



No more **EXCUSES**

“I’m too tired”; “I don’t have time”; “It’s too expensive”—if you’ve always got a million and one excuses for why you can’t stick to (or even start) a fitness and healthy-eating regime, here’s how you can finally kick the habit this year **Words by Yi-Hwa Hanna**

While most of us tend to start a new year with the best of intentions—to get fit, get healthy and start living a “cleaner” life—no matter how motivated we may be on January 1st, most of us never actually end up sticking to those major lifestyle overhauls we’ve been dreaming up since hearing the words “festive season.”

According to a Gallup survey, less than 50 per cent of adults across the GCC exercise for 30 minutes or more at least three days a week. Combine that with the waistline-bursting weight statistics—71 per cent of women in the UAE, 70 per cent in Bahrain and Qatar, and 54 per cent in Oman are counted as overweight—not to mention the high instance of Type 2 Diabetes cases, and the life expectancy in our region isn’t looking too great. And according to the survey, women are even worse off than men: In Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain and the UAE, the percentage of women meeting the commonly advised “30 minutes of exercise, three times a week” minimum is significantly less than that of men.

Whether it’s due to the demands of the busy lifestyles we lead, the increasing abundance of convenient, Westernised fast-food options, the high cost of gyms, health clubs or fitness classes, or in some cases, the lack of facilities available to women, one thing is clear: it’s time we shape up and start taking care of our health and our bodies. We’ve spoken to the experts at SMART Fitness—a new training centre that aims to be much more than a gym by providing comprehensive health, fitness and lifestyle solutions suited to your individual needs—for ways you can incorporate a little more nutrition and exercise into your existing lifestyle.

SET A GOAL

“One thing that can make your life healthier in all aspects is to always have a goal and keep it at the front of your mind,” says Jarred Lowson, SMART Fitness’s Exercise Physiologist and an expert in results-driven training. That sounds easy enough—especially when we’re still feeling motivated about our decision to get fit in 2013. But remember, you’ll need to stay committed: research has shown that 78 per cent of people fail to reach their New Year’s resolutions to get fit simply because of the fact that they’ve started out with unrealistic expectations, and are thus disheartened when they aren’t in shape by the end of January. According to an MSN

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QUICK FIX

Dubai’s first detox delivery service, Detox Delight, aims to provide us with a healthy, tasty and holistic way of cleansing our bodies of toxins and waste products. Their packages—which are based on vegan menus and are more than just a slim-down solution—are created by a team of nutritionists and raw food chefs, made with fresh ingredients and enriched with organic nutrients and living enzymes. And they’re delivered straight to your door! Here’s what our tester had to say...

“I’ll admit it—I was nervous before trying Detox Delight. While I do try and maintain a healthy diet during the work week, on weekends I find it hard to resist ‘naughty’ foods, so the idea of surviving on a liquid diet for a few days was daunting, to say the least. I opted for the 3-day package, and bright and early on the first day, an enormous cool box of beautifully-packaged juices and soups was delivered to my doorstep.

“I’m not going to lie, the first day was incredibly hard. The morning was surprisingly easy; the juices were really tasty, and I wasn’t hungry at all. But by dinnertime, I struggled. I felt tired, light-headed, and I was hungry. I wasn’t concerned about the slight dizziness I felt—I had been warned of this, and I was actually pleased since it was a sign that the toxins were working themselves out of my body. But the hunger—that was a different story. A friend of mine was visiting from overseas so I had taken her out to sample some local cuisine for dinner; the scent of her kebab was almost torturous, and I cheated by having an apple. It was an ‘approved’ snack, but the instructions had said those were for ‘emergencies only.’

“The next day, feeling guilty about my cheat, I vowed to be good. The tastiness of the juices renewed my motivation to keep going, and I was surprised to discover that the second day was actually much easier. Not only was I not hungry at all—with no cravings—but I actually had more energy, as my body started to adjust. I felt clean from the inside out, and I was overjoyed to find that my tummy was already flatter.

“By day three, I craved something savoury. I cracked open the soup—a delicious chilli soup with cashew cream—and I was so full after just half a bowl that I ended up saving the rest for later. It was the perfect way to end my detox, and as I eased myself back into my normal diet, I found myself leaning towards lighter, fresher foods with absolutely no desire for greasy, heavy dishes—the opposite of a craving, if you will.

