

Jessica Bartlett

Jessica Bartlett is a self-employed personal trainer, who uses strength training and nutritional strategies with her clients. She competed in Bikini Fitness with the UKBFF and after having learned first hand about the effects of strength training, it has driven her to study more. We asked her a few questions about her coaching philosophies and nutritional practices.

Hi Jess, thanks so much for taking time to talk to us. Tell us firstly: what have you been able to learn from your bikini competitions that helps guide you to greater success with your clients?

JB: Competing in bikini fitness helped teach me how to push and challenge myself to the extreme. A huge amount of self motivation and discipline was needed to keep myself on track as it could sometimes be a very lonely process. I think that going through these tough physical and mental challenges, and learning to embrace the difficulties, gave me a better sense of how to motivate and encourage others even when they are going through tough times themselves. To me, as with any goal in life, creating success within fitness and nutrition is all about resilience, mental focus and actually enjoying the process and not just concentrating on the end goal. The end goal is obviously very important as I feel clients will always need something to aim for, but I think it's about learning how to enjoy the steps of HOW you get there at the same time.

You told me that you suffered from an autoimmune condition in your early 20's – what was the condition and how did you reverse it?

JB: The condition was Seronegative Arthritis, which affected my knee joints, causing

them to swell up with fluid and creating so much pain to the point I could barely walk on them. It began in my early twenties when, in all honesty, I wasn't really looking after myself very well at all. The doctors decided to put me on all types of medication (methotrexate being one – a low dose of chemotherapy), which made me feel even worse. I decided to try and change my diet and lifestyle and get my mind focused on looking after myself, trying to keep a positive mindset about my body and my lifestyle. As my diet cleaned up, and I began to exercise (slowly at first), things improved, creating a snowball effect and eventually I stopped taking all medication and have since not had any problems.

Presumably most of your clients don't aspire towards a bikini body, so what is the most common exercise, nutrition and lifestyle advice that you hand out?

JB: The most common aspirations for clients are usually weight loss, learning how to lift weights correctly and gaining a healthier lifestyle. I try to encourage a complete lifestyle change (where necessary), with healthier eating, becoming aware of what is 'good' or 'bad' in the diet, and also creating a change that is achievable, manageable on their own and that can be maintained for the long term. I want clients leaving



me knowing how to continue with what I have hopefully taught them!

In this world of fad diets, what are your main nutrition philosophies and how do you individualise them for your clients?

JB: One thing I always tell my clients is to make sure to have protein with every meal. I think the general population are so unaware of how important this is, and it is something that is not actually that hard to incorporate into the diet to help achieve some very dramatic changes in the body. I believe that fats and carbs are not the enemy; it's just learning to use them wisely. It all comes down to balance. Always stay hydrated and remember to spoil yourself occasionally otherwise you'll go crazy. If you're eating well 80 to 90 per cent of the time, having a treat meal of some sort in the

other 10 to 20 per cent of time is not going to be the end of the world.

Nutritionally, how do you taper into stage competition?

JB: A week before a show, we go into 'peak week', which is the period when we are trying to drop any remaining water weight from the body. It's about trying to hit a short term peak and completely drying oneself out to reach that 'ripped' look you see on stage. I begin to water load in this week, and I will try to reach about five litres a day, while decreasing sodium levels in the diet. Two days out from the show, I begin to increase my carb intake or 'carb up', helping to fill out the muscles so I don't look 'flat' on stage. It's all about keeping track of how you look throughout the week, on a day-to-day basis, and then adjusting the nutrition sensibly as and when needed. **fsn**