

# BLOOM

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**MAYA NASSAR**

**International Fitness Model  
Entrepreneur & Super Mom**



# Women in Business: Interview with Fitness Entrepreneur and Model Maya Nassar Maalouf



## Interview by Hanan Rhazouani

**H**er journey depicts a story of challenge, consistency and success; the Lebanese athlete, entrepreneur, fitness icon and influencer Maya Nassar Maalouf, who started her journey after a self-confessed struggle with weight. Following a training program and diet regimen, she shed 20 kilograms of fat and impressively dropped five dress sizes. Even when pregnant, she never fails to impress us with her fabulous physique. Here we speak to Maya about her entrepreneurial journey so far, the challenges she faced as a woman in business and her advice for those wanting to follow her path.

“Challenges and  
new goals usually  
inspires me”



#### **Who is Maya Nassar?**

I'm a mother, entrepreneur, business owner, international fitness model champion and a fitness influencer. I'm also the first female in the Middle East to be endorsed by an Arab government to represent Lebanon in fitness modeling competitions abroad. My goal is always to help as many people as possible reach their fitness goals by sharing my passion and personal experience. I do this through my gym that I own with 2 branches and my online e-shop.

#### **What led you to get into fitness industry?**

In the past, I lived a very unhealthy lifestyle. I used to have a very bad diet and did zero exercise. I gained weight over the years, eventually becoming overweight and feeling extremely insecure. My health also suffered and I used to get sick quite often and had bad asthma. This is what motivated me to change and start a healthier lifestyle.

My life changed instantly and I became healthier, happier and more confident. This is when I knew that I wanted to work in the fitness industry and help people to change their lives the way I changed mine. In total, I lost 20 kilograms of fat and five dress sizes.

#### **What was the biggest challenge you encountered in your journey?**

The biggest challenge was probably preparing for my first competition. I had zero support and had to figure out things on my own because these competitions do not exist in the Middle East. Athletes abroad have access to training camps, workshops, seminars and even professional coaches who are specialized in preparing them for competitions. I figured it all out by myself and did the best I could. That year, I did not win at the competition but learnt from my mistakes and decided to come back stronger and try again. One of my favorite quotes is that a winner is a loser who tried one more time. The following year, I won first place.

#### **Who or what gives you the most inspiration ?**

I'm always inspired by challenges and setting new goals. I believe success must always be achieved and maintained. If we stop setting goals, then we stop growing and this is when we stop feeling inspired. In the past, I used to give up quickly, but reaching my fitness goals has built inner willpower and determination. It's all about constantly improving ourselves and achieving more each time. I believe we all have what it takes to reach a challenging goal if we want it bad enough. If we don't succeed in reaching one goal, then we can simply learn from our mistakes and start working towards a new goal.



*“I don't believe in setting limits to my goals and dreams.”*



**How would you describe your philosophy on health and fitness?**

I would say that I'm very traditional in my approach. I purely believe in diet, exercise, hard work and consistency. There is no other solution. Many people try new diet trends or fall for scams in the fitness industry that promise amazing results with zero effort. Unfortunately this does not exist and you will never see results if you don't work for it. However, the effort always pays off.

**How do you keep yourself motivated?**

The feeling I get from living a healthy lifestyle is what inspires me. It is really the best investment to boost your self-confidence, happiness and overall wellbeing. Nobody wants to feel insecure, unhealthy and out of shape, so this is what encourages me to keep on exercising and following a healthy diet.

**You are one of the first women to participate in bodybuilding competitions in the Middle East. Tell us more about it?**

After reaching my fitness goals and losing all the weight that I wanted to lose, I didn't want to stop there. I wanted to set a new challenge and push myself further. This is when I heard about these competitions and wanted to push myself to my limits both mentally and physically. My dream was to step on stage next to top fitness models. I was too insecure to walk around on the beach and wanted to reach my best ever self and have the confidence to walk on stage. I worked extremely hard and entered my first show. My goal was to participate. I reached that and set a new goal to participate and try to win. I'm so happy that since 2013, I've won 9 trophies so far.

**How often do you recommend we should work out?**

I recommend doing no less than three hours of exercise each week, if not more. Some people are extremely busy, but I always say little exercise is better than no exercise. The more frequently we exercise, the faster we will see results and reach our goals.

**What type of training are you mostly into? Where do you get fitspiration from?**

I'm into weightlifting and bodybuilding! This is my favorite form of training. Many women believe that weightlifting will make a woman bulky or masculine, but actually it is the best way to lose fat, build shape and get toned. I am inspired by a bodybuilder named Tom Venuto whose book about fitness journey has changed my life.

**Did motherhood take you away from your fitness routine?**

It definitely did not! It is much harder to reach a fitness goal when you have kids, as you need to make time for exercise and find someone to take care of the kids. However, this does not mean that it can't be done! I also love exercising and staying active to be a role model for my kids. I would advise mothers to make the balance and find a convenient time to exercise, even if it means training at home.