“While my active exercise regime means that I think I’d struggle with a 7 or 12-day programme, I think the 3 or 5-day options are the perfect way for me to detox a few times a year. With no hunger by my second day, three kilos lost and a fulfilling, tasty menu to choose from, I would definitely do this again the next time I’m in need of a good body reset.”



survey, it typically takes three months to shift winter holiday weight, so stick to your goals and you should be well on your way to achieving them by March. “My obvious advice as a nutritionist is to suggest eating a healthy, well-balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables,” says Alison Ramsay, SMART Fitness’s Nutritional Expert. “I [also] think it’s really important

to stay active and maintain physical activity throughout your life,” adds Samira Hanif, SMART Fitness’s expert in Rehabilitation and Postural Alignment.

Samira stresses the importance of considering physical activity as a “priority task.” Switching up the type of exercise you do based on the season is a good idea—from June to August, for instance, try →

water sports or indoor sports such as tennis, martial arts, volleyball, or even fencing. "It's vital not to use the weather as an excuse not to maintain your fitness," Samira says, continuing: "See the glass half-full rather than half-empty, and view summertime as an opportunity to explore a variety of different physical activities, rather than sticking to the same old routine."

SMART SWAPS

Tiny changes that yield big results can be easier than you think. Follow this handy guide, which includes some of GHME's & Alison's top 10 fave swaps:



Swap cornflakes for porridge oats "[Unlike cornflakes], porridge oats are a great slow-burning food and satiating, so they help you to feel full for longer," says Alison.



Swap regular lattes for Camelattes Camellos's camel milk coffees are a more nutritious and less fattening way of feeding a caffeine fix. Get them at Cafe2Go (04 325 9955).



Swap red meats for oily fish "High in Omega 3 and low in saturated fats, oily fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel are really good for the heart," says Alison.



Swap coffee for green tea "Drinking green tea has been shown to help weight loss," says Alison. We love the wide variety found at TWG Tea Salon & Boutique in Dubai Mall.



Swap milk and white chocolate for dark chocolate "Go for chocolate with a high cocoa content such as 75 or 80 per cent, which is higher in antioxidants," says Alison.



Swap bread for oatcakes Alison loves oatcakes as a substitute for bread, and thinks they make an ideal snack food because they are high in fibre and take longer to digest.



Swap white potatoes for sweet potatoes They may look odd, but sweet potatoes have more vitamins and potassium, and a lower glycaemic load than white potatoes.



Swap rice and pasta for quinoa This nutty-tasting super-food—which is packed with protein, low in cholesterol, and full of calcium and iron, is also great in hearty salads.



Swap sodas and fizzy drinks for flavoured water GHME's Picture Editor, Christina, flavours her water with fresh fruit or sliced cucumbers, and it's sugar- and chemical-free.



Swap white bread, rice and pasta for whole-grain or whole-wheat versions The latter is much higher in fibre and much more nutritious than the white versions.

WHERE THERE'S A WILL...

We get it—you're a busy mum or a working woman who finds it tough to squeeze some regular exercise into your daily life. But according to Jarred, you don't have to go out of your way to get fitter, and there are more realistic ways than parking your car further away from work for a longer walk in the searing heat, or taking the stairs when you live on the 37th floor of a

skyscraper. "Speed walk your errands—put your trainers on, set a time frame and get your heart pumping. When you're grocery shopping, walk around the entire store before starting your shop," Jarred advises. Then ditch the shopping trolley—lugging hefty baskets or carrier bags around the aisles will give your arms a great strength workout. And the sneaky get-fit tricks don't stop there: While you're in the check-out queue, make use of the idle time.

"Stand with your feet parallel and your knees relaxed. Contract your abdominal muscles and hold for approximately 10 seconds. Repeat this 15-20 times and you've got a decent core workout in without anyone noticing," Jarred says.

Once you get home, don't neglect house-hold chores no matter how tempting it is—Jarred assures us that vacuuming and sweeping can be good full-body exercises that can burn 245-280 calories per hour, while washing your car yourself can be another full-body workout.

After dinner, make a habit of a 15-20 minute walk with the whole family. "[Not only is it] quality time together in the fresh air, it gives your food a chance to digest and you can burn off some of the calories," says Jarred. If you're in the mood to stay in and watch TV, don't give up: "Do jumping jacks, jog lightly in place, skip, or do floor exercise on a yoga mat during commercial breaks," Jared says, continuing: "Do leg lifts with ankle weights or arm curls with dumbbells; such exercise can burn 550 calories per hour while toning and strengthening."

