

Six weeks to super-fitness

How can a die-hard fitness fan up her game to supermodel proportions? Charlotte Sinclair pushes herself to the limit

Gym 'll fix it:
Charlotte Sinclair works
out like never before.
Photograph: Can Evgin

first, an admission. I like exercise. I am not one of those determined-looking creatures you see running at 10pm on a Monday night, but I know I could be. The potential to be a weirdo about exercise is there. I'm fascinated by actors' accounts of pre-movie body-sculpting – tales of 5am starts, two-hour cardio sessions followed by an hour of weight training and brutal diets. I'm even a little jealous.

No one forces you to exercise as an adult; there's no break for games on a Tuesday afternoon or compulsory bleep tests every new quarter. And even if you're a workout queen, it's unlikely you're burning up the calories of a pre-*Iron Man 2* Gwyneth Paltrow or a pre-comeback Elle Macpherson. We don't push ourselves because, well, pushing ourselves hurts. There's cramp, and lactic acid, and sweat, and the feeling you might throw up (or actually throwing up). >

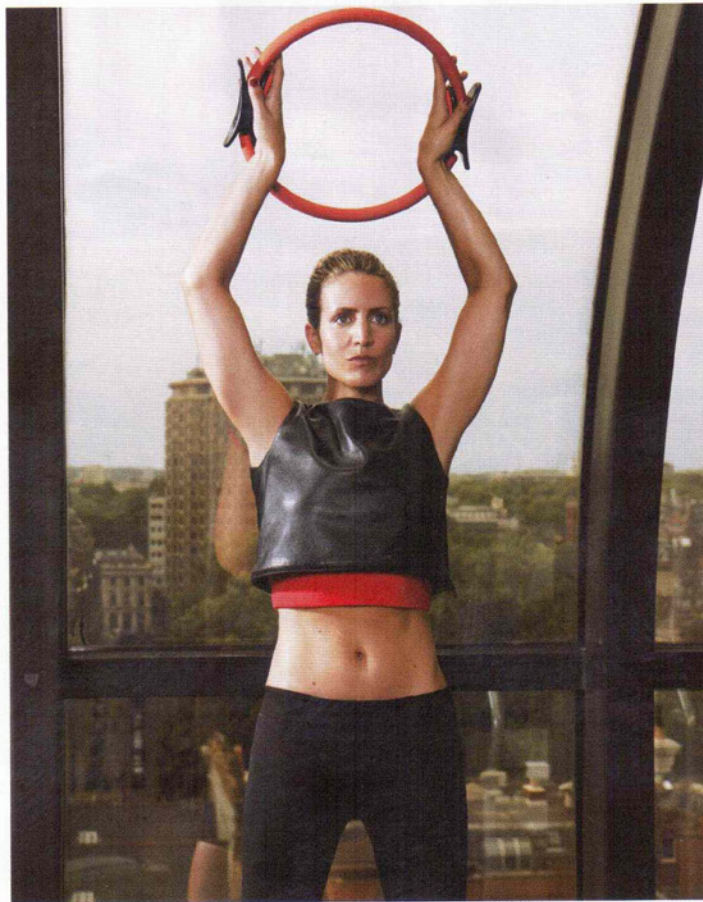
VOGUE BEAUTY

I work out five times a week (running, training, Pilates), so give or take a few long runs that's roughly five hours a week. I don't mind looking strong rather than fragile and waif-like. (Not that I have much choice, I am predetermined to muscle.) Poring, dubiously, over an online video detailing actress Jessica Biel's punishing exercise regime, I wonder what it would be like to work out nine or 10 hours a week. Is this, actually, the bare minimum that we *should* be doing to achieve a truly great body? And, if so, can you exercise like a fiend and still be a normal human being?

I endeavour to find out. I sign myself over to personal trainer and bionic man Jonathan Goodair for an hour and a half, six days a week, for six weeks. Goodair, a freckled, hard-bodied, super-fit fortysomething, is a one-time trainer to Madonna, Stella McCartney and Gwyneth and the only person in Britain trained in Tracy Anderson's Method (a complex series of Pilates-based moves and cardio). His double-pronged attack on the body focuses particularly on the smaller, structural muscles. "It means you don't bulk, or over-train the big muscle groups," Goodair says, "and the smaller muscles are the ones that pull your body in, to create that lean look."

My first session in his basement gym in Home House does not start well. I've forgotten my leggings. This, I'm certain, does not happen to Madonna. In Selfridges' Sweaty Betty concession, Jonathan asks me about my workout routine. When I boast of having run a marathon he doesn't seem overly impressed, and when we head back to the gym and begin training, I understand why. The Pilates-style routines (leg lifts over a box, a kind of pulsing arabesque in the air, cocking your leg and twisting it back and forth) are excruciating. Within seconds I am sweating, red-faced and leeched of all confidence. It's not only the peculiar angles that I must force my legs into (and the accompanying burning in my thighs), it's the repetitions.

We start at 20 reps on each leg, of each separate exercise, but Jonathan tells me we will be up to 80 in no time. The abs exercises are equally demoralising, and by the time we hit the treadmills I am exhausted and overawed with the thought of the next six weeks. On the treadmill we spend 45



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minutes mixing the occasional sprint with leaps, lunges and skipping. It takes more coordination than I possess and I feel lumpen and slow and irrationally angry with myself. Jonathan is kind and assures me I will get the hang of it, though all evidence points to the contrary.

