

# START EATING RIGHT

Even if we follow a good fitness routine, we need to make sure we get the right nutrients to keep energised and be healthy. We speak to Maya Nassar, a certified sports nutritionist, personal trainer and fitness model, who debunks those diet myths and shares her best practices for eating correctly to stay in shape and facing life on the go....

**- You are living proof that exercise and healthy eating go hand in hand to achieve results.**

You certainly need both, but I always say your nutrition makes up about 80 percent of the outcome. You will never see any results if you do lots of exercise but do not follow a healthy diet. Ideally, doing exercise and lifting weights boosts your metabolism and enables you to eat more overall calories without gaining weight easily.

**- What are the foods that give us energy?**

Carbohydrates supply our body with energy and are utilised quickly and efficiently. The best types of carbohydrates to eat are whole grains which include brown rice, brown bread, quinoa, lentils, oats, potatoes and so on.

Whole grain carbs fuel the body with energy, feed our muscles and make us leaner. Processed carbs contribute to health problems, weight gain and make us feel lethargic. This is why processed carbs should be eaten in moderation. If someone has been lacking energy throughout the day, it might mean that they are not eating enough overall carbs. Healthy and active individuals should make sure whole grain carbs are included in their daily diet and junk food is restricted to once or twice a week.

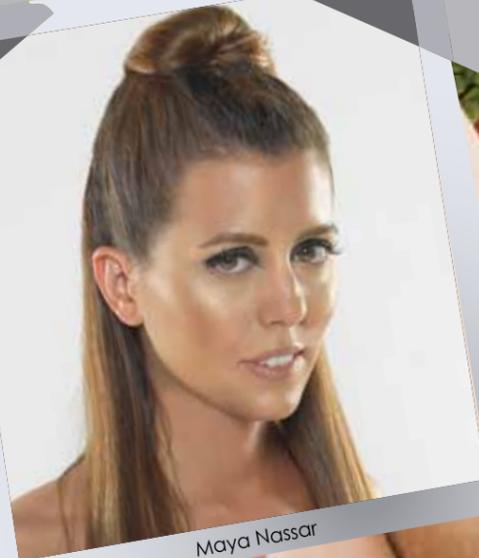
**- Before you compete for example, what foods do you eat mainly?**

I eat the same kinds of foods year round, but simply eat fewer calories when I am preparing for a competition. My daily diet includes protein, whole grain carbs, healthy fats, fruits and vegetables. When I am trying to lose weight for a competi-

tion, I simply eat less calories of the same food so I am in a negative energy balance. However, if I am trying to maintain my weight or build muscle, I eat more. I never cut any types of foods from my diet, even when I am preparing for a competition.

**ALL ABOUT MAYA**

The Dutch-Lebanese beauty has become a leader in fitness and wellbeing. Her website, *Start Living Right*, chronicles her inspiring journey to become one of few Arab fitness models. Nassar took home second and third place trophies in fitness modelling at the 2015 Pure Elite UK Championships and she was selected a brand ambassador for the international sports retailer De-cathlon.



Maya Nassar

**- Breakfast is always a tricky meal. What do you recommend that provides lots of energy for the day?**

I recommend having oats for breakfast with a source of protein, such as an egg white omelet. Since oats are whole grains, they are slow-digesting and keep us full and energised throughout the day. Oats can also be customised to your liking and you can add fruits or cinnamon to make it tastier. Protein helps to suppress our appetite and boosts our metabolism at the same time.

**- Avocados are very yummy but high in fat right? Should we feel guilty if we frequently have them?**

We should definitely not feel guilty about eating avocados! They contain healthy fat that offers many nutritional benefits. Healthy fats control our blood sugar levels, suppress our appetite and help us lose weight. It is important to pay attention to the overall quantity of healthy fats we eat to prevent weight gain. Eating quarter of a cup of avocado with our salads daily is extremely healthy and recommended.

