

'I feel even FITTER & healthier'

Presenter Mel Sykes talks about slowing the pace of her exercise regime, the new diet secret behind her killer abs and her latest TV adventure...

There's something about Mel Sykes. She reminds me of Tigger from *Winnie The Pooh* - her energy and enthusiasm are infectious. Yet as I chat to her about her current exercise regime, she admits, 'I suppose I don't bounce around as much as I used to!'

Now 45, Mel reveals she's changed how she works out 'the older I get', quickly clarifying that she doesn't see 45 as old. 'I'm still young,' she says, 'but you've got to respect that your body is changing, regardless how fit you are, or think you are! Your ligaments and joints are all ageing with you - you can't defy it, you just have to adapt as you go.'



6 FIT & WELL



Mel's regular Reformer Pilates sessions have helped her to tone up even more



Her weekly workout routine is now slower paced but clearly just as effective

That's exactly what Mel has done, limiting the number of 'crazy' HIIT workouts she does in favour of a 'slower paced exercise regime'.

It's a varied exercise plan that she devotes at least four or five hours to every week. As well as working out at home, on her exercise bike and using her TRX suspension trainer 'on the back of a door', a particular favourite is her barre class.

'It works everything but it's really great for legs, bum and core,' Mel says. 'It's intense but there's not too much bouncing around. I find it a challenge but it's easier on my body.'

Another class Mel loves is Reformer Pilates. 'It's on a machine so it's not easy, but I absolutely love it and there's less pressure on my joints.'

Mel also spends time working out in the gym. 'My favourite machine is the cross trainer. I love the skiing motion - it's great for my legs and bum, but it's easier on my knees.'

'For me, diet is the big thing'

Known for her impressive six-pack and enviable beach-ready body, Mel claims it's all down to diet. 'Any ab exercise is

good for your abs, end of story. But for me diet is the big thing. You can work your abs until the cows come home - but if you're eating rubbish, you're never going to see them,' she says.

And her diet secret? 'I'm addicted to Amelia Freer's *Eat. Nourish. Glow*. I haven't lost weight because I'm quite muscular, but I'm definitely a leaner size 10.

'When I first started it last June I cut out everything she recommends - sugar, dairy, gluten, alcohol and caffeine - but I've realised I just need caffeine!'

'I'm calmer and have more energy'

She's cut back, though, staying caffeine-free in the afternoon and evenings, and just having a double espresso first thing and a mid-morning coffee.

'I'm definitely calmer and more even in temperament - I'm not on caffeine crazy highs all day long. I've got more energy. I think that's the key. I'm not dosed up on sugar and food that makes me sluggish. I had a pretty neat diet anyway, but Amelia's book just sharpened me up.'

Mel cooks Amelia's recipes for her two sons, Roman, 13, and 11-year-old Valentino too. 'I do her prawn curry, shepherd's pie and Mediterranean soup - both my boys love them. They've got no idea they're healthy dishes - to them it's just shepherd's pie or prawn curry! Sometimes I might make myself something separate - if I do a bolognese, for example, I'll have courgetti

Mel spends five hours working out every week - it's her 'investment'



while they'll have actual spaghetti. But their diet isn't hugely different to what I eat.'

She's not saint-like when it comes to her diet either and claims she has the biggest appetite of anybody she knows!

'However stressed or ill I am, I can always eat and I can always sleep. I think that's healthy. I love cashew nuts - I could eat kilos of them - and I like chocolate too, but I try to go for the high-cocoa varieties.'

'I'd like to play golf and tennis'

As yet, Mel's exercise habit hasn't rubbed off on her boys. 'Neither of them are very sporty - I'd like them to be more keen. I've tried to teach Roman a bit of tennis because I love it, but he moans and groans if I ask him to play!'

Last year, Mel finally cracked her tennis serve while having lessons on holiday. 'My instructor didn't speak much English, so he had to teach visually. When I was standing to do my serve, he put a racquet on my front foot so I couldn't move it and all of a sudden the balls were going in the service area! I'd never been able to do that. It was amazing. I'd clearly been moving that foot too much for years.'

Mel's keen to take up golf too, but not, she says, until she's 'much older'. 'I've had a few lessons and I love it. Walking is a big part of it, which is why I think it's great for older people.'

'Trekking was a real challenge'

Recently, Mel's fitness was put to the test while filming for a new TV show, *A Week In The Wild* on BBC2 this month, where she

trekked through the Copper Canyon in Mexico with Stanley Johnson (dad of Boris) and German comedian Henning Wehn - no, she doesn't know why that trio was picked either!

'It was amazing, but very physical,' recalls Mel. 'I'd never trekked before, so I did find it challenging. One trek we did took about seven hours, then we met some local Tarahumara Indians, who run in thin, thronged sandals, and they run that trek in 90 minutes! They're so fast!'

Mel didn't alter her training regime specifically for the arduous trek - her overall fitness paid off.

'My exercise is an investment in my health. I don't exercise to change my body shape - it's about me feeling healthy. When I'm really busy with work I do work out less. But even if I can only fit in two hours a week, at least it's something. I don't enjoy all exercise, sometimes it's an absolute killer. Burpees, for me, are the worst exercise ever. I always hate whoever asks me to do 20 burpees - but I exercise because I love the way I feel when I finish.'

'The adrenaline and euphoria it brings keeps me doing it. I'm not addicted to exercise - it's not my primary concern. My primary concern is me and my boys. My exercise regime changes because life changes. I live in the moment.'

Mel's new diet plan

» What Mel puts into her body is vital, she says, and believes exercise counts for little if you just eat rubbish. She's a great fan of Amelia Freer's cookbook and eating plan *Eat. Nourish. Glow.*



Mel and her boys love the prawn curry from the cookbook



» Celeriac ribbons alla carbonara is a healthy alternative to pasta - Mel likes to swap traditional spaghetti and noodles for courgetti or other spiralized vegetables



Healthy roasted vegetable soup is another of Mel's firm favourites



'My top three no-gym moves'

Try to do these moves daily at home for an all-round tone-up

» Tricep dips

'I do this classic move every day to avoid the dreaded bingo wings!'

Place your hands shoulder-width apart on a bench (or just on the floor). Slide your bottom off the front of the bench with your legs out in front of you. Straighten your arms, then slowly bend your elbows to lower your body towards the floor until your elbows are at a 90-degree angle. Keep your back close to the bench. Press down into the bench to straighten your elbows, returning to the starting position. This completes one rep. Aim for three sets of 20.

Good for **STRONG ARMS**

» The clam

'This one really does burn!'

Lie on your side. Bend your knees up to a 90-degree angle. Lift both feet off the ground keeping them together, then move the upper leg upwards, keeping your feet together (your leg movements should resemble a clam shell opening and closing). Repeat 20 times on each side and aim for three sets of each.

Good for **A PERKY BUM**

» Leg circles

'A tough one but a goodie!'

Lie on your back, legs together. Raise legs to a height where you feel your core engage, then draw a circle in the air with your feet, clockwise, then anticlockwise. Start with 10 each way and build as you get stronger. Aim for three sets.

Good for **YOUR ABS**



» Mel is the new brand ambassador for Manuka Life, a fitness yoga and Pilates clothing range