

# MOST FIT

HEALTH, CELEBRITY & LIFESTYLE

# NESS

Olympic Silver Medalist

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GLASS**

Internationally Published  
Photographer

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Padron**

ENTREPRENEUR,  
COMPETITIVE FITNESS MODEL  
& TV PERSONALITY

**MAYA  
NASSAR**

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with

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**Biani Xavier**

**Alex Carneiro**

Entrepreneur, Competitive Fitness Model & TV personality

# MAYA NASSAR

[www.startlivingright.net](http://www.startlivingright.net)  
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By Darcy Shep

*“There is something I can do to change for the better, and to become stronger, happier, and healthier.”*

This honest, pragmatic attitude is exactly why fitness celebrity and innovator, Maya Nassar has won the hearts of fans across not only Lebanon but the whole Middle East, establishing herself as a leader in an industry that has yet to take hold as strongly as it does in Europe and the U.S. As a certified trainer, nutritionist, and fitness model, Maya certainly has the credentials to advise anyone on living the fit life. At the 2015 Pure Elite UK Championships, she won second

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Carrie Bader  
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and third place trophies in fitness modeling and earned its most sought after prize: the People's Choice Award. The year before, Maya took home first in the Bikini category, and in May, 2015, she was selected as a brand ambassador for the international sports retailer, Decathlon.

**E**arning the People's Choice Award is a testament to Maya's ability to relate to all people from different walks of life, which stems from her multi-cultural background as a Dutch-Lebanese growing up in Africa and England. As the host of MTV Get Fit in Lebanon Maya lights up television screens each week with daily fitness solutions, exercise ideas, and motivation and inspiration for women regardless of their age or skill level. She is very conscious of what resources women have to work out with and uses creativity and her own expertise to help them achieve their goals. The toned, beauty hasn't always been this way though. It took reaching a point of major dissatisfaction at being overweight and unhealthy, in order for her to take on the challenge of living a healthy lifestyle and pursuing professional body building. Determining to make the change, no matter what it took, Maya shared her triumphs of self-transformation and her discoveries on her website, Start Living Right, which quickly amassed thousands of followers. Her admirable fitness journey and dedication to a sport that is not practiced in her country, got the attention of the media and people all over the Middle East. An endorsement from the Lebanese Ministry of Youth and Sports, was all it took to skyrocket her momentum.

What started out as just a hobby, quickly evolved into a career as an entrepreneur creating the first fitness app of its kind in Lebanon, modeled after her existing website and becoming a top ranked Apple download. Trailblazing the path for women all over Lebanon and throughout the Middle East to get fit and healthy, Maya is the personification of self-transformation. As a coach and motivational speaker, she has leveraged her story that is so akin to many others, to encourage and assist everyone in making a lifestyle change. How she does it herself? "I always try to establish an emotional connection to my goals," she says. With her dumb bells held high, Maya gives MOST Fitness her formula for living the right way.

**MFM:** You are of Dutch-Lebanese descent and were born in the U.S. and went to school in London, so you have a very multi-cultural background-how does this all play a part in your daily life?

**MN:** I would say it helps me better understand other people because I grew up in Africa, lived in England, lived in Lebanon, my mom is Dutch, and I have a U.S. passport and a Ghanaian passport from my grandmother. So I was exposed to different ways of thinking, and it made me very open minded. I can easily understand people, and I don't easily judge. I also love to be around people who are different than myself, and that way I manage to always be learning.

**MFM:** Is fitness very big in Lebanon? What is Lebanese women's favorite sport or form of workout in general?

**MN:** Fitness is becoming bigger; we don't really have bodybuilding here. It doesn't exist, especially for women, so if you want to do it you have to travel outside of Lebanon and outside of the Middle East. We are seeing more gyms open now though, and for most women their favorite form of exercise is cardio. Most incorrectly believe that weight lifting is going to make them masculine or bulky, or that the best way to lose fat is to go on the treadmill and not to lift weights. As a country, we are kind of catching up to the rest of the world in that regard, and so I really enjoy educating women and showing them that lifting is necessary.

