

PUMPED UP KICKS

She does give a 'squat' about fitness, meet Maya Souhail Nassar – Maalouf, a personal trainer, sports and nutritionist and a bikini model competitor.

Text: Atheena Wilson Photos: Maya Souhail Nassar- Maalouf



Years ago, I attended a party at Maya's house, 'weight' for it, her Dalmatian's birthday party. Her childhood passion for animals never faded, and now she's a board member of the NGO, Animals Lebanon. It's her resolute nature and passion that has catapulted her into her successful stature. Last year, in May, she competed in Pure Elite UK Championships and won first place. Handling a busy schedule, she's now prepping for the next bikini modeling championship. She's rising up to the challenge of trimming down: I was glad I could catch up with her for an uplifting interview.

A Listings Editor at Beirut Editor, and now you have become a bikini athlete, how did that journey happen?

Journalism was something I was passionate about my whole life, ever since I was a young child. I discovered

fitness in my twenties after gaining a lot of weight and then changed my lifestyle around to lose weight and become healthier. My transition from writer to athlete came through when a friend of mine told me about a bodybuilding competition in London, and I decided to compete. I had always been curious about taking my fitness to the next level and pushing to my limits, and I discovered I am just as passionate about bodybuilding as I am about writing.

How does it feel like pursuing something out of the box and representing yourself as an athlete for Lebanon?

It is something I am really proud of! There are very few women who do what I do here, so this can be quite challenging, especially if people do not understand why I do it. I also like to raise awareness about female bodybuilding because many women falsely believe weight lifting will make

them masculine or that it will make them lose their femininity.

Who are the few people who have inspired you to take such a big step in life?

My biggest inspiration in the fitness industry is a bodybuilder called Tom Venuto. He wrote a book that changed my life and made me believe in myself. I have networked with him online, and my goal is to meet him in person one day. My husband also inspires me to keep on doing my best. He is always supporting me and encouraging me to never give up. If not for him, I might not have entered my last competition in the UK, where I ended up winning first place. I also have a supportive family and best friends, who bring out the best in me and inspire me to keep on doing my best every day.

Your challenges during the Pure Elite UK Championships were?

The biggest challenge mentally was

following through with my diet. No matter how hungry I felt, I could not indulge and had to keep it up for three months nonstop. I am someone who has an enormous appetite and loves to eat, so this was particularly difficult for me. My biggest challenge physically was to keep on training while following a strict diet. I did not always have a lot of energy and had many days where I did not feel like going to the gym. I made it a point never to skip my workouts.

There must have been a few exercises you may have dreaded..

Definitely! I used to do high step ups on a box (above knee length) carrying a heavy barbell on my shoulders. It is one of the most amazing exercises for the lower body, but I absolutely hate it because of how difficult it is. I also dreaded doing squats because I used to lift heavy weights and found it really draining. Many people claim that they love squats, but I only like the results and hate the actual exercise.

How do you juggle such a busy lifestyle?

I juggle my lifestyle by prioritizing what is important and getting things done. I always train first thing in the morning to get my exercise out of the way and then to be more flexible for rest of the day. Exercising late in the afternoon means something might come up, and I might have to skip a workout. I also believe in doing something you are passionate about. One of my favorite quotes is, "If you enjoy what you do; you will never work a day in your life."

"I believe that changing someone's life or hearing that I inspired them is just as rewarding as achieving my own goals." What's your aim with your website, Start Living Right?

What started out as a hobby is turning out to be one of the greatest things I've done because people are telling me that I have changed their life or inspired them to become healthier. My website offers tons of articles, downloadable guides, meal plans,

exercise programs, fat loss calculators and more. I have also recently created a free downloadable mobile version of my website. It includes everything found on my site but also has animated exercise illustrations with instructions.

You mentioned, "People think exercise and eating healthy is a punishment, what they do not realize it's actually a reward." A few tips we should incorporate into our lives?

My first tip is to think about how good you will feel from exercising and eating healthy. It might be difficult to get started, but if you follow through for the first three weeks then it will become much easier and will eventually become a part of your routine. My second tip is that, anyone in this world can do it. There is nobody who is too old, too out of shape or too unfit to become a healthier version of themselves. Finally, remember fat loss is meant to be a very slow and gradual process. It can be frustrating to see someone lose weight much faster than you, but everyone is different, and no two people will ever be alike.

Being both a writer and sports nutritionist what are some things you learn from your readers and your clients?

I am constantly reminded of how difficult someone's journey is and I feel like I am able to help them because I have been there myself. I know just how challenging it is to change your life around. Other people teach me how to listen, how to guide them and to always do my best to be a good role model for them.

What would you have to say to all the women around the world?

I would tell other women to always stay strong and follow their dreams. There will always be negative people and obstacles that hold you back, but overcoming difficulties and staying



QUICKIES

An exercise that you love:
Deadlifts

Sports that you enjoy:
Tennis, swimming, and horse-riding

A book on your bed stand:
The Shadow of the Wind by Carlos Ruiz Zafón

A craving that's impossible to resist:
Chocolate cake

Your current workout music track:
Love Me Harder by Ariana Grande

positive is what will push you forward. I really believe there is nothing a woman cannot achieve if she believes in herself and works hard towards her goals. I also believe it is important to encourage and support other women. One of my favorite quotes is that 'strong people do not put others down, they lift them up.'