

WE GOT CHARITY FIT AND TRANSFORMED OUR BODIES!

Can the charity challenge trend help you get in shape? Meet four inspirational readers who did just that – overhauling their health and happiness at the same time

“Training for a common cause makes sure you stay motivated”

‘I WAS EXERCISE-SHY – NOW I’M A RUNNING ADDICT!’

Sarah Hayward, 35, took part in the Race for Life in memory of her brother – and has slimmed down by an amazing 2½st

‘I was 17 when my brother, Matthew, died from cancer. Losing him was incredibly painful and, ever since, I’d wanted to do something to raise money for cancer research, but wasn’t an “exercise person” so didn’t really know where to start.

‘After giving birth to my daughter, Tabitha, I topped the scales at 14st and realised that I had to do something – I was 4st over my pre-pregnancy weight and felt constantly exhausted and unhealthy. So when I saw an ad for Race for Life, I knew it would not only be an opportunity to help honour Matthew’s memory, but a motivation for me to shift some weight. I enrolled with a group of my best friends and we started jogging together several times a week.

‘We tried to push ourselves further each time and, amazingly, I actually started to

enjoy it. After six months, my body was transformed – I’d lost 2½st, going from a size 20 to a size 14.

‘On the day of the race, seeing the other runners displaying the names of their loved ones on their backs was very emotional. It’s a fantastic event to be a part of – and being among other people who had been through what I had was so comforting.

‘But, more than that, the experience made me realise that I enjoy working my body, and the sense of achievement I felt at reaching my goal was amazing. Since then, I’ve joined a gym, which I’m writing about on my blog (<http://mumrara.blogspot.com/>). I’m much more confident, and being able to shop in ordinary clothes stores is wonderful.

‘I will do the Race for Life every year now, and I’m planning to take part in a 10k in

Portsmouth soon. I can’t recommend running for charity enough if you want to get fit and do something worthwhile: between five of us, my running group raised over £1,000 in sponsorship. My brother would have laughed to see me running for anything other than a bus – but I know he would have been so proud of me, as I will always be of him.’ Visit www.raceforlife.org for more details. >

3 things I learned...

- Training for a common cause makes sure you stay motivated.
- Don’t write yourself off – you can be anything you want to be.
- Working hard to achieve a goal is an enormous confidence booster.





'CLIMBING KILIMANJARO HELPED ME DITCH ANTIDEPRESSANTS – AND 2ST!'

When Debbie Clayton, 45, began training for a charity mountain trek, it was the start of a brand new life

'It all began when my friend, Marlene, told me she was going to climb a mountain to raise money for the British Heart Foundation (BHF), and I decided to do it, too. After a messy break-up my self-esteem was low and I was very overweight – I'd gone from a size 10 to a size 16 and being only 5ft 2ins, it showed. I was on antidepressants and couldn't stop comfort eating. I knew the climb was the motivation I needed to get things back on track, but I had no idea it would change my life.

'I needed to raise £3,000 for the charity to take part in the climb, so I asked friends and family to sponsor me and organised a fundraising event. The company I worked for also donated money. To get fit, I started walking, going to the gym and doing spinning, circuit and toning classes. The exercise made me feel amazing and, in October 2009, I came off my antidepressant medication completely. My confidence was soaring – losing 2st and slimming to a size 10 made me feel like a new woman.

'Finally climbing Kilimanjaro in September 2010 was exhilarating. Every day we walked high and slept low – climbing to a higher elevation during the

day and coming back down to sleep, to help us cope with the altitude. There was a real camaraderie between the 32 people in my group and I never once thought about giving up. When I reached the top – at 19,341ft – I broke down and cried, because to me the mountain symbolised the end of a bad chapter and the start of my new life.

'Climbing Kilimanjaro is tough – but achievable, as you don't need to have anything other than good fitness and the right frame of mind. I'm now planning to climb Mont Blanc. It's more technical than Kilimanjaro, which means I'll have to keep my motivation and fitness levels sky high.'

For more on the BHF, log onto www.bhf.org.uk.

