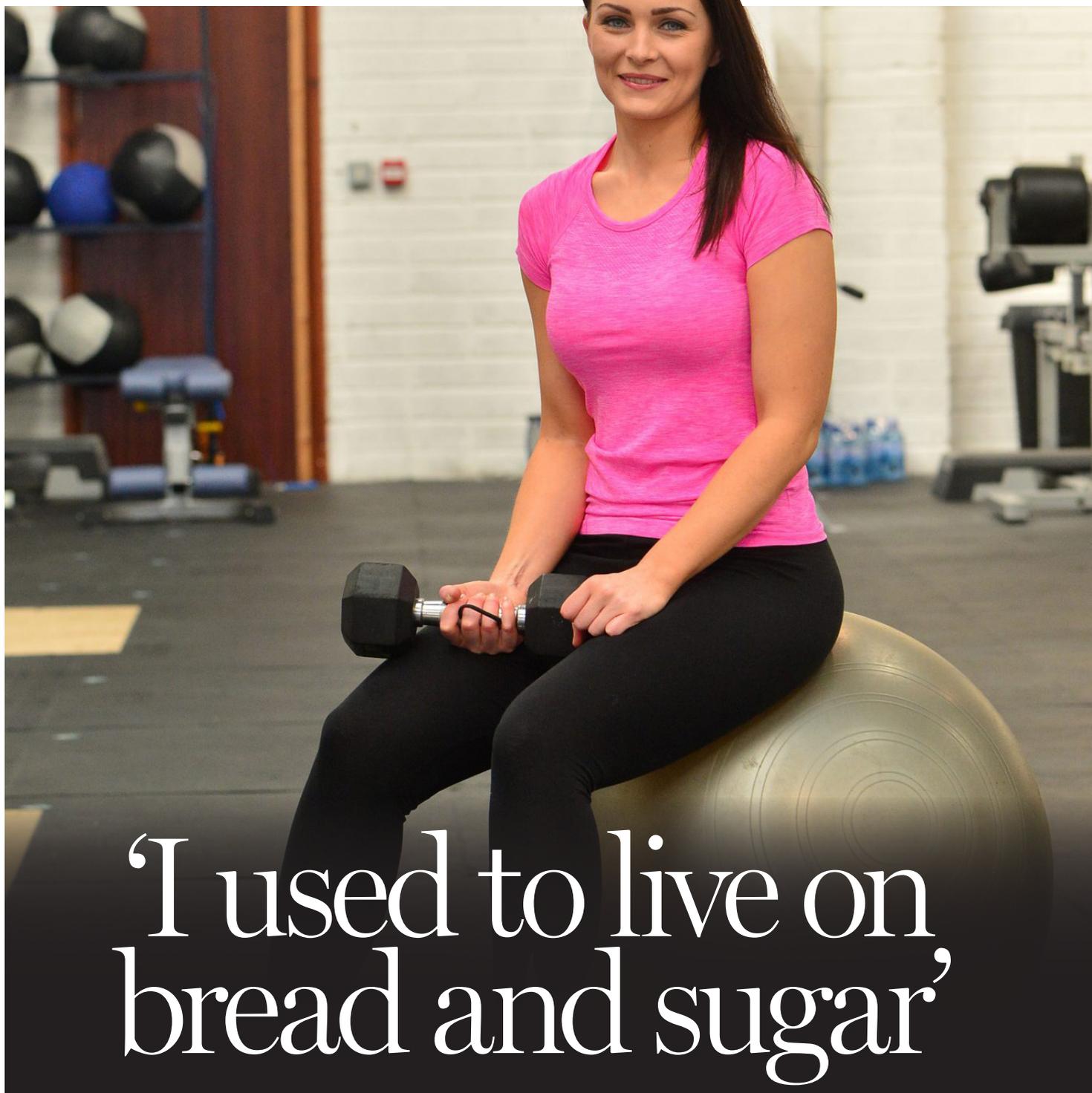


Health & fitness

Dublin Life



'I used to live on bread and sugar'

UNTIL recently, I had always read stories about fitness transformations with one eye open if I am truly honest: both enthralled and appalled by the notion of spending any great amount of this precious life 'going to extremes'.

Instead, I choose to not go anywhere at all for a very long time – the comfortable option, where it was perfectly acceptable for me to have a Twix for breakfast, drink coffee all day and spend my evenings eating toast.

