget-packed world.