3 things I learned...

- If you want to change your shape, increase your confidence and boost your self-esteem, exercise really is the key.
- You don't need a lot to start climbing – just a good pair of boots and a can-do attitude.
- You're never too old to change your body.

'I SLIMMED TO A SIZE 12 TO JUMP FROM A PLANE!'

Tracey Iveson, 40, overhauled her lifestyle to skydive for a charity close to her heart

'My son, William, now 10, was diagnosed with cystic fibrosis as a baby, and I'd always wanted to do something to help raise funds for research. On the whole he is well, but he has periods where he has to go into hospital and is on antibiotics permanently. So when a friend told me about an upcoming skydive to raise money for the Cystic Fibrosis Trust, I knew I had to join her. After years of unhealthy eating, I'd reached 13st and was a size 16-18, so it was the perfect opportunity for me to get in shape *and* give something back to a very deserving cause.

'In order to take part, I needed a declaration from my GP to say that I was physically fit enough, which meant a serious lifestyle overhaul. I began gently by using my Wii Fit and regularly walking by the beach, and managed to lose a stone between December 2009 and May 2010. But once I began to notice how much better I looked and felt, it gave me the motivation to join the health club at work. I made sure I went three times a week and started a food diary to help me keep track of what I was eating.

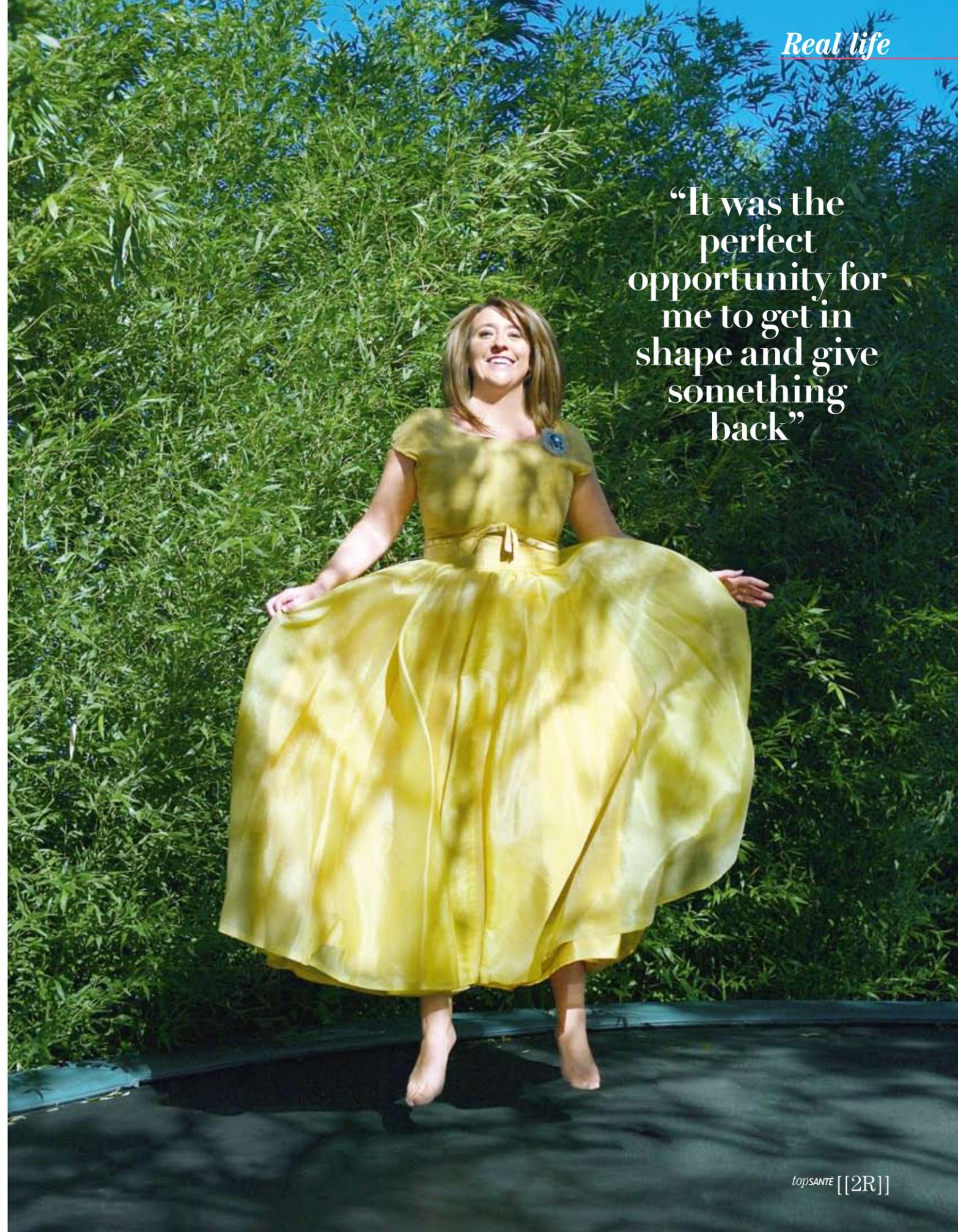
'As the event got closer, I began to wonder if I really had the courage to go through with it, but I knew I couldn't let down my sponsors. Then the big day came – and the jump was over so quickly! The initial fall from 12,000ft at 120mph was certainly scary, but it lasted less than a minute and once my canopy opened, the feeling of peace and tranquillity as we floated back to earth was amazing. I was elated and felt on top of the world.