**MFM:** You are an endorsed athlete by the Lebanese Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Lebanese minister has endorsed your app, "Start Living Right." How did it feel to get such high recognition in your country?

**MN:** It felt really great because I'm the first female bodybuilder in Lebanon to be endorsed by the government and recognized in a competition outside of Lebanon. It was really amazing, and it kick started my career. It was really a matter of approaching the minister, telling him my story, and asking for his endorsement.



When I had the official letter, I got a lot of media attention and TV and newspaper interviews; it helped me share my story with other people. It definitely made me more credible, and made people trust me more.

The actual idea came from my personal trainer, Bashar Dab, when I was training for my second body building competition. He told me, why don't you go to the minister? You are a female bodybuilder, and we don't have that in Lebanon. This is something new; ask him to endorse you, recognize your sport, and it

will be really good for you and for Lebanon. It will raise awareness that a woman can be a bodybuilder without being the typical idea of a super bulky bodybuilder. I was first endorsed as an athlete, and then later I created the first fitness application for Lebanon. The Minister gave a speech, and I had a press conference where I invited the media and the Minister and gave them a presentation of my app.

**MFM:** What was the process like for creating your app, and how is it different and more unique than other fitness apps out there?

**MN:** It's a mobile version of my existing website. I used to work as a journalist, so I love to write; writing is my passion. I started the website about fitness as a hobby when I first started training. I shared my training, workout videos, diets, and what I was all doing to get in shape. People had started asking me questions, so I created a free website where I gave free support and access to free information. The website started to do really well, and was averaging 8,000 visitors per month. I thought the next best thing would be to have a mobile app, so I expanded and added animated illustrations and applications. I figured this might be something more practical because not everyone will check a website every day, but they always have a phone in their hands. Also, when I started my fitness journey, I was very confused and very overwhelmed about the abundance of information available, so I desired to give back to people that were like myself, and guide them in what to do. There are a lot of scams out there, telling you to take diet pills, or use certain machines, so my website is free of advertising and gives unbiased advice.

**MFM:** You are a board member of NGO Animals Lebanon and an advocate for animal rights-did you have pets growing up, and how did you become passionate about that cause?

**MN:** I've always had pets my whole life. I grew up in Africa and Nigeria, and we had all kinds of pets including: dogs, cats, mini farm horses, ostriches, antelopes, and any kind of animal that you can imagine. I always really liked rescuing animals because unfortunately in Nigeria, animals are very mistreated. I love to take care of them, and rescuing them became my thing-no matter where I am or what country I am in. It is still legal to abuse animals in Lebanon, and we don't have animal protection laws. There are a lot of animals smuggled into the country. We are the largest NGO in the Middle East and one currently working to change the law in Parliament, and make it illegal to abuse animals.

Photo Credit: TBar Powell | [www.fitnesspower1.com](http://www.fitnesspower1.com)

**MFM:** What was your motivation or turning point that made you decide to quit being overweight and remodel your body and health?

**MN:** What happened was that I had never been a healthy person before, and I have zero background in fitness. I was leading a very unhealthy lifestyle, and never exercised or went to the gym. I ate poor food, and I used to suffer from very bad asthma and had difficulty breathing if I did any exercise. Also, as I got older, I kept gaining more and more weight because as you get older, your metabolism starts to drop. My jeans didn't even fit anymore! I realized that if I continued down this road, I knew I would be very unhappy. My wake-up call came when I realized I'm responsible for my own life; it does not have to be this way. There is something I can do to change for the better, and to become stronger, happier, and healthier. It was reaching that low point that really woke me up.

**MFM:** As the host of *MTV Get Fit*, twice a week, how do you prepare for each show that will be featuring you and your workout routines on camera?

