

The common mantra “I’ve been to the gym so I can therefore eat a large piece of cake” holds no truth, as it’s the burning of calories combined with the toning of the body that results in looking — and feeling — better



happens when you try to stretch a piece that’s just come out of the packet — ouch!

After the warm-up, he showed me that he’d set up a few lines of coloured cones at the back of the room. These would work as a kind of circuit, and I’d break from doing exercise on the floor to running up and collecting each cone of a particular colour.

Thankfully, I was familiar with most of the exercises Paul wanted me to do (if squats, planks and bicycle sit-ups mean anything to readers, you’ll understand.) Most of them involved the use of a weight and body movement and they all put core strength to the test — especially the abdomen.

After each round of exercises, Paul would tell me to run and collect another row of cones and it became clear he was incentivising the exercise regime, always encouraging me to keep going because I knew what was coming next — and soon I’d be picking up the last row of cones and ending my session.

Paul was encouraging, and this is perhaps what helps people who lack the motivation or the will to carry on with exercise. It’s all fine

What you eat is every bit as important as how much exercise you do in terms of getting in shape, and fruit can play a big part.

and well staring at a TV screen when you’re on a treadmill, but who’s going to tell you “well done” at the end of it?

He would tell me if I was doing something wrong so that I was getting the most out of the exercise, and also so I didn’t injure myself. He would also give praise if I had done well, and remind me a movement was “difficult” if I was struggling at all.

At the end of it I was astounded to hear that Paul thought I was quite fit, and that I’d be good to train because I have a knowledge of the exercises he does, and I listen to what I’m being told.

After cooling down and getting changed, I met up with Paul at the end for a debrief and he showed me the seven-day food diary he gives to new client.

It’s essential people fill this in as honestly as possible, as weight loss is as much about what you’re eating as how much exercise

you’re doing. If you omit the chocolate bar you scoffed during a mid-afternoon slump in the office or the packet of jelly beans consumed while watching a film, it will only prove a hindrance when Paul comes to trying to work out why you are not burning enough calories.

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I tried my hardest to keep a food diary for the week after I saw Paul, and calorie counting was a new phenomenon. Before, I would generally look at the fat content of foods and also try to ensure, where possible, they were low in salt and sugar. I lived by the rule that women should consume no more than 70g of fat a day.

I had to scour packaging for

calories and, in some places, actually engage my brain to work out how many I had consumed because the ‘per 100g’ information more often than not pertained to an amount that was not, in fact, 100g.

To my surprise, Paul’s verdict was that my diet actually wasn’t bad at all, although there are a few areas for correction (mainly the chocolate biscuits that find their way in at mealtimes!)

He created a sample eating plan for me to follow, giving options for all times of the day. For example, choosing between macaroni, a tuna mayo roll, boiled egg roll, chicken salad, small baked potato, soup or brown roll with ham at lunchtime accompanied by a glass of water.

Paul’s tips included drinking two cups of coffee an hour before training — which helps burns twice as much fat used for energy during a session — increasing protein intake as it makes you feel full and decreases the need to snack.

Another important point is to drink at least two litres of water a day.

We’re always told to stop eating when we feel full, but Paul also stresses the positive effect of eating at at least half the pace you normally do, as this allows the brain to register a feeling of fullness.

The thing that alarmed me most of all was the fact I was allowed two treats “per week”. These are one bar of chocolate and a one packet of crisps. I can decide which day I have them, but it mustn’t be the same day. I must admit, I haven’t yet willed myself to cut down my ‘treats’ to such an extent. . .

Paul said I shouldn’t look upon the regime as a punishment, but as a means to reaching a goal. It’s clear the change had to come from within, but having a personal trainer along for the journey can’t hurt.

For more information visit: motiv8trainer.co.uk

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THE PHRASE “personal trainer” was once synonymous with the rich and famous but, these days, having someone who can work round your schedule and help you stay fit and motivated is fast becoming the way to balance good health with a busy lifestyle.

Motivation is the key

PAUL GOW, a 37-year-old firefighter from Dalgety Bay, has somehow found the time to establish his company Motiv8trainer and combine it with his perilous profession.

“I have been a firefighter in Dunfermline for 14 years and I’ve been doing the personal training for about three-and-a-half years,” he said.

As you might expect, he’s no stranger to the gym, having been an avid goer since his teenage years.

