



Fit For Life

With some recent reports claiming that we reach our “peak” for physical fitness in our 20’s, we had to question, do we really? These women not only prove that wrong, they blow that theory out of the water. Meet this trio of #fitspiration committed to staying fit, for life.

By Yi-Hwa Hanna

Magdalena Lyle, Strength and Conditioning Coach, Fascial Stretch Therapist and Bowen Therapist at Embody Fitness (embodyfitness.ae)

At over 45 years old, Magdalena Lyle is in such good physical shape that she would put most 20-year-olds to shame—and we don't just mean in terms of her impressive strength. As a fascial release therapist, she's also an expert in keeping her body healthy for the long run. And she didn't start out in her youth, either. "My career did not start straight out of high school or college like most coaches. To be honest I was not in any particular sporting field or any fitness regime. However, I always had an interest in personal fitness and health, especially to be a positive role model to my family and friends," she says. And that she certainly is. Magdalena, who was the strength and conditioning coach for the National UAE Girls Soccer Team in Abu Dhabi, is passionate about understanding how the body works. "Staying or getting fit has consequences as well, because the more you train the more you need to provide recovery in the forms of stretching and manual therapy. For all the good that we do in the gym or outside our body takes a hit and we need to look after our bodies if we wish to keep demanding so much from it," she says, continuing: "The more I learned, the more I understood my body, which allowed me to be able to assist, inspire and motivate others. Even though I thought I was relatively fit and healthy before and after my kids, I was more knowledgeable and determined as ever to continue on this journey of health and fitness."

Like everyone else, it wasn't always easy for Magdalena, but learning from others, as well as mastering her commitment, discipline, and willpower has helped her to not only stay on track, but to improve along the journey, too: "I had

my struggles to sustain and maintain the discipline and drive of staying fit and strong as there will always be peaks and troughs in continuing to strive for my best body. Everyone has their best body and a crucial mistake that I see women make is that they strive for someone else's body, that often isn't close to what their body can achieve. This personally affects me as I see the hard work they do—however, they end up disappointed and not believing in a healthy lifestyle. Everyone has that critical part of the body that struggles to budge, the social events that you want to be part of but don't fit into your nutritional plan or early morning exercise session.

Then that curveball that comes from left field and you need to either move house, country, change job and the added stress that you weren't accounting for. The good news though is there are strategies you can do to make sure you stay on track. I had faced all this and more but all the while trying to maintain an equal balance personally, professionally and emotionally. But what I knew was that training, whether it be in the gym lifting weights or going outside for a walk or doing a bootcamp, is all good for the soul and from the soul comes your inner happiness and glow. You do feel better and you do have more energy and you do look better through

your skin and smile because you are happy that you achieved something for yourself. The biggest and hardest lesson to teach my clients and myself (yes, me!) was to tighten up my nutrition. Everyone would say they eat well, but do they or I all the time? No! If you want significant change, you need to be disciplined with what you put in your mouth, but also understand the consequences of particular foods. Nobody makes you eat bad food; it doesn't get to your mouth without a conscious decision by us to pick it up. Being consistent with eating the right, healthy choices will help you maintain, sustain and have energy levels throughout the day."



Hanlie Signorini, Health and Fitness Blogger and Sports Brand Ambassador (@fitterstronger)

A true fitness influencer, staying healthy is now a way of life for 51-year-old Hanlie (who is in such good shape that she could outperform most people we know in their early 20's), but this wasn't always the case. "It was only after emigrating to the UK in 2000 (and putting on 10kgs in four months) that I started my fitness journey and attending the local gym on a regular basis. When [my family and I] moved to Dubai five years ago, I immediately joined a gym. I made friends, fit friends, and they became my 'Dubai family.' I joined a team and took part in my first obstacle race. I loved it and was hooked, and now I enter races around the world. Preparing for a race gives every workout more purpose," she says. Hanlie's family has inspired her in more ways than one. Her brother had a heart attack in his 30s and it scared her: "I had my bloodworks checked, and discovered that I have high cholesterol. It motivated me to take my health seriously. I completed a Nutritional Therapy Diploma course in 2010, and learned that food can heal my body. I started to eat cleaner and thought about the nutritional value of food and no longer calories. One thing I know is that the cleaner I eat, the better I feel. I'm a lot more aware of what makes me feel good and what isn't worth having," she says. Over the years, Hanlie has noticed that she has more energy than she did 20 years ago. She's much stronger now, and even though she actually weighs more, it's muscle, and she can spend two hours training then leave feeling fantastic. "I attempt things I would never have dreamt of when I was in my 20's." She has had some setbacks to deal with, but understands that they're just part of the journey. "At the end of November last year, I had a relentless spasm in my left

glute with sciatica symptoms. I struggled to walk for more than a couple of metres and had to use a wheelchair. I could no longer do the things I loved. I tried staying positive, but every attempt to start training again started badly. I don't know how I would have coped if it weren't for my family," she says. In December, a doctor told her she'd never again be able to train like she used to. Hanlie refused to accept that, and in January, after many treatments, the spasm started easing off and she carefully started exercising again, taking it easy with rest days in between. Immediately, her mood improved, "proving that there is truth about those happy endorphins!"

