

Working Out During the Most Wonderful Time of the Year

Local fitness expert shares tips on how to include fitness in your holiday festivities *By Amanda Van Slyke*

"Strength is a metabolism booster," says Shara Vigeant of SVPT Fitness. "More women need to be strong. They're so scared of that. They think they're going to get big and bulky. [Women] can't get big and bulky by resistance training. We don't have the hormones for it."

Shara is like a blunt best friend that tells you what you need to know rather than what you want to hear. She doesn't believe in doing sit-ups to achieve abs, making excuses that you're too weak or trying new dieting fads. Instead of spot reducing arm fat or butt cellulite, she believes in working out the core – nipples to knees – to achieve an overall strengthening of the body as a whole.

So where has your blunt best friend been all your life? After dropping out of 7 years in law school, Shara opened her own studio, SVPT Fitness, in 2008. Not only did the now strengthening and conditioning coach find the previous working conditions awful on her body, but she had since discovered a new passion: Helping others improve their quality of life.

"I felt like a caged animal," says Shara. "So I up and quit."

The former body builder has been working as a personal trainer since 2004, and before that she helped her coworkers at the law firm she worked at get in shape. With the new studio she attained this July that has doubled in size from her former one, the coach stresses that she trains mostly the general population rather than just athletes, which most people assume of her. And while she has trained champions such as boxer Jelena Mrdjenovich and many other professionals who stand beside her in frames lined along the studio walls, Shara works with every-day people because she believes that anyone from any background is worthy of achieving a stronger body.

While jumping on the bandwagon of the newest fad diet or trying to work out parts of your body you dislike can seem like the quickest and easiest solution to becoming healthier and getting fit, Shara stresses that these approaches will only make you less in shape over time and cause you more issues in the long run. Shara mentions that this is why the fitness industry can be so confusing for people and that it's not about a one-size-fits-all way of doing things – it's about finding the way that works best for your body.

"One of the biggest misconceptions is that you can spot reduce. You can't just train your arms to get toned and you can't just train your butt to get flat and you can't do sit-ups to get flat

abs. You have to address your body as a whole," says Shara. "Most women don't understand that in order to get toned you need to have muscle. If you don't have muscle there's nothing to get toned. An example of a woman with no muscle tone is Kate Moss. Some women don't want that. They want to get in shape. They need to do some type of resistance training."

Shara understands that the gym can be daunting and that it can be difficult to know where to start in a room full of machines you've never used. She puts importance on hiring a trainer who can help you find out what you need to work on the most instead of guessing at what you think you need to work on.

"There's nothing worse than going in there and wondering around aimlessly. Then A) the novelty will wear off in two weeks and B) you're wasting your time," says Shara. "Get a trainer and get a program so you walk in there confident that you have a specific training goal and purpose that day. And that's easier to stick to and that trainer will give you goals."

And what happens if we don't work on strengthening our core?

"You don't want to be a sixty-year-old woman who can't pick up her grandchildren. You don't

want to be an eighty-year-old woman who can't get out of bed. If you have a problem getting out of bed in the morning [now], there's an issue," says Shara. "It's all about quality of life. When I was a body builder it took away my quality of life because I wasn't training correctly. I was training for cosmetic reasons – body part training. Our bodies were designed to work together like machines."

Shara has taken a much more balanced approach to fitness as opposed to the harsh measures she applied in the past. She realizes that people aren't perfect because even as a personal trainer she struggles with getting in her workout and eating healthy just like everyone else. The coach knows that the holidays are a time for socializing with family and indulging in treats, and she's adamant on her clients enjoying them without guilt.

"A lot of women get really stressed out," says Shara in regards to women worrying about falling off their diets during holiday gatherings. "That stress is doing more harm to their body than the actual things they're indulging in."

She advocates allowing yourself a couple days during the holidays to enjoy the festivities and to be OK with slacking off on fitness or diet.



"I like the 80/20 rule. If you are eating clean all day and you have a party to go to, get your workout in and have some indulgence."

Shara points out that one of the things people tend to be too focused on is weight loss rather than changing their habits. "They want to get to weight loss but they don't think about the things they need to change in their life to get to weight loss. Let's think about changing your lifestyle first and a side effect of it is weight loss," says Shara. "Let's get you sleeping better, eating more fruits and vegetables – the side effect is weight loss. Everyone wants to change their lifestyle. They think, 'what do I even do to do better?' Water. Breakfast. More colour. Less processed. And balance in your life."

Quick Tips To Become A Healthier You:

No time for a meal?
Shara's go-to fix: Grab a handful of almonds with a green juice.

Looking to lose weight?
You can't out-train a bad diet. Remember: You're eating for nutrients.

Trying to eat better?
Stick to foods that come from the earth. If you can't pronounce the ingredients why would you put it in your body?

Want to become healthier?
Find one thing in your life you need to eliminate. By eliminating it, you're actually adding to your health.

Feel like you're not making progress?
Work on one goal every week. Even just a little progress is still progress.



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