Jarred also suggests meeting friends at the park to get active rather than visiting your usual cafe. Investing in a pedometer to record the number of steps you take in a day, and adding in a few simple exercises (such as squats and push-ups) as a morning or evening circuit are other great ways to add exercise in to a busy day. We at GHME like the cheesy-yet-effective DVD Tae Bo workouts from Billy Blanks, particularly the 8-minute workout. "Any exercise is better than none at all. These popular 'short workouts' have you working as hard as possible, allowing little to no rest for the duration, which keeps the heart rate high throughout," Jarred says.

MAKE IT COUNT

"If you'd like results in a shorter time frame, follow the protocol for High Intensity Interval Training. HIIT is, in my opinion, the best and most effective form of exercise in terms of losing weight, building strength, improving

cardiovascular fitness, and toning," Jarred says. He explains that HIIT—which requires little to no equipment and is proven to burn more calories in a shorter amount of time—Involves pushing your body beyond your comfort zone with a high-intensity set followed by a medium intensity set, repeated 8-12 times. The aim is to achieve a 2:1 ratio of work-to-recovery period; so if you do 30-40 seconds of hard sprinting, you should follow that with 15-20 seconds of jogging or walking.

"While many would have you believe that you can transform your body in less than 5 minutes per day, it's far more effective to follow a HIIT programme for at least 15 or 20 minutes, three to four times a week. Your warm-up alone should be three to five minutes long in order to prevent injury and get the blood flowing," Jarred warns. Recent reports show that women performing HIIT three times a week over a fifteen-week period achieved significant reductions in total body fat, subcutaneous leg and trunk fat, and insulin resistance. In short, it's the perfect workout for busy people.

If you're not quite ready to graduate to HIIT just yet, don't fret—there are a few exercises you can focus on to ensure you're really pushing your body to change. "The squat, deadlift and bench press have long been considered the ultimate three for providing results, in terms of strength increase and physique transformation. Each of them use large primary muscle groups and smaller secondary muscles to perform the exercise, which make them benchmarks of all programmes," Jarred says. Doubling up exercises is another good idea: Pairing lower body movement with upper-body exercise, such as bicep curls with squats, or shoulder presses with lunges, means a greater cardio workout.

DON'T GIVE UP

Even if you've kept to your routine for the first few months of the year, by the time Easter rolls around (with all of its tempting sweet treats) it can be tough to stick it out. But according to Samira, there are simple ways to make exercise feel less like a chore.

"Always exercise on Sunday—it sets precedence for how you want your week to go," she says. Exercising first thing in the morning is another good idea—it'll make it harder for you to get side-tracked, and it's out of the way so you can focus on the day ahead. This positive attitude is also key to your keeping up a regime: praising yourself for even the smallest efforts each day is a



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big psychological boost that keeps you on the right track. An “all or nothing” attitude is a negative pattern that can potentially destroy your fitness regime.

[It's also important to] consider your environment," Samira says. "For example, I hate going to the weights section at my gym. I find all the big, muscle-bound men intimidating, but this doesn't mean that I don't like to do strength work—I just don't like to do it in that environment, but I'm more than happy to do it at home." In other words, find your happy place—even if that means suiting up in your workout clothes while you're still umm-ing and aah-ing over a workout, since that's half the battle—and it'll be a lot easier to stay motivated. Finally, avoid skipping exercise for two consecutive days. "[It's easier to] keep up a good routine if you do it every other day, compared to starting all over again after a few days break. Even a simple 15 minute workout is sufficient, just keep it going!"

EAT RIGHT

In the quest to lose weight quickly, many women tend to skip meals, thinking it's a good idea. But "[this is] the worst thing you can do if you want to lose weight," Alison says. "Firstly, you'll end up so hungry that you're likely to raid the cupboards for any high sugar, high fat food you can lay your hands on quickly—whilst telling yourself it's ok because you didn't eat breakfast. Secondly, in primitive times when man had to hunt for food, the body learnt to slow down the metabolism of food and to store more fat to be ready for survival on the days there was no food available. So if you skip meals, the body prepares itself for starvation and burns calories very slowly. This is why people often put on more weight on than they lost when they yo-yo diet," she warns. Alison advises eating smaller, low-carbohydrate, low-fat meals regularly throughout the day instead.

Having tried many diets throughout her adult life herself, Alison strongly believes that there is no such thing as a miracle diet: "Fad diets can work in the short term, but because they can't be integrated into a normal life and we crave foods that have been excluded, they just aren't sustainable in the long term." ■