If you had asked me at the start of all of this what my diet was like, I would have told you that I was pretty healthy – aside from the odd pizza, McDonalds, Chinese or fancy meal out, followed by one or two (okay, more like five) glasses of wine.

The truth is, I ate like a hungover student most days of the week. I loathed exercise so much that I had reached the age of 29 without ever buying a proper tracksuit and I drank to excess whenever I indulged.

My attitude to my health was as immature as my sense of humour,

TRANSFORMATION

After just 16 weeks of training and eating healthily, bride-to-be **Joanna Kiernan** has totally transformed her physique

but thankfully, it seems that at least one of those things can be remedied.

Sixteen weeks into my new healthy lifestyle, I am eating more than ever before, with three square meals a day and healthy snacks. In cutting out most carbs (bread, pasta, rice, potatoes) and sugar (from two spoons in each coffee, generally accompanied by a biscuit, to zilch) and training regularly, I have lost over three kilograms and decreased my body-fat percentage by 5.7pc – from 24.9pc at the beginning to a lean 19.2pc.

I am now the strongest, fittest and the most confident I have ever been in my body.

Has it been difficult? Of course, but not half as difficult as I anticipated it would be.

Once the sugar cravings abated, my head became genuinely clearer

than it has ever been. A few weeks in, I even noticed my attitude to food changing to a point where I could treat myself without splurging completely – finally finding a happy medium.

It has been a slow and steady process under the watchful and expert guidance of Niall Munnely and his team at the Performance and Fitness Academy in Naas, Co Kildare – no gimmicks, no fancy fads, just eating and training well, with a huge emphasis from Niall on making sure that the mental side of the process was not ignored.

CRAZE

I had previously tried to get fit and healthy on my own many times, spurred on more by spasms of motivation than any sort of sustained or

decisive effort. I would try the latest fitness craze (as long as it didn't look too scary) and I regularly attempted any new celebrity diet I heard of (at least until lunchtime).

The messages out there about fitness and nutrition, particularly in this internet age, are fast, furious and confusing. They can be so overwhelming, in fact, that they can put a lot of us off the entire area.

We begin to see fitness and healthy eating as extreme, as beyond our reach. Instead of taking action, we sit around berating ourselves for not having the willpower to get fit, when all we are really lacking is a little focus and calm. As Niall says: "It is not rocket science – your body is a very efficient machine, if you just treat it properly."

Perhaps, the best lesson I have learned throughout this process has been this: it doesn't have to be complicated, you simply ignore all of the white noise and put one foot in front of the other.

For years, I sat on the fence, aware of what I could or should do, but

TURN OVERLEAF

Top 5

THESE TOP FIVE OILS ARE NOT ONLY GREAT FOR THE KITCHEN, THEY HAVE BEAUTY BENEFITS TOO

Vita Coco Coconut Oil 500ml

€13.99 www.tesco.ie

Coconut oil is a popular alternative to most cooking oils, thanks to its unusual flavour, cooking durability and can even be used as a beauty product. Vita Coco's organic coconut oil is perfect for frying and even works as an addition to your morning smoothie or coffee. Vita's oil can also be used as a moisturiser, skin cleanser, mouthwash and hair conditioner.



Clearspring Organic Avocado Oil

€12.15 www.nourish.ie

Organic and sourced from Chile, Clearspring's oil is ideal for the kitchen and for moisturising your skin too. Besides its great skin properties, the smooth flavour of Clearspring makes it ideal for numerous dishes. This organic oil can be used for deep-frying, baking and salad dressings.



Finest Argan Oil

€ 17.99 www.thehealthstore.ie

Argan oil is mostly used as a hair and skin product, but has culinary properties too. The culinary version of Finest Argan Oil has a distinct nutty flavour and rich texture. High in vitamin E and omega, the oil works as a component in salad dressings, roasted vegetables and even as a bread dip. Finest Argan Oil beauty range moisturises the skin, provides UV protection and even revitalises damaged hair.



Scarlett&Mustard Pure Pumpkin Seed Oil

€15 www.marksandspencer.ie

Ideal for unheated preparations like salad dressings, dips and marinades, this even works over vanilla ice cream. Pumpkin oil is a rich source of vitamins A and E, as well as omega-3 and zinc, which can strengthen hair and revitalise skin. It also contains phytosterols, which fight bad cholesterol and helps keep the bladder healthy.



