

edwinagriffin

fit women

“I believe life is about choice and that with the right choices, anything is possible.”



Sydney born Edwina Griffin was heavily involved in sport from an early age. The youngest of three girls, she followed her sisters into athletics from the age of five. During her school years she participated in every sport on offer and regularly competed at State and National levels in athletics, joining Australia's World Junior Athletics Squad as a 400m Hurdler. From this involvement in sport grew her awareness and interest in health and fitness.

After leaving school, she studied at UNSW. Edwina majored in Japanese while working as a hurdles coach in her spare time. A brief taste of the corporate world, working in a Japanese marketing company after university, confirmed that this was not the future for her, and she returned to her passion for health and fitness.

Building up her coaching knowledge, at the age of 21 Edwina was in business for herself – opening her personal training studio, Fitwomen, in 1995. Specialising in women's fitness initially, the business has expanded to include sports team training, corporate programs, adventure trips and men's health. Now a group of companies, the business includes Fitwomen, Fitmum, Adventurewomen, Fitmen and Real Body Management, with Fitwomen and Fitmen operating from a holistic centre that offers fitness training, dance, pilates, yoga, meditation and massage.

Edwina is seen as an expert in women's health as well as pregnancy and post-natal exercise. In 2003 she produced Fitmum, a DVD-based exercise program for pregnant women. She has presented to fitness trainers for Fitness NSW and often speaks to women's groups on health and lifestyle balance.

Personal experience has taught Edwina that the body can heal itself in remarkable ways, and that most things are possible with good planning and determination. Her holistic approach to health and wellbeing teaches that both physical and mental paths need to be followed for health, happiness and high daily energy. On this subject, she writes for Nature and Health magazine and other publications, as well as presenting in person and on radio.

Edwina lives in Clovelly and spends her spare time hiking in the mountains, paragliding, skiing, swimming and participating in any outdoor sport on offer. Dancing to awesome music or laughing with friends is her ultimate stress relief, and her life balance is found playing the piano, watching theatre and meditating.

What does health mean to you and how do you achieve it?

Good health to me is a balance of both the physical and the mental. Illnesses, injuries or negative thought patterns can dictate life choices and restrict the options available to us. But a fit body and positive mind enable us to see the many opportunities there are in life, and to make choices based on our preferences rather than letting physical or mental imbalances dictate them. I believe balancing our physical and mental sides equals perfect health. The challenge we all face is achieving and maintaining that balance.

The keys to achieving good health, in my opinion, are mainly choices concerning diet, exercise, hydration, sleep, thought patterns and relationships:

Diet - I recommend eating foods appropriate to the individual and varying the ratios of carbohydrates, proteins and fats depending on your body's ability to digest each food type (Refer to The Metabolic Typing Diet by William Wolcott and Trish Fahey for more detail on this subject). For me this involves a high amount of protein. I eat organic food whenever possible and eat very little takeaway food. I buy my food fresh every day and eat as much raw food as possible. I try to keep the number of preservatives and additives in my diet as low as possible and I try to avoid all processed sugars.

Exercise - I am very active and I tend to be running around a lot. Therefore I burn off many calories in an average working day through incidental exercise. My planned exercise program involves some cardio-vascular exercise every day but I try to vary that as much as possible - some days I go jogging, some days I'll swim and on other days I'll enjoy cycling or boxing, etc. On my weekends I often go hiking and paragliding, and in winter I ski so there is plenty of variety in my training. In weeks when I am less active, I then do a couple of weight sessions to correct muscle imbalances, keep my bone density and muscle mass up, and maintain strength and stability. I do some stretching every day as well to slow my pace down, focusing on any tight muscles.

Hydration - our bodies are 75% water. I recommend that my clients consume at least half their body weight in fluid ounces (multiply by 29.57 for millilitres) of clean water each day. Every cell in the body needs water to produce energy, and water is also essential for the optimal function of our nervous, digestive, eliminative and detoxification systems. I carry a water bottle with me which encourages me to drink more. I also find some clients mistake dehydration for hunger - they often find when they drink more they eat less.

Sleep - I aim to have at least eight hours sleep per night to ensure my body enjoys both physiological and psychological repair. Sleep is important to maintain hormone balance; imbalances in cortisol and insulin can inhibit fat loss and negatively influence energy levels. To ensure that my cortisol levels and insulin levels remain balanced, it is essential for me to get plenty of sleep and to reduce stimulation before going to sleep. I try not to watch TV or use my computer late at night, and I don't turn on bright lights in the evenings. Using candle light and reducing stimulants reduces the load on the sympathetic nervous system, helping the body wind down naturally for sleep.

