

GET FIT NOW

A certified Athlete, TV host and fitness entrepreneur, Maya Nassar is a health and fitness enthusiast who transformed her body and now wants to help others transform their lives as well. Interview by Talah Turk





Having dropped five dress sizes and lost 20 kilos, the half Lebanese half Dutch athlete earned her stripes with lots of hard work and determination. Nassar started her journey with some insecurities about the way she looked and grew to become a fitness expert who's helping other women cross that very same bridge to a healthier lifestyle.

What inspired you to ditch old habits and embrace a healthy lifestyle?

I had become overweight and extremely unhealthy. I used to feel very insecure about my body and would never walk around on the beach without covering up with a towel. None of my clothes fit me anymore and every few months my jeans size was getting bigger. After reaching a very low point, I realized that I am responsible for my own lifestyle and that I can do something to change for the better. I could be the girl who is insecure or I could be someone who is very fit, confident, and takes care of herself. I believe I would have

“I train five times a week with weights and do cardio approximately two to three times a week”

never reached where I am today if I did not have an unhealthy lifestyle.

What's your typical workout routine?

Right now I train five times a week with weights and do cardio approximately two to three times a week. If I am training for a fitness competition, I do cardio up to six times a week. I love lifting really heavy weights and pushing to my limits. Many women incorrectly believe that they will bulk up and become masculine from weightlifting but that is a myth. Women only become masculine when they take anabolic steroids.

What keeps you motivated?

Comparing my old lifestyle with my new lifestyle keeps me motivated. Even though there may be days where I want to cheat on my diet or skip the gym, I think about how rewarding a healthy lifestyle is and how good it makes me life. With my old

lifestyle I ate whatever I wanted and never did any exercise, but I felt terrible. With my new lifestyle I eat healthy food daily and exercise regularly and it makes me feel great.

What's your favorite exercise and what's your workout nightmare?

My favorite type of exercise is bodybuilding. I am a huge fan of training with heavy weights. I would say my workout nightmare is doing lots of cardio. I find it very boring and sometimes have difficulty breathing because I suffer from asthma. However, I always move at my own pace and listen to my iPod for motivation.

How do you keep your workout routine fun?

I keep my workout routines fun by constantly changing my program every month. Doing the same workout repeatedly can become very boring. I

keep on challenging myself by making the exercises harder and find it really satisfying when I see my body getting stronger. I also listen to uplifting music on my iPod and wear comfortable clothes when training.

Tell us about your experience competing internationally.

I started competing in bikini fitness competitions in 2013. After losing all the weight I had gained, I wanted to take things to the next level. I wanted to step on stage next to top fitness models and show off my best ever physique. I believe once you achieve one goal, you should immediately set another. My approach was that this was a challenge against me and myself. As long as I stepped on stage and entered the competition, then I would be a winner. However, I am extremely lucky to have won four trophies between this year and last year.

How do you prepare for bikini competitions and what's the biggest challenge?

I prepare by training hard and following a strict diet for three months. The biggest challenge is definitely the diet. I stop dining out and follow my diet to the letter. I have to measure my food and keep track of my calories. It can be extremely hard, especially if I watch friends and family eating bad food in front of me, but it is all worth it in the end. I always say you don't need to enjoy the hard work, you just need to crave the end result.

Tell us about your diet?