Hanlie credits her husband with a large part of her motivation, as she shares her love for fitness. "He loves to run and it's something we can do together anywhere. I do have days where I wake up feeling lazy, but when I see him put his trainers on, I'm always inspired to join him." Last year, Hanlie began calisthenics training, and wishes she started 30 years ago. "Just think of the cool moves I'd be able to pull off by now!" she laughs. But, she is always pleased with what she accomplishes, especially in terms of race results, "especially in my age category. But I often wonder what I would have been able to achieve if I started training earlier. It's never too late to start though, and that post-race feeling is such a thrill. Exercise and healthy eating makes me feel positive and have confidence. I know that looking after myself keeps me young inside and outside."

Nowadays, Hanlie likes to mix it up with running, weight

training, and throwing in a few handstands. "Nothing gives you an instant facial like a handstand!" She eats loads of greens and nut butters, but also enjoys her fair share of carrot cake. "Life is about balance," she says. It warms Hanlie's heart when her children, or strangers online, say she motivates them to keep fit: "For

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me, it's always been about being healthy, and having energy when I'm older. 50 is the new 30, and 70 is the new 50! That means you have to do this for years, and for life. I don't stop when I go on holiday: It's part of my life, like breathing."



PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF HANLIE SIGNORINI AND ADIDAS.



Kathrine Switzer, Marathon Runner, adidas brand ambassador athlete, and founder of 261 Fearless



Talk about a hero: In 1967, Kathrine Switzer became the first woman to run the Boston Marathon as a numbered entry. She had to sign up under a gender neutral name to do it, and had to push past an official who tried to tackle her off the course in order to finish. Which, of course, she did. “I discovered early that running always made me feel powerful, free and fearless. The longer I ran, the stronger I felt so the 26.2-mile distance intrigued me. The Boston Marathon, which was founded in 1896, was the most famous race in the world to me next to the Olympics. Yet unlike the Olympics, it was supposedly open to anyone who wanted to try to run. I felt thrilled by the prospect of running 26.2 miles in a race where supposedly anyone could run in the same race as the greatest runners in the world. There was no other sports event like that! (For instance, you cannot just go out and play baseball with the New York Yankees). Plus my coach Arnie Briggs had run the Boston Marathon 15 times and he used to tell me stories about this race and they inspired me. There were no rules written saying it was a men’s only race. There was nothing about gender on the entry form. My coach told me it was OK for me to enter

“I knew if I [dropped out when I was tackled by an official mid-race in 1967] no-one would believe women could run distances and deserved to be in the Boston Marathon”

and in fact I must enter the race properly for my run to count. Lastly, I sign my name with my initials, K.V. Switzer—my name Kathrine was miss-spelled on my birth certificate and around age 12 I got tired of it. (There is no ‘e’ in the middle of my name; normally it is spelled Katherine). I also wanted to be a writer and admired authors like J.D. Salinger and E.E. Cummings, so I thought using my initials was a cool, writer-ly kind of thing to do.— So the officials probably thought K. stood for a man’s name.” she says. “My coach didn’t believe that a woman could do the marathon distance but promised to take me to Boston if I showed him in practice that I could do it. We trained hard and one day ran 31 miles, and he was amazed, exhausted, and also proud. True to his word he helped me enter the race,” she says. When she showed up on the day, the men at the run were

excited and supportive. And that tackling incident? It was certainly scary, but Kathrine is grateful that through it, she had the opportunity to change women’s sport and women’s lives. “I was very frightened and was just trying to get away from him,” she says. The men around her shouted at the official to leave her alone and push him away, but he was very determined. “Then my boyfriend, who was an ex all-American football player, gave the official a massive shoulder charge and sent him flying out of the race.” Dropping out wasn’t an option to her: “I knew if I did that no one would believe women could run distances and deserved to be in the Boston Marathon; they would just think that I was a clown, and that women were barging into events where they had no ability. I was serious about my running and I could not let fear stop me,” she says. And that she

didn’t: She finished, of course. “I’m grateful that we could break down this barrier—it is not only about running, it’s a social revolution!” Now at the age of 70, Kathrine has run it again—wearing the same bib number that she did back in 1967—this time with the Adidas team, and her organization 261 Fearless (261fearless.org), a global running community that unites women globally. “[It was] to celebrate the 50th anniversary of my first running Boston in 1967. The Boston Athletic Association granted 261 Fearless (261fearless.org) a number of charity bibs, and the money women raise from these bibs will go a long way to helping our organization further our mission of empowering women.” she said, continuing: “Adidas has always been the brand. In the 70s it had prestige, was worn by champions. I still have my adidas bag that was given to me after the 1972 Olympics when I visited them in Herzog after the games. I was given 2 pairs of adidas SL76s every year by the USA adidas representative. That was considered a big deal then. But I personally never had a formal relationship with adidas until now, and I’m thrilled. It feels like I’m home where I should be, with a brand that has been on my feet for over 50 years,” she says. Kathrine says her training actually hadn’t changed much from that very first marathon. “I did 50k in practice 2 weeks before Boston in 1967, so I was confident about finishing. Now at age 70, I run every other day, at least one hour, and every 8-10 days do a long run. The purpose now is to arrive at the start line healthy, and finish the race. It is one thing to run just to finish a distance and completely different to racing it hard.”