



MAYA NASSAR

THE MIDDLE EAST FITNESS STAR

Being fit is what we all aspire to especially when it means being healthy. If the role model we look up to is a mother of two, it sends a message that motherhood and having fabulous abs is a dream that could come true. This month Amira Tharwat brought you all the way from Lebanon fitness guru, International fitness model champion and owner of Start Living Right Gym Maya Nassar. The half Lebanese half Dutch fitness entrepreneur reveals all about the secrets behind her fabulous body and shares some of her fitness hacks.

You were born in USA yet, you are very proud of your Lebanese origins, tell us more about that...
I would say that I am very multicultural. I have a Lebanese father and a Dutch mother and I was born in the US. I am very proud to be half Lebanese and to be living in Lebanon. I believe I have the best from both of my cultures and this has made me who I am today.

How were you able to be back in shape after your second pregnancy 4.5 months later, and at the time competing in the world championships in England?
It took a lot of hard work and dedication and was the hardest prep I have ever experienced. I was not ready enough and didn't end up placing simply because I needed more time, but I really grew from this experience. The hardest part was dealing with physical exhaustion of having 2 kids and a newborn baby, but I still managed to commit to my goals. I had a very easy pregnancy and trained until the day before I gave birth, and I was back in the gym 3 weeks after my delivery. My life during these few months was just about my business, my training and my kids, but I hope I can show other moms that anyone can reach any goal if they want it bad enough. It was

the first time since 2014 that I didn't win any trophy, but it was the time I learnt the most, and to me this is a form of winning.

Being fit is not only about shape, but about adapting a healthy lifestyle, how do you encourage your followers to do so?
I always tell my followers that it takes 3 weeks to build a new habit. It will always be challenging at first, but if they stick it out for long enough then, it will eventually become a lifestyle. I tell my followers that it is the best lifestyle they can possibly live, and it will reward their life with health, happiness, confidence and personal satisfaction.

You showed your stretch marks and wrote a post about it on Instagram, why were you keen on doing that, and what is the message you wanted to convey?
Yes! I was always obsessed with having the perfect flat belly and abs, but since becoming a mom, I discovered there is nothing more beautiful than motherhood. I want to empower mothers to be proud of their bodies, even if it means they have stretch marks. Our marks are a reminder that we gave birth and carried our babies in our belly.



A lot of pregnant women suffer from Diastasis Recti post pregnancy, what is the reason for it? And what are the exercises they can do to narrow the gap between the stomach muscles?

Diastasis Recti is caused when abdominal muscles and connective tissues in a woman's body are stretched out from pregnancy. Pushing during a natural labor can also cause Diastasis Recti. After two pregnancies in less than 2 years, I have suffered from this myself. There are specialized floor exercises and breathing techniques that can help with this. The best thing a woman can do is to speak to her doctor or a qualified coach for a proper diagnosis and treatment.

What distinguishes your gym 'Start Living Right' from any other gym?

My gym offers everything a person needs to live a healthy lifestyle from personal training to classes, physiotherapy and diet consultations. However, what makes my gym different than others is my personal story. It is not just another gym in town, but rather a boutique with a personalized touch. I have lost 20 kilograms of fat and five dress sizes, and fitness became my ultimate passion. My gym is all about taking care of our customers and supporting them to reach their goals the same way I reached mine. We are a fitness community and we go out of our way to take care of everyone and make them feel welcome.

There is also the online coaching that your gym provides, tell us more about it...

Last year, I recently launched an e-shop via my website www.startlivingright.com and we offer customized diet plans and workout programs. I also give online consultations. Many people live far away or abroad, and we are still able to help them. People can diet or train for years and not see results, and this is usually because they are not following a suitable plan. We send plans that are customized to their goals and we guarantee results. We have many satisfied online clients at the moment from many different countries. I will soon be launching a fit pregnancy e-book with diet and training plans for pregnant women including, lots of general information about what to expect in each trimester. My e-book will be endorsed by a gynecologist.

You also launched a free mobile app, tell us more about it...

A few years ago I launched the first mobile application in Lebanon. It is endorsed by the Lebanese Ministry of Sports and has been ranked as the number one app by Apple Store competing with other international apps. My app contains diet plans, exercise programs, recipes; tons of articles and everything someone needs to live a healthy lifestyle. My app is for free and can be downloaded on any smartphone store by searching for 'startlivingright' as one word.

The gym is located in Lebanon, any coming plans to expand in the Arab World?

Definitely! We have two branches in Lebanon and we will be opening a 3rd one soon, but it is my dream to open a branch in Egypt or other Arab countries.



How do you manage to stay active with your fans and take care of the gym while being a proud mom of two kids?

It is all about having a routine and balance. Each day I have the same schedule with my work and my kids, and having a daily routine makes it easier to balance everything. I always give priority to my kids and do not go out much during the week to be able to sleep early and have energy to get through the day. I limit late evenings to the weekends, which helps me stay on track as a working mom and fitness influencer.

You also have an amazing sense of style, what inspires you when it comes to fashion?

Honestly, I am very classic in my style. I love simple, classic outfits and I am not very adventurous or eccentric. During the day I like to be very casual, but at night I enjoy getting dressed up. I am inspired by what suits my body type best and do not really follow any trends.

And the designers you admire the most?

I'm a huge fan of Herve Leger, Armani, Burberry and Louis Vuitton.

What are the mistakes that Arab women do when it comes to staying fit? And how can they avoid it?

I believe Arab women still do not know the value and benefits of lifting weights. They believe it is unnecessary and that if they do

it, they will bulk up and become muscular. However, this is not true. Women do not have enough testosterone in their bodies to look like a man and muscular female bodybuilders always take steroids. Weightlifting is the best way to burn fat, shape their body naturally (without needing surgery), boost their metabolism, prevent diseases and feel empowered. Also, many overweight women believe they should not lift weights and that it will expand under their fat, but this is not true. An overweight woman will see faster results if she lifts weights. The best training program is one that includes both weightlifting and cardio too.

Your hubby seems very proud of your accomplishments, how much does his support help you in making your dreams come true?

He supports me fully and has even traveled to watch my fitness modeling competitions in England. I am lucky that he treats me as an equal and shares my success with me. It is extremely important to have support from those closest to you as this can help you stay motivated and on track during very difficult days.

Where will you spend this Valentine's?

Most probably in an Italian restaurant and will definitely be having a cheat meal. I always have cheat meals on Valentine's Day and Italian food is my favourite cuisine.