Week one is, I'll admit, grim. This is exercising as endurance sport. Every 90-minute session reminds me of that feeling, 10 minutes into a run, when all you want to do is sit down on the pavement. Trying to fit the workouts into my lunch-hour becomes untenable, so we switch to

evenings, which means saying goodbye to my friends and my husband. There's no getting away from the fact that some nights, 45 minutes on the treadmill feels like a life sentence, and a floor exercise which involves scissoring one's legs and twisting into a funny little press-up is crippling. By week two, though, something is happening: I'm enjoying myself. The repetitions are gradually becoming easier, and, since Jonathan changes the routine every eight days in order to "surprise" different muscle groups, we get to ditch the dreaded leg-lift-over-box number. (My personal *bête noire* – *boîte noire*?) Though, of course, as soon as I mention my increased stamina Jonathan promptly straps me into some ankle weights. Great.

There are other, unexpected effects of all this exercise. I develop a Pavlovian response to the Britney Spears song "Radar", the soundtrack to my cardio hell, so that I now associate it only with physical pain. I underestimate the sartorial demands of 10 hours of exercise a week and am forced

to stockpile sports socks and invest in four new pairs of gym leggings. (Without fail I always run out of T-shirts by Wednesday.) I am also hungry *all* the time, though I only want to eat healthily. Knowing exactly what I have put myself through to burn off the calories, the cakes and chocolate that regularly – and unhelpfully – orbit the office are now viewed as malevolent forces. Not that I have much time to eat. If I snack before a session it makes me feel sick, and by the time I get home, all I want to do is crawl into bed. And the thought of having to work out on a hangover means alcohol is out too. Exercising like a celebrity seems to require one to become an ascetic. No fun.

Others' reactions are illuminating: when I confess what I'm doing, I'm met with either awe or abject horror. I forgot the >

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Waterproof running jacket, £140, Sweaty Betty

iPod armband, £16, 1000 Miles, at Sweaty Betty

Sports bra, £50, Thuasne, at Wiggle.co.uk

Jacket, £85, Adidas by Stella McCartney

Jacket, £125. Shorts, £45. Both Stella McCartney for Adidas

Pedometer pebble, £20, Silva, at King's Road Sporting Club

The Stick massage tool, £35, The-stick.co.uk

Trainers, £85, Asics

Forerunner watch, £170, Garmin, at Amazon.co.uk

Running leggings, £24, Nike

Trainers, £70, Nike

peculiarly British suspicion of exercise, the idea that working out is vanity, the ingrained notion that, really, I'd be better off reading a book. (The butt-versus-brain argument is a tedious one, but is slowly losing its pervasiveness. After all, for what reason do the *New Yorker* podcasts exist, other than to accompany a run around the park?)

The endurance aspect of the challenge has psychological repercussions, too. I am tough and competitive when it comes to sport, where I'm less so in life. Pushing my body past its limits makes me feel surprisingly vulnerable. As my body adapts and strengthens, I feel grateful, and even a little moved. Our bodies really are meant for so much more. One doesn't have to go out and run the Marathon des Sables, but the fact that we test our bodies so infrequently begins to strike me as rather sad, like tethering a horse.

Jonathan keeps me entertained with stories of Madonna (typical questions from me: What does she work out in? Does she sweat? What kind of furniture does she have in

my legs no longer feel as if they're filled with lead not blood.

By week six, and 50 hours of exercise later, I've hit my stride. We hop on the Pilates machine to restrict the exercises with weights and ropes but even this isn't impossible anymore. Jonathan and I have bonded as a sergeant to his foot soldier after a long and arduous battle. I can tell he's proud of me. What's more I think I've become addicted. I feel virtuous, and clean, and utterly focused – like a fasting saint. The post-sweat dopamine high – though perhaps not as fun as other highs – is very real. As is the evidence of the toning and tightening in my body, which means I can now dress from the thin section of my wardrobe. I have more energy, too, and when I go for a run, my pace has shot up and hills are gratifyingly easy. Even my resting heart rate has dropped so low that when I visit the doctor a month later, she remarks that either I'm very fit or very ill. When we do the inevitable weigh and measure at the end of six weeks, I've lost 3kg (6½lbs – increased muscle tone means it hasn't been more), a couple of

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her house? Answers: crop top and gym pants, yes, and not a lot – her gym was a building site at the time), and he has a telepathic understanding of when I need a kind word. "Only champions work out on Friday nights," he says at the end of one long week. Champions and masochists, I grumble.

By week three I'm done for. My legs feel bruised where the muscles have been attacked, and I wake up stiff and aching. My body, forgetting what it is like to be physically rather than mentally exhausted, can't get enough sleep. I find myself dropping off on the bus to work, head lolling against the glass, and at the weekend I sleep until midday. This continues into week four and, on Wednesday, staring down the barrel of another 90 minutes of toil, I ditch the session, texting Jonathan an excuse, a coward's retreat. That weekend I go walking in the Cotswolds with friends and demonstrate, holding onto a stile, the leg kick exercises. They eye me with pity. Still, the benefits are beginning to show. I can hold a conversation during my treadmill sessions with Jonathan without gasping for breath. I count out 80 repetitions easily, and

inches all over and, thrillingly, my body fat percentage has dropped to 17 per cent (the average range for women is between 21 per cent and 33 per cent – Madonna's is a reported 11 per cent).

Still, what counts is what happens when I don't have Jonathan beside me, counting out those reps. A few weeks on and I have dropped to a respectable hour of exercise six times a week. As I suspected, 90-minute workouts six days a week are almost impossible for mere mortals to maintain while still having some semblance of a life, marriage, or the ability to converse on subjects unrelated to lactic-acid build-up. But the experience has made me more, not less, convinced of the importance of exercise, and I know we are capable of more than we do. Give or take genetics, one's body and intellect are one's own responsibility. And we only get a shot at it once. So, I salute you, the lonely runner, out there pounding the pavement at 10pm on a Monday night. Really, there's nothing between you and Madonna but a bit of luck and a record deal.

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