

EXERCISE & NUTRITION

Living Lean in Lamorinda

By SUSAN GILLERAN
Staff Writer

Personal fitness trainer Sheena Lakhotia, with a body of steel that belies having given birth twice, is living proof that her program, Living Lean, works. It's a regimen that the Orinda resident developed using proven scientific principles and motivational practices, incorporating diet and exercise with personal one-on-one coaching. But, if you really want the skinny,

it's about busting myths:

Myth #1: Everyone who goes to a health club is healthy. Lakhotia is keenly aware from personal observation and experience — through teaching spinning and ball & muscle classes six nights a week — that exercise alone is not enough to reach weight goals. "I've seen people come into the gym everyday in a week, do the same thing and never seem satisfied," she says. "So I decided to do an exercise and diet plan teaching people how to integrate healthy habits into their lifestyle. Which brings us to..."

Myth #2: Diets are all about losing weight. They're actually about being healthy, according to Lakhotia. "If you eat well and exercise, you'll be strong and fit.



Orinda resident Sheena Lakhotia demonstrates one of the exercises in her new Living Lean program.

The importance of living lean is to have a healthy heart," she says. Towards that end, her Living Lean program begins with a personal health assessment, where clients are asked to divulge their entire health, diet, and exercise history as well as goals and food preferences. They are weighed and their body fat is measured.

Then Lakhotia digests the information using a software program and puts together a customized nutrition and exercise plan. Included along with a minimum six-hour per week workout schedule is a complete day-by-day menu that offers up the ideal combination of good protein, fats, and carbohydrates in their purest forms that are necessary to achieve goals. And this leads to...

Myth #3: You have to starve if you want to lose weight. The bottom line is you have to eat — to trick your body against storing fat, which it tends to do when hunger sets in, Lakhotia professes. "This is not a crash diet," she says. "You can actually eat five times a day. Certain vegetables are free foods so you can heap them on until you're blue in the face. You can even have shakes for snacks. Who doesn't like a smoothie? You can also have a glass of wine a day. We want to make sure this is something that you can incorporate into your life. "Your body needs high fiber foods that stay in your system a long time and prevent you from getting cravings because the goal is to lose fat and gain muscle to become lean," Lakhotia adds. And she goes on to bust ...

Myth #4: Diet foods are boring and monotonous. Lakhotia believes that flavorful foods and flexibility are the real pluses of her program. Clients may opt to do their own cooking (recipes are currently being developed to help guide them) or purchase fresh "gourmet" meals prepared by Susan Ford Catering in Lafayette for Living Lean's healthy meal supplier, OrtoGo. "These are fresh, wonderful meals that everybody loves and can be ordered online at ortogo.com (a Living Lean portal is currently in the works) and delivered to your home or picked up locally," Lakhotia says. Which brings up...

Myth #5: Exercise always works. Actually, Lakhotia says, "If you want to increase metabolism, you really have to change up what you're doing. Otherwise,

your body gets used to the same routine." Focusing on the core, which is where she sees real body strength coming from, she provides her clients with a customized mix of weight training and cardio workouts. Duration and intensity vary with each individual as well. "I want them (my clients) to be independent and to live healthy. I spend as much time as I need, whether it's meeting every week, at the (Lafayette) reservoir or at the Lafayette Health Club (where she credits owner Debbie Swigert with choosing the name of her program) or in a home gym. And then there's..."

Myth #6: Sticking to any program is a piece of cake. "Motivation is the key," she says. It's actually a double combo of motivation and follow-through — as Lakhotia continues meeting with clients weekly until they're ready to be on their own, providing progress reports filled with kudos and inspiration to keep them on track. "Knowing that they're not alone really seems to work," she adds. And finally, there's...

Myth #7: Physical trainers have always been in great shape. Lakhotia remembers exactly when she caught the fitness bug, which for a young woman growing up in a traditional Indian household was considered somewhat of an anomaly. She'd put on the freshmen 10 while attending U.C. Davis from which she eventually graduated with a B.S. in genetics, and fell victim to her brother's jokes. So upon returning to school, she attended her first aerobics class and has been teaching ever since, along with step-aerobics, cardio-kickboxing, strength training and spinning. "In 20 years, I've worked at all kinds of health clubs and have never had to pay for membership," she said.

"This is my true love. I studied genetics for my father (having gone on to pursue an advanced degree in immunology at Cornell). I was in marketing and founded my own company (in the medical device and diagnostics industries), which allowed me to stay home with my children, but I'm really a people person. This is what I'm best at, and I love to do it."

Additional information on the Living Lean program is available by calling 925-360-7051.



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