**Are you currently training for any upcoming competitions?**

At the moment, I am pregnant in my third trimester and don't have any competitions coming up. I will surely compete again though!

**As a mother of 2 and currently pregnant with your 3rd baby, how do you manage to balance your professional and motherhood lives?**

It is all about setting a routine and following a schedule for each week. My kids and work fill up my time completely! I don't have much free time anymore, but I love being productive and with my kids. It's definitely a rewarding feeling to watch your children grow up and see your business expand as well.

**Does committing to a healthy lifestyle mean you have to give up on your favorite food?**

If our favorite food is junk food or unprocessed food, then yes. This does not mean that we can't indulge once or twice a week and enjoy our favorite foods. However, you should eat natural and unprocessed foods on a daily basis including protein, wholegrain carbohydrates and healthy fats. I used to eat lots of junk food previously but I was happy to give it up when I experienced the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. In the long run, eating unhealthy food will actually make you feel worse.

**What's a typical day of healthy eating and exercise look like for you?**

At the moment, I am working out six days a week and have healthy clean meals daily with one or two cheat meals per week. A cheat meal is one bad meal only and not a whole day of eating unhealthy food. Working out six days a week might seem extreme for some people, but I do an hour each time and it helps me start my day with energy and positive vibes. This does not mean that people need to train six days a week to see results! They can still reach their goals while exercising up to three or four times a week.

**What are your picks for the following perfect meals?**

- **Breakfast:** Oatmeal with skimmed milk and some fresh fruits.
- **Pre-workout:** Usually one serving of a fruit, such as a banana or a bowl of strawberries.
- **Post-workout:** A protein shake mixed with skimmed milk or water.
- **Dinner:** Grilled fish served with a green salad and grilled sweet potato.
- **Snacks:** I love eating rice cakes with a healthy topping like natural peanut butter. A bowl of nonfat Greek yoghurt is also a great snack or simply fruits.

**Your website and mob application offers a variety of services such as diet & exercise programs, nutrition, weight training and even recipes! Could you elaborate us more?**

I launched the very first fitness mobile application in Lebanon which was ranked as the number one application by the Apple store, competing with international apps. My app is also endorsed by the Lebanese minister of sports. I created this application to be a free tool to help anyone, anywhere in the world reach their fitness goals. The app has diet plans, training programs, exercise illustrations with animation, healthy recipes, and lots of information to help anyone get started. My app can be downloaded for free by searching for "startlivingright" in any smartphone store.



*“a winner is a loser who tried one more time”*



**How do you feel about being an entrepreneur? What's the best thing that makes you proud of being the owner of SLR GYM?**

The best thing about being an entrepreneur is having a dream and seeing it come to life. My goal was always to have my own gym and help people reach their goals and I'm so happy to have achieved that. We currently have two branches and we will be hopefully opening a third branch soon. We've helped so many people believe in themselves and become passionate about exercising and living a healthy lifestyle.

**You have thousands of followers on social media, how do you keep your audience motivated?**

I try my best to be real and honest with my followers. There are many false marketing scams that promise amazing results with zero effort and I never endorse any of these. I tell my followers that if you want to see results, then you need to get up and work for it. I also try to motivate them by sharing my personal weight loss story and showing them that if I can do it, then they can do it too. At the moment, I am sharing pregnancy tips and workout videos to motivate pregnant women to keep on exercising and being active.

**What is your advice for women who need to adopt a healthier lifestyle?**

My advice to them is to start slow and make sure they are following a sustainable plan for the long run. They should exercise at a time of day that is convenient for them, and follow a training program customized to their goals. Diet is also really important. These women should consult a trusted nutritionist to help them create a balanced meal plan. They should stay away from anything that is restrictive or low in calories. The idea is to create a new healthy lifestyle. Consistency is a very important key; usually it takes three months or longer to see a real difference. Finally remember that there is no easy way out. If you want results, then do not fall for marketing scams. The only way to reach your goals is by following a diet and exercising.

**What are some of your upcoming projects?**

My next project is an online pregnancy program for pregnant women. I'm very proud of it and it has taken a year of work so far. It will include diet plans, training plans with illustrations, a beauty guide and detailed explanation of what will happen to a woman during each week of pregnancy. I've collaborated with a gynecologist who endorsed my guide and guarantees that all information is safe and credible for a healthy pregnant woman to follow. It will be available online via my website very soon.

**What can you advise the young generation?**

I would advise them to be active and take care of their health. They should make it a habit and a lifestyle. I regret not living a healthy lifestyle when I was younger. Taking care of yourself mentally and physically will help you to reach your goals and achieve personal satisfaction and self-confidence. At the same time, being fit is not just about being slim or looking good. It's also about preventing diseases, staying healthy and increasing your life expectancy. Nearly everyone wants to grow old independently and be around to watch their grandchildren grow up. This is why it is extremely important for the younger generation to take care of their health.

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