I make sure I take at least one day per week off for total rest. After a very busy work period, I'll also try to take a long weekend off. The body needs rest and recovery time to function better, so I try to allow for that.

Thought patterns - I find meditation is the ideal way to get my thought patterns in order. I meditate every day for between 15 minutes and one hour, depending on the day. I find it clears my head and reduces the chatter in my mind. It also energises me and helps me to think clearly.

Meditation tends to help me gain clarity and better perspective on important subjects. Given that 88% of our mind is sub-conscious, it's great to tap into this resource and strengthen the link between the conscious and sub-conscious. I look forward to this time out every day - meditation has become my key to surviving during busy, stressful times, keeping me sane and more balanced.

Relationships - choosing to surround yourself with positive people who are aligned with you, and supportive of you, is important for good health. I choose to surround myself with people who are supportive and positive and who I relate well to. I find we all benefit as we feed off one another's positive energies. Although everyone has down days, I believe we have choice around our reactions to situations and I surround myself with people who have a similar approach to life. I believe this is another key to good health as healthy friendships and relationships only enhance our wellbeing.

What are the biggest mistakes people make in relation to their health and fitness?

One of the biggest mistakes people make is that they take pieces of information from various sources without tailoring them into a program suited to their own needs. We are all individuals. Everyone has a different posture, different stress levels, goals, available time, and so on.

As the body cannot differentiate between different stresses, all psychological and physical stress put upon the body must be considered before structuring a program. If someone's body is already stressed, say through injury and poor diet, to then add the additional stress of an intense cardio-vascular program may actually work against improving their health. Reducing dietary stress and addressing their injuries should be the primary focus before introducing exercise to ensure a more effective result.

For others, exercise may be the first priority in their program. Then it becomes a question of which exercises are most appropriate for each individual's needs – weights for bone density; pilates for abdominal and pelvic floor muscles; yoga to increase range of motion. Many of my clients use combinations of exercises depending on their backgrounds and goals.

“Identifying a client's goals is important, but enjoying the journey is just as important.”

Another major mistake I see is people entering a program at the same level regardless of their exercise history or past injuries. Someone with shoulder and back pain requires a very different entry level program to someone experiencing no pain, just as a woman who has just had a baby should be given a very different starting program to someone with no children and correct abdominal and gluteal function.

The movement patterns of an individual, based on their lifestyle, are also often not considered. If a mother does many squats and lunges in her day as a result of her household tasks, then it is essential that her program includes plenty of these movement patterns. If a footballer needs greater speed to perform on the field, then it's essential his program includes more than just heavy weights on the leg extension machine – he needs to be performing the kinds of movement patterns he'll use on the field.

There also need to be recovery weeks for any intense program, giving the body time to repair and rejuvenate and to prevent burnout. Many people start an exercise program trying to do too much too quickly, exercising at a high intensity every day. These people quickly find that they are tired and often sick or injured, in return for only small results in terms of their fitness or weight-loss goals.

Programs need to be structured and built up, with all daily commitments and stresses considered. This means the program becomes sustainable and realistic as a long-term lifestyle option, not just a short-term goal which is too challenging and exhausting to maintain.

How important is mental health and how does it relate to physical health?

As the body cannot differentiate between the different stresses on the body, mental stress has as much impact on the body as physical stress. The mind and body have such a close relationship that mental issues can even manifest as physical ailments and injuries.

When someone presents to me with physical ailments, I will always consider the thought patterns that may be associated with those areas. For example, lower back pain can be associated with financial stress or lack of emotional support. I see it as important to address both the physical injury and also any psychological issues that may be relevant to it.

The body will hold mental stresses in various muscles, joints and organs of the body. I am yet to meet anyone who has major stress in their mind but does not have any physical symptoms or pain in their body. Dealing with both the mind and body together when aiming for good health is the ideal.

Who are the role models or mentors that have inspired you along the way? What important lessons have you learnt from them?

My role models through life (apart from my fantastic parents) are Don Bradman, Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama. They each had an ability to inspire millions of people around the world and yet remained humble and grounded in themselves.