**MN:** In the beginning it was quite difficult because I wasn't used to hosting, even though I've done interviews before. Plus, my show is live and not edited, so if I make any mistakes, it is broadcasted all over the Middle East and Lebanon. I practice every evening in the mirror, and speak in both Arabic and English. I'm taking lessons to improve and work on my accent because they want me to speak a lot of Arabic. As for my exercises, if something I enjoy doing, so if I see one in the gym, I'll take note. I watch YouTube videos, write down ideas, talk to trainers, watch fitness shows, and anything that inspires me. I put together easy-to-do, at-home workouts,



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Carine Badr  
[www.instagram.com/carinebadr](http://www.instagram.com/carinebadr)



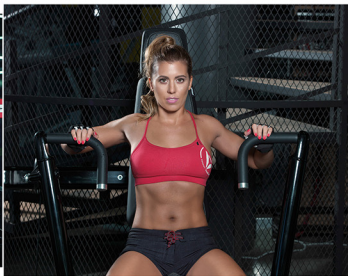
that are designed for the whole body. A lot are at home and for people who don't have access to the gym or have minimal equipment. For example, if you don't have dumbbells, you can use water bottles instead. So I really try to create a way for anyone to work out as gym equipment can be expensive. Also, I make my routines not too hard, and they are more beginner to intermediate. For people who are more advanced, there are options for making them harder, so they are suitable for all levels and all ages. The routines especially target women, and ones who may be elderly, or are beginners, and they are as effective and useful and easy to do using minimal equipment.

**MFM:** You have won first place and second and third awards at the Pure Elite UK Championships and one of the best ones- "The People's Choice Award," what made you stand out to everyone in your opinion that resulted in your win?

**MN:** That is a good question. I guess first of all, it is maybe the fact that I'm natural; I haven't taken any steroids, so I have a very feminine look. I do not have a hard, lean physique, but rather I'm very curvy. The audience votes for one overall male and one overall female winner, and there were more than 300 athletes and more than 200 women. My friends all believe I won this award because I have a very feminine look, whereas



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others take steroids and can look a bit masculine. I would say that's it, and then to smile a lot, be yourself, be confident, show off your personality, and above all else, have fun! My attitude is that I'm going to have a good time, and that it will still be a great experience no matter what happens. Many girls cry if they don't win, and I see them coming off the stage, with tears in their eyes. That is not my attitude; it is me against myself. As long as I'm there and I participated, I'm happy. I know that I've done my part, and I trained as hard as I could. If the judges don't choose me as the winner, I still know I've done my best.

**MFN:** You do so many different things, do you plan to continue competing in bodybuilding and taking it to the next level?

**MN:** I certainly do. I see it as part of my lifestyle. I might not compete as often as other people do, like people in Europe or the U.S. because they have a lot of local competitions. Traveling far takes a lot of time, so I can't do it more than once a year. But I make fitness a part of my lifestyle and encourage everyone to do the same.

Even when I have kids, and am in my 30s and 40s I want to be disciplined, dedicated, and surrounded with like-minded people and fitness professionals, as that is something I enjoy as a hobby.

**MFN:** Who or what inspires you every day?

**MN:** Tom Venuto—he wrote a book called, *Burn the Fat, Feed the Muscle*. When I was trying to lose weight the very first time, I read it and found it to be the most inspiring book I've ever read! It taught me everything I needed to know; it focused a lot on goal-setting, motivations, and tactics to never give up. I still use everything and all of his approaches and his methods and told him that his book really helped me. He's personally given me a lot of advice, and I advise other readers to purchase his book. It's a great read, very informative, and give loads of advice.

**MFN:** What do you do when you feel un-motivated to work out?

**MN:** Well the thing is, I do what I need to do whether I feel like it or not. I always say the results are the same;

your body doesn't care, as long as you are motivated, train hard, and follow a good diet. My first approach is that I'm going to do it no matter what. I always try to establish an emotional connection to my goals, so if I'm trying to lose weight or have a competition, I establish why it's important to me. When I have a connection, and it matters to me and is really important, I feel much more motivated. I know in my heart and mind that it is going to be something very rewarding to me, so that makes it harder to give up.

**MFN:** How would you describe your personal style? Favorite outfit to wear for dinner and going out?

**MN:** I would say that I'm very simple, but I do like to dress up at night when I go out. If I have a dinner or party or event such as a wedding, I like to get glammed up, and wear an up do. But during the day, it's very simple, and I am always in gym clothes and not really wearing any makeup. My favorite thing to wear is a nice evening dress by Hervé Léger, that is tight and form fitting. One of my best friends is a fashion designer, Bianca Karam, and I get many of my clothes from her

and from her store. She also designs dresses for me and has clothes for daytime, evening, and all occasions.