'Since then, I've been determined that I won't ever allow myself to get big again: now I wear size 12 jeans without the need to shoehorn myself in, and that's a fantastic feeling. The experience has meant a total lifestyle change and I'm so glad I went for it.'

For more information on the Cystic Fibrosis Trust Skydive, log onto www.cftrust.org.uk/help/events/skyline-skydives.

3 things I learned...

- Facing up to your fears gives you incredible confidence in other areas of your life.
- Keeping a food diary is brilliant for helping you stay on track if you're trying to lose weight.
- You should always challenge yourself – you'll be surprised what you're capable of.



“It was the perfect opportunity for me to get in shape and give something back”



'I CYCLED 215 MILES AND SUPERCHARGED MY ENERGY LEVELS!'

Janine Valerio, 37, took part in the London to Paris bike ride and came back a new woman

'Both my husband, Angelo, and I wanted to help raise money for the National Autistic Society (NAS) – it's been incredibly supportive to us. We have two children, aged nine and six, and our youngest, Robbie, is on the autistic spectrum. He's wonderful, bright and alert, but has problems with social communication and understanding language. After some thought, Angelo and I decided to do the London to Paris bike ride – 215 miles over three days. I hadn't been on a bike in 15 years, but the idea of doing something so positive was all the motivation I needed.

'We started fundraising – finding sponsors and holding charity events – and managed to raise £7,400. I started my training at the end of January 2010 and followed the programme suggested by the NAS: three cycle rides a week of up to 40 miles each. It was exhausting but invigorating and I lost a stone – I was a size 14 before and now I'm a 12. My whole body felt so much more toned, but the best thing was the boost to my energy levels. Whereas before I struggled to manage family life without feeling tired, I suddenly felt alert and ready for anything.

'The ride itself was a fantastically satisfying experience. A group of 31 of us cycled to the Eiffel Tower and there was great team spirit throughout. I also had time to reflect on how lucky I am, something I think many people don't do enough. Since then, I've carried on with the cycling and feel so revitalised that I've added swimming and running to the mix. I even did my first ever sprint triathlon last October. Exercise has become part of my life now – and raising funds for a cause close to my heart made it all the more worthwhile.'

For more information about getting active to help support the NAS, log onto www.autism.org.uk/ events or call 08450 509001. □

3 things I learned...

- It's worth making the effort to meet people in a similar situation to you – their support can be invaluable.
- Asking friends for sponsorship is great – but don't be afraid to ask companies, too.
- Life is about taking opportunities. Don't put it off – get involved now!