**- For those of us who have an addiction to bread and other carbs (including junk food), how can we wean ourselves away from those cravings?**

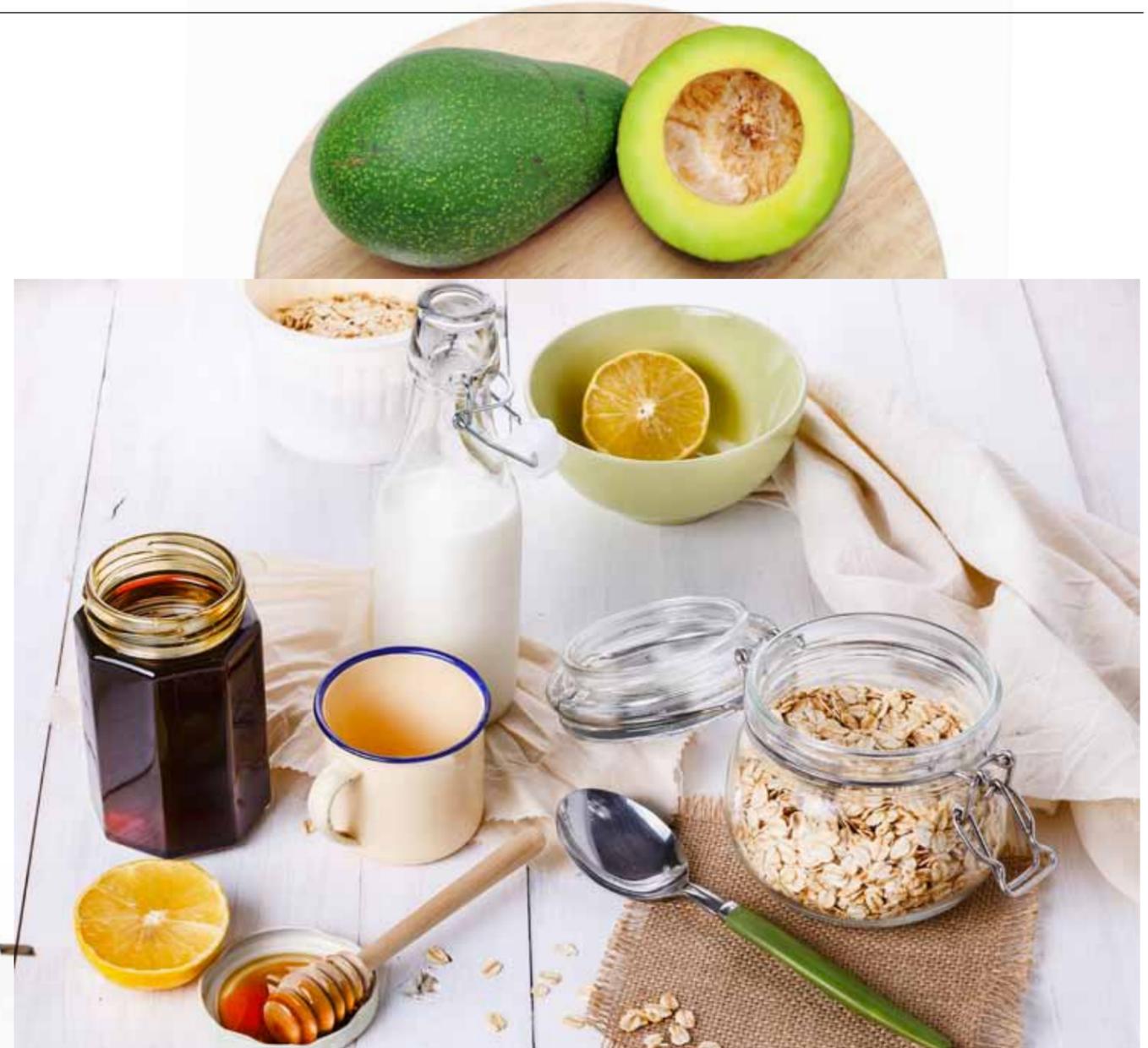
I do not recommend cutting out carbohydrates from someone's daily diet. Carbohydrates play a major role in our brain functionality and energy levels, and we simply do not function efficiently if we cut out them. Eating the right carbohydrates in the right quantities promotes fat loss and nourishes our body with nutrition.

I would recommend replacing processed carbs and junk food with wholegrain carbs. It is also very important to pay attention to portion sizes and overall calorie intake, as you can still gain weight even if you eat too much healthy food.

It is a myth that some of us are addicted to junk food. We only have strong cravings for these foods because our bodies are conditioned to eating them regularly.



Maya Nassar



**FRUITFUL DAY IMPROVES HEALTH WITH IN-SEASON, IN-REGION FRUIT**

Fruitful Day, a fruit box delivery company, delivers directly to the workplace, ultimately improving the health and wellbeing of employees in the UAE.