Primadonna Extra Virgin Olive Oil 750 ml

€3.29 www.lidl.ie

Primadonna's olive oil is not only affordable, but can also be used in salad dressings and for shallow frying too. While it's ideal for various dishes, it's great for another practice known as oil pulling. Oil pulling is an oral hygiene practice, where you swirl a teaspoon of the oil around in your mouth for 15 minutes once a day to help clean and re-mineralise teeth, and even nourish and remove toxins present in the mouth. Oil pulling is best practiced in the morning before eating.



GRAINNE COYNE

TRANSFORMATION

Farewell fad regimes, hello lifestyle change

FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

unable or unwilling to drag myself up and actually do it. I wasn't majorly bothered about the prospect of being a waif and by pure luck, I was not overweight, so I slipped through the cracks. I had an easy enough ride with a few minor body-images woes en route.

However, shopping for a wedding dress soon cured my apathy. By the time I decided upon my dress in the ninth shop we visited (there was generally an entourage), I had spent so much time looking at myself critically in those giant mirrors, it felt like there was very little about my body left that I actually liked.

There were no happy tears when I found the dress, just blank relief accompanied by a feverish



'There were no happy tears when I found the dress, just blank relief and a feverish desire to tone up'

apart from getting through it. And in that, there is amazing peace.

Of course, there are minor moments of panic from time to time in which I worry about silly things like sweat marks, whether or not my leggings are transparent or if my post-session jelly legs will get me to my car, but the majority of the time, my mind is quiet and my body dutifully works away.

desire to tone up.

Thankfully, rather than finding my way into one of those gyms where they get you in, burn you out and make you feel inadequate in the process by screaming in your face, I found my way to a place which turned out to be the very opposite.

It has certainly not been easy, but unlike anything else I have ever tried — from yoga and guided meditation to jogging and run of the mill machine-based gyms — at the Performance and Fitness Academy, there is no room for wandering thoughts, no space for fear or bad moods. My body leads and my mind follows on, unable to think of anything really during that sacred hour,

Follow Joanna's fitness journey at Fit4aBride.wordpress.com
Check out The Performance and Fitness Academy on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/The-Performance-and-Fitness-Academy-257985114224163
And Twitter: @TPFacademy

TOMORROW...EXPERT DAVID CAREY ON DEALING WITH NIGHT TERRORS

Is banning lie-ins the secret to good sleep?

It's winter and those weekend lie-ins are tempting. But an expert explains to **Kate Whiting** why they can do more harm than good

WELLBEING

LET'S face it, most of us could do with getting a bit more sleep, right? Thank goodness for the weekends, when we can snatch a couple more hours of shut-eye (if we're lucky!), and make up for those missed Zzzzs during the week.

The clocks went back an hour at the weekend and those long, dark mornings make staying in bed even more tempting.

Except, according to many experts, that's not how it works. In fact, not only does an occasional lie-in not make up for a lack of sleep on other nights, but hitting the 'snooze' button could be making things worse, and we'd be far better off waking up at the same time every day, seven days a week.

WHY IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ROUTINE

"We should aim to stick to a good routine at least most of the time, and the phase before midnight is important," says Dr Nerina Ramlakhan, Silentnight sleep expert and author of *Tired But Wired: How To Overcome Sleep Problems: The Essential Sleep Toolkit*.



Dr Nerina Ramlakhan

And that routine isn't just about what time our head hits the pillow and we actually close our eyes — what we're doing in the lead up to bedtime can be important, too, if we're to properly benefit from a deep, restorative sleep.

"Our circadian timer [the sleep clock in the brain] runs on a rhythm which functions optimally when it works to a regular routine," Ramlakhan adds.

"This rhythm is influenced by the light/dark levels, which then influence the amount of [sleep hormone] melatonin we produce.

"Too many people in today's busy world try to work against this rhythm, spending too much time in front

of screens. The blue light from the devices and the dopamine-induced alertness both disrupt the clock mechanism."

HOW SLEEP CYCLES WORK

We sleep in 90-minute cycles. Each cycle consists of five phases: light sleep, which is phase one and two; deep sleep, which is phase three and four; and REM sleep, which is phase five.