Throughout my childhood, although I never played cricket, I had a huge respect and interest in Don Bradman. He was to me, a true leader and inspiration for any sportsperson. He achieved legendary status worldwide, yet remained humble, honourable and was respected across several generations. He was brilliant, yet did not see himself as above anyone else.

Nelson Mandela sacrificed many of his prime years fighting for what he believed in. He followed his dream of equality - a huge challenge which had huge consequences for him and his life. He does not appear bitter about his sacrifice and he maintains a positive approach with total clarity and strength of character. I have huge respect not only for what he has done, but also for his attitude about where he has been and what he has endured. The Dalai Lama's spiritual way of life is also of great inspiration. Much of his

commentary is subtle and drawn from calm contemplation of human behaviour. From this he provides us with clear, simple and accurate explanations for those behaviours. He is inspiring as he has achieved a real lack of attachment to material life and can separate himself from human desires and motivations. His spiritual practice, meditation and education contribute to a rich life with very little clutter or hustle and bustle. He has achieved a level of contentment which many of us will not achieve in this lifetime, and I find his words grounding and reassuring. He reminds us that we create our lives and we have a choice as to how we live them.

Is there a significant quote(s) or saying which you live your life by?

Life is about choice and that with the right choices, anything is possible. We must choose carefully and be clear about our intentions. I choose success and happiness!

What specific things can people do to improve their attitude and outlook on a daily basis?

Trying to be more present in daily activities, living in the now and enjoying the small things in life are important. Too many of us live wishing for the past, or fixate on the future, which can make the present seem unsatisfying. When we live in the now, we notice and enjoy everything here in the present. I find I tend to enjoy daily moments more and I connect better with people when I apply this way of thinking.

Our motivations and purposes in life differ but it helps to be clear about what your life purpose is. Waking up each day with a clear purpose is very motivating. Setting small benchmarks or goals to achieve will help you maintain that motivation, reaffirming that you're heading in the right direction as you achieve each one. It's also important to reward yourself whenever you reach one of these goals, so take some time out, treat yourself and look forward to the next challenge.

SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

You've just launched a brand new health centre in Sydney's eastern suburbs. What was the motivation for moving to bigger premises and what's the plan for the business over the next few years?

The main reason for the larger premises was to expand my Fitwomen exercise studio and have the space to launch Fitmen within the one location. My philosophy is very holistic and I recognise that everyone's needs are different. The new location enables me to provide a balance of services to cater for a wide range of needs. We provide not only weight training, cardio training, dance and outdoor fitness, but also yoga, pilates and meditation, all under the same roof.

The new location also enables specialists in massage, kinesiology and nutrition to consult, and there is room for other therapists and exercise specialists as needed by my clients. I also believe that keeping the mind fit is as important as keeping the physical body fit; therefore we offer courses in meditation which help achieve mental clarity and balance. Meditation also provides a stepping stone to a more spiritual path for those who are interested.

Different body and personality types benefit from different types of classes, so I offer clients various options for exercise that will keep them enjoying their programs in the long-term. The new space offers many options but is still personal, with limited class numbers and a friendly environment where groups can interact and one-on-one sessions can have privacy.

Many clients try sessions they may not have considered previously because it is all under the same roof, so I feel I am able to provide a more balanced and effective program for everyone.

Fitwomen aims to provide clients with the tools to balance both body and mind. but

that's not something I want to restrict to just half the population: I want everyone to benefit. So following the success of Fitwomen, I have now also launched Fitmen. Many men had asked about the Fitwomen approach to health and exercise, and whether it could be offered to them so the need was there to match my desire to launch this new offering. Now Fitwomen and Fitmen aim to offer all options and to educate about the benefits of each.

A lot of people know you as the pregnancy fitness queen. How did you get involved in this market and what are your main tips for women wanting to stay healthy through their pregnancy?

When I started my business in 1995, I specialised in women's health and quickly realised that there was very little information available about exercise during pregnancy. I often had women who were training with me fall pregnant, and they would go from exercising daily to doing nothing. Or, they would continue running and doing what I considered to be too much! I realised that these two extremes were far from ideal, so I decided that I would research this area and provide women with the knowledge required to exercise safely during pregnancy.

I packaged the information as a DVD, something I worked on for two years while I continued to train clients. My DVD, Fitmum, was launched in 2003 and contains a complete program for pregnant women, including cardio, weights, stretch, aqua and meditation exercises.

