

# YOU BETTER SHAPE UP

Unlikely gym bunny *Gabrielle Lane* embarks on a quest to improve her fitness with the MPH Method and shares tips for those looking to change their lifestyle in 2015

**M**y name is Gabrielle, I'm a size 8 and I eat pasta five times a week. If you have ever found yourself wondering if the tomato sauce for your fusilli constitutes one of your recommended five-a-day portions of fruit and vegetables, this feature is for you. *The Guardian* newspaper would call me a Tofi (the acronym it has coined for people it believes are thin on the outside, fat inside); my friends call me 'lucky', but Matt Hodges, the personal trainer behind the MPH Method – and the man in charge of showing me exactly what it takes to be super fit – has some more illuminating reflections on our workouts.

"When I start with someone it's always important to get them to build strength so that we're able to carry on adding in high intensity workouts without risk of injury," he begins, rather innocuously enough.

"This is why we tackle some of the bigger movements first, which you quite rightly found hard. Also, with you personally, we were going to tackle the imbalances in your feet (especially the right foot) and the knock-on effect it had with your knees and your hips. You also had the task of battling through a lack of co-ordination." A natural-born sportswoman I am not.

Sent to investigate whether having a personal training and nutrition team really does mean 'we can all look like that' [cue popular celebrity image] and much more importantly, assess how feasible and worthwhile it is to make diet and exercise changes, I trained with Matt five times a week in December and haven't looked back. Under Matt's guidance the MPH Method offers a lifestyle overhaul and a huge amount of support to those with specific goals, whether it's former or current professional athletes seeking an improvement in performance, those desiring weight loss or members of the forgotten demographic – the average person who has lost sight of health and wellbeing under a pile of deadlines and 'life admin' and just wants to feel good.

In combination with a carefully tailored programme of strength and conditioning in the gym, clients also work with nutritionist and hormone coach Rosie Millen (more on this later), nutritionist Sonal

Shah, osteopath and physiotherapist Tim Allardyce and sports massage therapist Sarah Dewey to ensure that they start to look, feel and move well. The process gets results – but here's what I learnt along the way:

## 1. CHOOSE A PERSONAL TRAINER YOU LIKE

"The more training you do, the more benefit you'll get. No excuses," says Matt. Typically with the MPH Method, clients train four times a week for an hour per session. It sounds obvious enough but the key here is the psychological benefit, because the greater the impact you see, the more likely you are to persevere. What about those of us with busy schedules? "There are 168 hours in a week," says Matt. "You should be able to spare more than one of them."

As you're spending so much time with your Personal Trainer (PT), choose one that you like. Matt Hodges is used to training clients of all fitness levels at studios in Putney and St John's Wood; the latter has a good musical playlist and a 'fitness café' upstairs serving healthy food and smoothies (banana, honey, milk and spirulina). It's the little things that make a difference as you're striving for your 40th lunge.

## 2. THERE MIGHT BE A LESS OBVIOUS REASON YOU'RE NOT LOSING WEIGHT

"I originally set up the MPH Method because I wanted to offer the public the most scientific way of assessing their bodies and tailoring a training programme," says Matt. The team uses full body DEXA scanning (a sophisticated type of X-ray) to calculate levels of fat and lean muscle mass, giving the most accurate picture available as to what's going on inside you. Nutritionist Rosie Millen is also an expert on devising meal plans based on comprehensive hormone tests which are often undertaken at the beginning of the programme. Do you crave salt and carry your weight around the waist? You may have dysfunctional adrenal glands and abnormally high levels of cortisol.

## 3. YOU CAN'T OUT-TRAIN A POOR DIET

Whether or not there's a non-chocolate cake related cause for your body shape and fitness levels, Rosie is on hand to tailor dietary advice. If you're attempting to slim down and train regularly, the key is so eat more protein and fewer carbohydrates – and it's even more protein than you think. In my case, Rosie suggested that 40 per cent of my daily calorie intake came from protein, 30 per cent from carbohydrates and 30 per cent from healthy fats. Eating five small meals a day helps to keep energy levels up and blood sugar levels steady, which is even likely to improve the quality of your sleep.

## 4. DON'T FEAR WEIGHT TRAINING

One of the best things you can do to shape and tone your body is to hit the gym's weight room. This is where you should expect to spend most of your time, likely visiting the treadmills only for 'interval sprints' or short bursts of speed and rest over 10-20 minutes. "It's incredibly important to bust the myth that women become bulky if they lift too many weights," says Matt. "Women should think of using weights as a way of sculpting their curves and flattening out conditioned areas of their body." In practice this means varied circuits of kettlebells, dumbbells and step-ups with weights – and less visible sweating.

## 5. DON'T TRY AND FOCUS ON YOUR ABS

Sit-ups are not the most effective route to a washboard stomach. In fact, you can ditch them completely – if you're

working out in other ways. "Large compound (multi joint) exercises that recruit the abdominals like deadlifting, squatting, lunging and pull-ups (to name a few) work the abs in a much more functional way," says Matt. "That said, hanging knee raises and isometric exercises (holding positions like the plank) work like a dream for good ab strength."

Matt's sessions incorporate all of the above in circuit style rotations with a high number of repetitions. Lunges? That's 12 on each leg, three times over, with a little bit of monkey bar action in the middle. No joke. Matt Hodges is adamant that good personal training should aim to tone all muscle groups as part of a holistic package of physio and dietary support.

"If I can get a client to be balanced in a short amount of time – nutritionally, hormonally, and physically – then they will undoubtedly feel great and my job is done." ■

020 8748 0514  
themphmethod.com



Image courtesy of Nike