

MAYA NASSAR'S START LIVING RIGHT APP



By now, the story of Maya Nassar, Lebanon's first fitness bodybuilding and bikini competition champion, is relatively well known. As she recounts it, Nassar used to be overweight and felt insecure so she decided to take matters into her own hands and embark on a fitness journey based on her own extensive research on clean diets and weight loss programs. So she set out a personalised program which included both nutritional changes and working out six times a week under the supervision of a personal trainer. "I am proud that I did it myself and no one helped me. I was fascinated with the

subject and addicted to the results of feeling good, having energy and confidence and losing weight on a weekly basis," enthuses Nassar.

In three short months, Nassar had lost more weight than she'd originally planned to. Without wanting to stop there, Nassar challenged herself further by signing up to take part in a female body building competition. "I thought of trying it for the challenge and for the preparation training it would involve, not necessarily to win. Just being on the stage with the other girls would be like winning for me," says Nassar, explaining that since female bodybuilders are rare in Lebanon, she had to train alone and had no one to share her experiences with.

While training for the competition and even on her initial fitness journey, Nassar, who was always passionate about writing, recorded her experiences on her personal Facebook page. Towards the end of July 2013, she realized the positive feedback and fitness questions she had been getting from her friends online and decided to launch a fitness website called Start Living Right which would motivate and inspire those thinking of launching their own health and fitness programs. "There are a lot of scams regarding diet and fitness so I wanted to be very honest and provide simple, unbiased information for people. I don't have advertising and I am not trying to sell anything so I am not impartial," explains Nassar.

Nassar says the website did really well because a lot of users were writing to her saying that she had inspired them in their fitness journeys. The website now has 8,000 unique visitors. Because of the website's positive performance, Nassar decided to launch a mobile application with the same features of the website, including the calorie counter and the motivational articles but with a few additions such as the animated workouts divided into the body's muscle groups.

The application has 15,000 downloads so far and Nassar says she and her developers are working on a few more additions. 70 percent of Nassar's online clients are women, mainly from Lebanon and the Middle East, but she says she also has users from England, Russia, India and Turkey. The website and applications are slightly geared towards the Middle East in that the calorie counter includes food items which are common to this part of the world and not usually found in international calorie counter applications.

Nassar has no structured marketing but says that what has helped her gain exposure was being officially endorsed by the Lebanese Ministry of Sports to represent Lebanon in female bodybuilding competitions, garnering her a lot of media attention. "I wanted to do this to counter the stereotype of female bodybuilders as being very muscular and unfeminine which is not necessarily true," explains Nassar.

Nassar's journey in fitness does not stop here; the young health and fitness leader has plans to open her own gym soon. "My advantage is that I have a lot of followers, on both my website and application. Many of them contact me wanting to work with me but I don't have a physical location to help them. I plan to drive traffic from my website and application to my gym when it finally opens and use this as a physical location where I'll be able to help the people I've been thus far helping online."

It is clear that Nassar's heart really is in it. "For me, it's more about passion than work. It's something I enjoy doing," she concludes.