My DVD was the first fitness program anywhere in the world that provided information on all the health risks and outlined all exercise options available to women during pregnancy. My Fitwomen centre took up this program, and has been running Fitmum classes for pregnant women since 1995. Other trainers now refer to me as the pregnancy fitness queen as many have asked for my advice on how to train their clients and staff.

My main tip for pregnant women is to be sure to continue doing some exercise. Don't, whatever you do, wrap yourself in cotton wool and do nothing. The incidence of gestational diabetes is getting higher and it is important that women work to avoid this in their unborn children. I recommend doing weight training twice per week (at the correct level), with walking and swimming on other days for a gentle cardio-vascular. Exercise during pregnancy aims to maintain fitness, muscle mass and strength. It is not a time to try to improve fitness but to maintain it at a good level. Mental relaxation also plays an important role pre- and post-pregnancy.

As a busy and successful business woman, what do you do to relax and take time out?

I love spending time outdoors, so usually I take time out in the sunshine doing something! In summer, I love hiking in the mountains, paragliding, or swimming in the ocean. In winter I usually ski and relax on my property at the Snowy Mountains. When I'm really busy at work, I look to slow my pace when I can. I will just walk, play the piano and meditate on the beach to try and relax my mind. Outdoor cinemas, theatre and music are also favourites of mine. I love being out under the stars as I watch a great movie or dance to some fantastic music.

A lot of your specialty work these days is health coaching and corporate speaking. Was this a natural evolution from being a fitness trainer?

Yes, health coaching and speaking is an expansion of what I do and a way to reach a bigger group of people. I love working one-on-one, but speaking to bigger groups means that I can spread my message more effectively. My aim is to educate as many people as I can, and having been in the industry since 1995 I feel I have plenty of information to pass on. I have also overcome a number of personal hurdles in life which have taught me many lessons. These can be passed on to others for their benefit.

Writing for magazines was my first step toward reaching a bigger audience and I still enjoy that. Speaking was the next step for me and I love it. Speaking gives me a buzz and I feel inspired and excited about getting my message out to more people. My message is no longer just about the body and exercise; I have learnt more about the importance of the mind so my message these days is about our energy choices in both mind and body.

When in my fitness trainer role people tend to ask me specific questions about exercise and diet, and want specific answers to those questions. I feel I can pass on a more complete message by including both mental and physical health information. Speaking and coaching is the perfect environment to inform people about the bigger picture – about life choices around achieving balance and happiness.

What did you learn from your background as an elite hurdler that you have been able to apply to training clients and running a successful business?

Training with the national junior team taught me discipline, determination and focus. I realised at a young age that if I put my mind to something, I could achieve it. I also realised the power of the mind for visualising what I wanted. When competing on days when I was not focused mentally, my performance suffered, but on days when I was clear and focused, I achieved my best results.

Competing at this elite level gave me the confidence to believe in myself and to inspire my clients to believe that they are able to do anything.

Usually, the main thing holding people back is the little voice in their head telling them they can't achieve or that they aren't good enough. Our thoughts are powerful, so I aim to keep my clients' results positive by setting small goals along the way to achieving their bigger goals. The more goals we can tick off, the more positive the ongoing results and the higher their motivation remains.

Reaching the national team didn't just fall into my lap. I put plenty of hours into training. But the reason I made it was because I loved it, therefore it did not feel like an effort - it was fun. Identifying a client's goals is important, but enjoying the journey is just as important. My aim is that Fitwomen and Fitmen should be fun, social environments so my clients and staff enjoy what they do and the good results follow.

Having coached executives and corporate workers for over 10 years, what are the key ingredients high performers share?

My experience has taught me that there are seven key ingredients common to all high performers. **These are:**

Clear goals - all high performers are very clear on their purpose and they have goal markers along the way to check that their performance is on track.

Determination and passion - they are always very motivated and energetic about achieving their goals. Passion is an essential element for high performance.

A positive attitude and positive friends - high performers always tackle things with a positive frame of mind, and they tend to surround themselves with other high achievers.

Good mentors - when they lack knowledge about something, they choose good mentors and advisors to ensure they are always learning and growing. They appreciate the value of having a good team to support them and invest in their team both personally and financially. They encourage their team members and help them to achieve their own goals as well as the team's goals. They inspire others and respect others and themselves which provides a very positive environment.