**MFN:** What is your beauty secret?

**MN:** I don't really have a beauty secret to be honest. I would say that the best way to have beautiful hair, skin, and nails is to follow a good diet, exercise, and get lots of sleep. It's not a secret, you just have to have a healthy lifestyle, and that means don't smoke or drink too much alcohol, and do work out, eat nourishing food, and if you drink a lot of water, you will glow. I also moisturize, use good products, and use really good brands because if you use cheap makeup you can have pimples or acne and other skin problems.

**MFN:** You talk about how weight-lifting is so important for women in addition to cardio—which are your favorite weight lifting exercises for toned arms, and which for glutes and quads?

**MN:** Arms: I would say the basics like shoulder press, lateral raises, triceps overhead extension (that one always gets me sore), biceps curls, and barbell curls. Glutes



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and quads: Hip thrusts are very effective, and you can never go wrong with squats, deadlifts, and high step-ups. Do those above knee level to really target the glutes, while holding a dumb bell.

**MFM:** As a certified sports nutritionist-what is your go-to healthy breakfast and lunch that is also delicious?

**MN:** My food is very simple: for breakfast I have oatmeal with skim milk in the morning, and I also have an egg white omelet. That is the same breakfast I have every morning, and sometimes I have grilled chicken in the morning for my protein. I love a good quinoa salad and an ice grilled salmon with some spices. More or less every day I have a lot of fish, grilled white fish, or grilled chicken, with a nice seasoning. I have more than 100 recipes on my website, where readers can see what I have for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Sometimes I make dishes from my website if I'm lacking in inspiration.

**MFM:** I love your motto: "Healthy, fit, and strong is beautiful." What is your advice for someone's very first step towards living a healthier, beautiful life?

**MN:** The first step is to start with diet, because even if you do a lot of exercise, you can't out-exercise a bad diet. Decide you are going to do it and follow a healthy diet. This includes eating a lot of unprocessed healthy food, restricting junk food to not more than once a week, and controlling liquid calories. This is really the first step, anyone can exercise, but what is really hard is paying attention to what you eat 24/7 and controlling portion sizes. To make the decision that no matter what happens, you are going to follow a healthy diet, body transformations are all about what you eat. They are influenced by your diet, and also diets are responsible for the way you feel. If you follow a poor diet, you are going to be tired and have a weak immune system. The minute I changed my eating habits, I rarely ever got sick



any more. The second step is to start exercising and lifting weights and to educate yourself on the proper way to lose weight. People think they need to follow a low-calorie diet and need to starve themselves, but there really is no need to be restricting, and it needs to be sustainable in the long-term.

**MF:** What future plans do you have or projects are you working on?

**MN:** I am currently working on opening my own gym where I can help people in person and have a place to receive people. I am also working more on my app, adding more features, making it more user-friendly,

and creating a new version. I am always working on my TV show and finding ways to keep it interesting and creating new exercises and unique ways to really interact with my audience. I also plan to train for more competitions in the future.

**MF:** Where can MOST Fitness readers find you on social media?

[www.instagram.com/mayanassar\\_fitness](http://www.instagram.com/mayanassar_fitness)

[www.facebook.com/startlivingright](http://www.facebook.com/startlivingright)

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[www.youtube.com/user/startlivingright](http://www.youtube.com/user/startlivingright)



Photo Credit:  
Cortie Bink  
[www.instagram.com/cortiebink](http://www.instagram.com/cortiebink)

A promotional image for BIOMASS BEAST supplement. It features a muscular man, George Brown, an IFBB Pro, flexing his muscles. The background is a collage of wild animals: a tiger, a bear, and a wolf. In the foreground, there is a blue and black tub of the supplement. The text 'RELEASE YOUR INNER BEAST' is at the top. The BIOMASS logo is in the bottom right corner.

RELEASE YOUR INNER  
**BEAST**

GEORGE BROWN, IFBB PRO

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