Founded by a group of friends, Fruitful Day provides delicious fresh fruit that people can feel good about eating. Where fruit comes from and at what time of year is the key to whether it is good to eat or not so the company has established relationships with local and regional suppliers, through industry expert and strategic advisor Yael Mejia, the founder of Baker and Spice, to provide a well-curated selection of "in-season, in-region fruit". This unique approach means UAE employees will enjoy fruit that is tastier and at its nutritional peak.

Research shows making the right choice in the office boosts productivity, performance, improves wellbeing and helps companies to improve their bottom lines. Providing fresh fruit to employees has a real impact on staff morale, satisfaction and motivation. A healthier office also reduces the amount of absenteeism.

If we focus on eating the right carbs with the right portion sizes for three weeks, then we can easily break out of this addictive cycle. It takes three weeks to establish a new habit.

**- So are there days you cheat and maybe indulge in some junk food? Do you think it's OK?**

I definitely indulge in junk food once or twice a week. I have a cheat meal only and not a whole day of eating bad food. This is definitely OK and helps to satisfy our cravings every once in a while. A cheat meal also gives your metabolism a boost and can supply your body with a burst of energy if it is an occasional treat.

Start Living Right is also a top ranked Apple store download for Lebanon, which has exercise diagrams, a fat loss calculator, calorie counter, videos and articles on nutrition.



**- Many women complain about belly fat, especially after childbirth. Besides exercise, what do you recommend we do differently with food?**

I suggest women pay attention to exactly what they are eating. Many

times a woman may be eating healthy food, but she is simply eating too much of it, which is why she never loses any weight. We only lose weight if we burn more calories than we consume. For this reason, I advise new



mothers to follow a proper diet plan, which may even require them to measure portion sizes and keep track of how much they are eating.

**- Do you believe in juice detoxes?**

I do not advocate any type of juice detox. I do not follow anything that is restrictive and that we cannot commit to in the long run. Similarly liquids can be high in calories and are not as satiating as solid food. My personal approach is that we do not need to detox. Our body has its natural way of excreting toxins, including through our kidneys, liver or visiting the toilet.

**- Do you take any supplements or vitamins?**

I usually take multi-vitamins if I am trying to lose weight for a competition. I advise people to take vitamins when they are following a diet simply because they have a restricted intake of food and it is one way to guarantee your body is getting all the nutrients and vitamins your body requires.

**- In the Middle East dinner can be very late, which is very bad for us.**

**What do you recommend for those of us who find ourselves being served a late dinner?**

First of all, it is a myth that eating late is bad for you. We only gain weight if we eat more calories than we burn. I advise anyone who eats late to make healthy food choices and pay attention to their portion sizes. I also recommend having a healthy snack a couple of hours before a late dinner, such as a fruit. This helps to control our hunger levels and prevents us from binging at a late dinner.

By Alia Fawaz

Here are two healthy and easy to make recipes from Maya Nassar's website and mobile application, which contains over 100 meal ideas.

### HEALTHY OATMEAL FOR A NOURISHING BREAKFAST



Makes four servings  
Calories per serving: 300

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 2/3 cup of skimmed milk
- 2 cups of oatmeal
- 3 cups of water
- 6 chopped dates
- 2 bananas

#### DIRECTIONS:

Soak the oatmeal in water overnight. Boil the oatmeal and milk in a pan and then simmer for 15 minutes. Add more milk if your oatmeal is dry. Mix with dates and bananas and then serve.

### MOROCCAN CHICKEN WITH PUMPKIN A HEALTHY LUNCH OR DINNER

#### INGREDIENTS:

- 4 cloves garlic
- 4 chicken breasts
- 1 cup pumpkin
- ½ tbsp. of cumin
- ½ tbsp. paprika
- ½ tbsp. turmeric
- 1 tbsp. olive oil
- 400g cherry tomatoes
- 400g butternut squash
- 2 tbsp. lemon juice

#### DIRECTIONS:

Preheat the oven to 175°C. Chop the garlic and mix with coriander, paprika, cumin, turmeric, olive oil and lemon juice to create a paste. Rub the paste into chicken breast and chop pumpkin into wedges. Place pumpkin into baking dish with cherry tomatoes. Place chicken on top of vegetables and cook in preheated oven for 30 minutes. Top with coriander leaves.



Makes four servings  
Calories per serving: 350