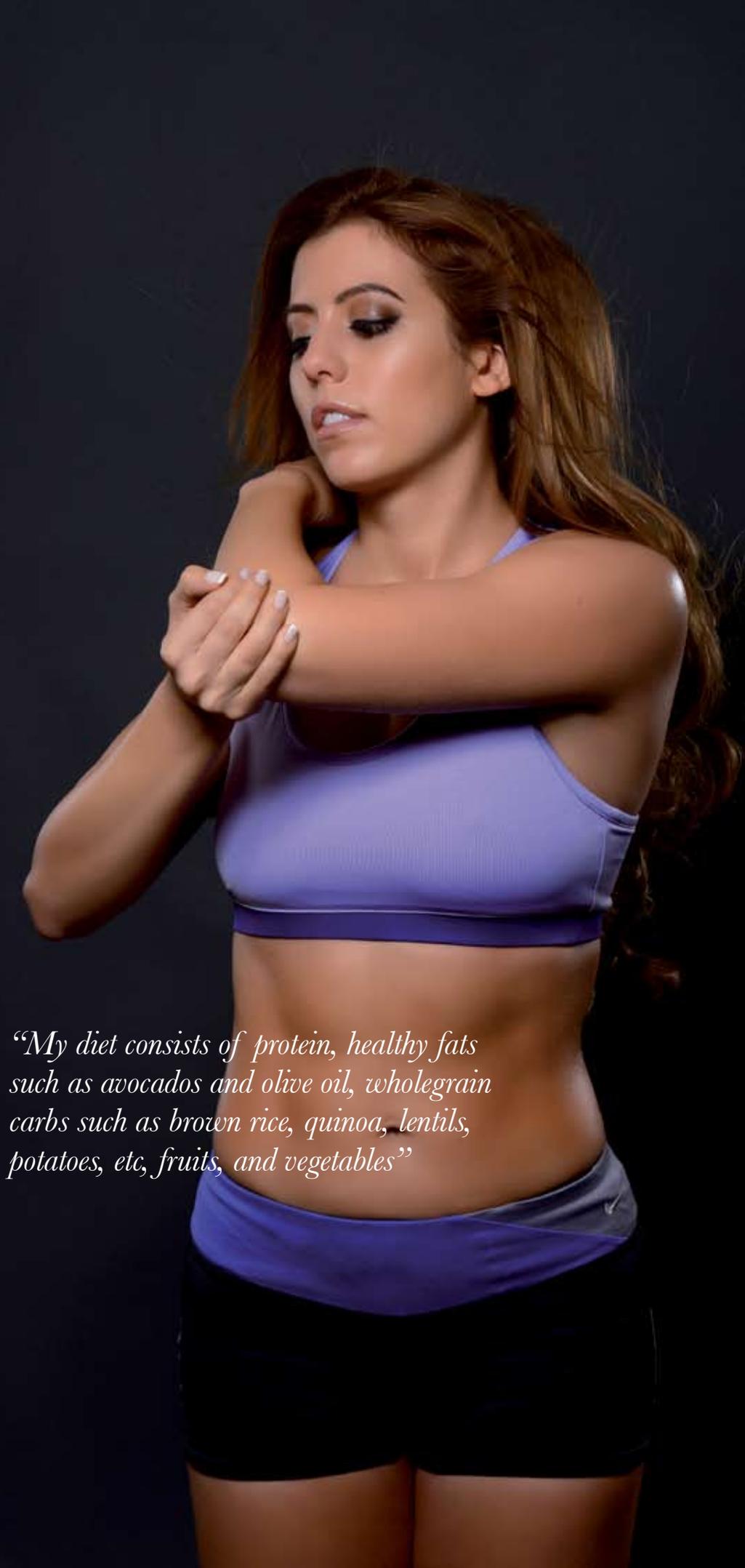
My diet consists of protein, healthy fats such as avocados and olive oil, wholegrain carbs such as brown rice, quinoa, lentils, potatoes, etc, fruits, and vegetables. Many women incorrectly believe that they need to eat very low calories or cut out carbs when they are trying to lose weight. This is extremely incorrect. When you are trying to lose weight, you should never starve yourself or do anything extreme such as cutting out food groups.

What's your favorite cheat meal?

Definitely Italian. I used to eat Italian every single day before I took on my healthy lifestyle. Every now and then I enjoy a nice big pasta dish and a pizza – with dessert!

Tell us about life on TV.

I started a new show on MTV which airs live twice a week called Get Fit. I present easy-to-do workouts that anyone can do at home using minimal equipment. It has been a really fun experience and it gives me pleasure to know that I am helping people exercise at home. Many people do not have access to a gym or simply cannot afford a gym membership and this is one way of helping them stay fit. People can watch me on MTV Lebanon at 10:00 am every Tuesday and Thursday.



“My diet consists of protein, healthy fats such as avocados and olive oil, wholegrain carbs such as brown rice, quinoa, lentils, potatoes, etc, fruits, and vegetables”



“I empower women through bodybuilding to help them feel strong, healthy, and feminine and to break the stereotype that weightlifting is for men only”

What’s your advice for people who can’t find the courage to take the first step towards a healthier lifestyle?

My advice to them is to believe in themselves enough to do it. It all boils down to how bad you want it. It is very easy to make excuses and say you don’t have time for exercise or that you are addicted to junk food. However, if you really believe in yourself and want to become fit, then nothing will stand in your way. When I trained for my first competition, I had a full-time job and used to wake up one hour earlier to train and sometimes would train during my lunch break or in the evenings. I also used to prepare my healthy food one day in advance and take it with me wherever I go. If I was very busy and had nowhere to eat my food, I have even had days where I ate in the car! If I can do it, then anyone else can do it too. I always say that health and fitness is a gift to yourself. It is up to the individual to make the time and to invest in themselves.

Tell us about your app Start Living Right.

I developed the first fitness mobile application in Lebanon called Start Living Right. It is a mobile version of my website startlivingright.com and it offers tools and information to help anyone reach their fitness goals. My application has been ranked number one by the Apple store and is endorsed by the minister of sports. My app has advice, workout routines, recipes, fat loss calculators, nutrition information, and much more. My website offers the same information including complete guides with diets and workout routines to help people lose weight. My mobile application is free and anyone can download it by searching for “startlivingright” from their smartphone stores. I created my website and app simply to help people. I wanted to help anyone like my old self who did not know what they needed to do or how to start.

What are your current goals?

My current goals are to continue competing internationally in bikini fitness and to inspire and change the lives of as many people as possible. I also have future plans to open my own gym.

What are some of your other hobbies or areas of interest?

I am a huge fan of traveling. My husband and I enjoy traveling to new cities and exploring foreign areas. I also enjoy giving talks or lectures about health and fitness to inspire as many people as possible.

Tell us about all the great work you do to help out those in need and support good causes.

I am a board member of the largest animal welfare NGO in the region called Animals Lebanon. I am a huge animal lover and do my best to raise awareness as much as I can. I also empower women through bodybuilding to help them feel strong, healthy, and feminine and to break the stereotype that weightlifting is for men only. ■