“When I got to my late 20s I decided to take on part-time work at a gym since I worked four days on and four days off as part of my fire service job.”

Paul took classes at a gym in Glenrothes, including spinning (indoor cycling), and funded himself to become a qualified instructor, eventually branching out as a personal trainer in 2008.

“I designed a website and logo and started spreading the word. I started to get a few interested parties and from there it just escalated,” he explained.

“People have realised nowadays that personal trainers are not just for celebrities. All types of people come to us and with the main objective of getting fitter and healthier in a way that works for them.”

The main benefit of having a personal trainer is the fitness regime is tailored to suit the individual and his or her goals — whether it be losing weight, trying to improve health or focusing on specific parts of the body.

“The regime fits in with the client’s circumstances,” Paul went on. “We can visit people in their own homes, which is the ultimate in convenience and ensures that people find the time to exercise effectively.”

Trainers can also go out to spots like parks — depending on the weather and the type of exercise being done — and their ability to be flexible makes it much harder for clients to come up with excuses about being “too busy” or “too tired”.

Paul says many of the people who come to him are keen to lose weight and feel better about themselves, but simply haven’t been able to achieve it.

“A lot of people you speak to are desperate and they have tried everything — they want

to make the change and they can’t do it by themselves.

“There’s also so much pressure in the media to be thin now, and some people can’t motivate themselves and don’t know what to do. We do find people want to take the challenge and they require that motivation.”

Clients might also be spurred on to become fitter because of medical reasons. For example, they may have been diagnosed with a condition like diabetes, cystic fibrosis or lung problems.

Either way, Paul’s approach isn’t just about making someone run around until they are sweating and red in the face — it’s an entire lifestyle approach, diet and all.

“When we come in, we look at everything, exercise is one, the things you are eating is another. It could be you are eating the wrong foods or over eating and so on.

“We get clients to keep a food diary and note everything that passes through their mouths for seven days.”

From this diary, Paul can calculate carbohydrates and calories consumed and the key thing when keeping a note of food consumption is to be honest.

Motiv8trainer also monitors and records clients’ progress and fitness related improvements using methods such as measuring heart rate, body fat levels and Body Mass Index. After the programme has begun there is a four-week review.

“We set realistic short and long-term goals whilst we are working with clients and devise appropriate programmes to meet them,” Paul explained.

Some of his clients will get into a healthy routine quite quickly and, once they know how, they are able to watch their diet and do the right kinds of exercise without his help. Others, however, like the constant motivation of having a personal trainer.

Paul has recently expanded his business to cover Edinburgh, Tayside and the Lothians with trainers currently being recruited all over England as well as in Wales, Northern Ireland and even Dublin.

He agreed to give me a taster session and put me through my paces at Step Up Health and Fitness in Rosyth.

Prior to our meeting, Paul asked me how fit I was, as this is something he would normally assess in a preliminary meeting with a client interested in taking on his services.

He will tailor his sessions to the fitness level of the individual — even if someone has never done structured exercise before.

I wouldn’t say I am extremely fit. I do exercise fairly regularly, and try as hard as possible to go to the gym twice a week, and my preferred classes are body combat (a workout inspired by martial arts including karate, boxing, taekwondo and tai chi) and



Personal trainer Paul Gow.

also yoga, which give a mix of cardiovascular activity and core strength. Some weeks things don’t go to plan — maybe I’m busy or away somewhere and that’s when things can get tough.

I can see how having someone who fits round your schedule instead of trying to fit exercise into your schedule might appeal,

since everybody seems so busy these days.

After the initial meeting, during which Paul and his client discuss fitness levels and goals, he’ll give them a questionnaire to fill in and return on the day of the first training session. These are just general questions about health goals, exercise history, lifestyle and diet.

Paul was satisfied I wasn’t unfit, but he knew I wasn’t too good with high impact cardio workouts. He assured me I’d be fine when I told him the last time I had a personal training ‘taster session’ was in 2008. On that occasion the instructor got my heart rate so high so quickly that I almost fainted and he had to sit me down and get me a sugary drink. Then he expected me to carry on!

To begin with, Paul got me to jog lightly round the room to get my body warmed up, then he took me through a series of stretches. It’s important never to just break into exercise suddenly. Paul used the analogy of muscles being like a stick of chewing gum — imagine what



Below — Paul gets to work with a client on her fitness regime.