"Phases one and two are the preparation for the deep sleep phases. Deep sleep is what we all need, as it heals body, mind and spirit," explains Ramlakhan.

"REM sleep is when we dream and sort out our mental 'filing cabinets', which is important for learning, memory consolidation and ability to focus and concentrate."

SHOULD WE BANISH WEEKEND LIE-INS?

Of course, routine means, well, sticking to a pattern, and your body clock isn't going to make allowances for breaking that routine at the weekend.

With this in mind, Ramlakhan does advise that long Sunday morning lie-ins are best avoided. But, she adds, we'd be less reliant on them to help us catch up on energy



if we had a good sleep routine in the first place.

Ever wake up shortly before your morning alarm is due to go off? Yet more proof that our brain's like routine when it comes to successful slumber.

"Getting into regular habits does neurologically programme the mind, making it easier to pre-empt our alarm call," says Ramlakhan, who notes that too much sleep can be bad for us too, and it's not just a lack of sleep we need to be careful of.

'People who oversleep are more likely to follow poor dietary patterns, exercise less and suffer mental health problems'

"It causes sluggishness and fatigue and can also lead to weight gain, digestive problems and other health problems, due to secondary effects," she explains. "Additionally, people who oversleep are more likely to follow poor dietary patterns, exercise less and even suffer mental health problems."

To strike the perfect balance, start getting into a sleep routine which involves going to bed well before midnight, rising at a similar time each day and not lazing in bed just because you can.

Dinner dash

SPEEDY SALMON BURGERS / SERVES 4



YOU WILL NEED:

- 4 boneless, skinless salmon fillets, about 550g/1lb 4oz, cut into chunks
- 1 shallot, finely chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 2 tbs Thai red curry paste
- Thumb-size piece fresh ginger, grated
- 1 tsp soy sauce
- Bunch of coriander, chopped
- 1 tsp vegetable oil

METHOD:

Place the salmon in a food processor with the red curry paste, ginger, shallots, garlic, soy and chopped coriander. Process until the mixture is roughly minced.

Shape the mixture into four burgers. Then, after heating the oil in a non-stick frying pan, cook the burgers for five minutes on each side, until crisp.

Serve alongside sweet potato wedges or boiled baby potatoes and a green salad.

TOMORROW... AMANDA BRUNKER'S TAKE ON PARENTING

Sitting all day in work? Here's how to get more active in the office



EXERCISE

MANY people today tend to lead a sedentary lifestyle. This is defined by people who do little or irregular exercise.

Working hard during the day can leave us too tired in the evenings to get out and get exercise, but there are a few things you can do during your working day to help increase your activity levels.

For some, the majority of the day

is spent sitting down: eight or more hours at a desk at work, followed by sitting during the commute home and then watching a bit of TV in a seated position.

If we want to get out in the evening and get some activity for our bodies, it's important to keep mobile during the day — it will help reduce any injuries later that night. Sitting for hours tightens and stiffens the body. To then ask the body to move can present a challenge for it and, at times, result in pain.

There are also long-term risks of constant sitting. True, short bouts

of sitting can allow the body to rest and rejuvenate, however, doing it all the time behind your computer screen at work, or on your couch at home, will ultimately hurt the mind and body.

Leading such an inactive lifestyle can lead to long-term problems as we age and resulting common issues include pain in our lower back, knees, joint and also neck pain. We can help combat all of these ailments by adding some activity and mobility to our daily lives.

I've made a list of some ways you can get active while you're in the workplace:

'If your workplace is near a park, why not change the setting of your meeting to that park to get some fresh air and stretch the legs'

WORKPLACE WORKOUTS:

- Go to the bathroom on a different floor of your office block
- Always take the stairs, not the lift
- Stand and walk around when taking a call on your mobile
- Introduce 'walk and talk' meetings. If your workplace is near a park, why not change the setting of your meeting to that park to get some fresh air and stretch the legs
- Make sure you get up from your desk every 30-40 minutes and spend a few minutes walking around to stretch the legs
- Keep drinking water, this

hydrates you and forces you to get up and walk to the bathroom

- Get out of the office on your lunch break, give your mind a rest with a short walk
- Do some stretches in your chair — stretch the hamstrings, arms and hips
- Be aware of your back posture — stop slouching
- Roll your foot on a tennis ball or a golf ball while standing.