Rest and recovery - high performers are always very strong on allowing time for rest and time with family. They work hard but have good life balance with quiet time and family time prioritised as highly as their work commitments.

Exercise and diet - high performers appreciate the importance of having a fit, healthy body to enable them to continue to perform at a high level.

A sense of humour - in my experience, high performers always have a great sense of humour! It's important to be able to laugh off the hard times to help stay positive.

Having suffered chronic fatigue syndrome and depression, you have been more skeptical about a spiritual connection in the past. What have you done to change this?

I believe sometimes you have to hit rock bottom to find the desire to search for more and find the courage to question your purpose in life. In my opinion, prior to getting sick I had enjoyed a pretty easy run. I had always earned good grades, won nearly all my sporting events, played instruments, had plenty of friends and loved life. I think it is safe to say I had never had any reason to question who I was or why I was here: I was having too much fun to worry about it.

Getting sick was one of several events in my life that have shaped my perspective. After achieving a personal best at a swimming carnival the day before, I woke ready to go with an Australian team to run in America but fainted back onto my bed. I couldn't stand up without fainting for the next three or four months and have very little memory of that time. I was woken to eat and slept for the rest of the time. It was 12 months before I could function again normally.

This was the first time in my life that I couldn't be the performer. I was no longer

able to captain my hockey team, I couldn't keep up with my assignments at school, and my 'best' friends seemed to disappear. I found my great mates became more concerned about who was going to take my sporting positions than with my health. During the four months that I was chronically ill, not one of my friends visited me and only one person sent a card. As an adult this isn't as significant, but for a 15-16 year old girl it was a confronting and upsetting reality. It was the beginning of a time when I began to question the meaning of my life.

The next significant event was when I discovered I had a back injury that could stop me from competing in sports at an elite level. I was training for a marathon when I realised I couldn't physically lift my leg up when running. Later I learned I had an injury in my back which was affecting a nerve.

I spent three months unable to even walk without pain, and again questioned my purpose and identity. I had to assess who I was and who I would be if I could no longer compete. This experience reminded me that I can be happy without my sport, and that there are so many more levels to who I am. I am now jogging again when I choose to and I compete in all sports with consideration for my back; I am just more careful and aware of my body now. This period helped me to realise that it is not the end of the world to have some options taken away as there are plenty of others available. Sometimes it's just a question of accepting the change, looking for alternatives, and allowing the new choices to unfold.

Another significant event was a broken heart at the age of 32 when the man I thought was my life partner, and whom I thought adored me, announced he was over the relationship with no hint or warning. This sent me into a period of depression and darkness but also spurred me onto a journey of personal development. Although this was the most painful and lonely period of my life so far, I am now grateful for where it lead me.

It was during this course of personal development that I was forced to

practice meditation and although I struggled hugely with it for the first two months, eventually I came to embrace it. I had toyed with meditation on and off over the preceding 10 years, but this was the first time that I committed to meditating every day. I found myself reading spiritual books, books on human behaviour and personality types, and I spent every spare minute absorbing information about who I was and why I was here.

During one of my meditations I had the most amazing experience - an experience which has given me strength and comfort about my life. After chanting in a group we went into our usual meditation, however I felt this amazing energy shooting up my spine. A huge warmth and feeling of happiness and peace came over me, and I could see other people smiling with me in the room. I have never experienced such a feeling of comfort, balance and peace since. I could have stayed there for days, it felt so amazing and beautiful. I had to come out of the meditation with the group so I had to let it go, but I will never forget that feeling.

I was not brought up in a religious family. Actually, I have rarely been to church at all except for special occasions. But I have always thought there was a higher 'something' out there somewhere. This experience convinced me that there is a higher world. I am not sure what that world is and I see no need to label it, I just believe it is there and that it is very loving and beautiful. We are all part of this same energy, part of this higher world - we just need to learn to tap into it.

This experience shaped my life. I am now aware of the various sources of energy available to us and the choices I have about what I do with that energy. A healthy and fit physical body is a great foundation, but spiritual practices such as meditation enable us to connect to higher energy sources. We can also receive energy from sources around us in nature - from rocks, mountains, the sea, and so on, and we can choose to surround ourselves with positive energy. We must be careful not to deplete our energy with bad foods, negative thinking, negative people and unhealthy living. The more energy we all have, the more we can achieve and the more we can enjoy life!