

Nawaz Modi Singhania

In conversation with HELLO!, the wellness icon and pioneer of many firsts in the Indian fitness space speaks about the power of positivity in healing the mind and body. Even as she busts workout myths and slams internet fads, she shares that it's important to simply follow your soul



The gorgeous Nawaz Modi Singhania describes fitness as the 'game changer'. Seen here with her husband, entrepreneur Gautam Singhania

How do you describe fitness?
 "Fitness is the vehicle to a high quality life. When you are slim, toned, healthy, have lots of energy and look young because of your fitness routine, automatically the world, the people in it, treat you very, very differently. You are always looked up to, you receive better opportunities. Fitness really is everything – it's the game changer because never mind how the world sees you; you yourself view yourself very highly. Fitness really is 'self-esteem'."

What prompted your journey in the fitness industry?

"While pursuing my third year of BA at the St Xavier's College, Mumbai, I knew I would study law. Since I come from a family of lawyers – my father, my brothers are all lawyers – I wanted to have that feather in my cap, but I never wanted to practice law. I was already into fitness by then, because I was puny and weak from my early childhood days. And, I had a strong premonition that I really needed fitness in my life for my own health and wellness as well. I entered this field when there were no other

players around in the fitness industry, except for perhaps the odd Talwalkars. I wanted to do something on my own time, in my own space, on my own terms. I went to America in 1991-92 to get trained and certified on the subject and taught there as well as a Fitness Professional. Post my return from the US, I started Body Art, my first centre being at Hughes Road in South Mumbai, with just an Aerobics Studio, which had only a couple of different types of classes. But, I got an amazing response and, gradually, I expanded. Today, we offer 28 to 30 different types and forms of classes in the Aerobic Workshop, including cardiovascular classes, resistance/strength training classes, mind-body workouts, soul workouts, anti-stress workouts, facial fitness/anti-ageing and more. Over time, I added a Pilates & Gyrotonics Studio, Gym, Aqua Aerobics/Aqua Yoga Camps, Personal Training, Indoor Biking/ Spinning, etc. and then expanded into a number of centres."

You were the pioneer of many firsts in the fitness space in India...

"Yes, we introduced Pilates – that is the full

equipment-based Pilates – over 20 years ago. Gyrotonics was another first by us in the country as were Facial Fitness, Callanetics, Slide Training, Trampoline Training and Aqua Yoga. We also brought Anti-Gravity Training to India and Suspension Fitness. These are separate studios by themselves and are fantastic forms of training. For instance, there are multiple benefits to Aerial Arts Training: the participant achieves a slim, toned body and acquires strength and increased mobility and flexibility. Complete mental relaxation and a flat, toned core, improved circulation, increased proprioceptive awareness, improved eyesight and hearing, improved balance and control and a strong, healthy back are amongst the many benefits this fabulous workout offers. It's about integrated mind-body-spirit wholeness."

What do you feel about the power of positivity in healing the mind and body?

"Everything starts in the mind. Everything we are, everything we have, even life itself first starts with an intent, which means it starts with a desire that originates in the mind. Every single human being who is in our life, we desired to have and keep them in our lives, which is why they are there. Every single possession we have, everything we work for, strive hard for, is all there because we thought of it, wanted it, worked for it and moved towards achieving it. So, the power of the mind is ultimate. If we are negative, all our experiences are negative, we approach things with doubt, fear, hatred, bitterness and scepticism. Therefore, the universe being a giant mirror, just reflects back what we project. When you are positive, you are happy, a beacon of light, you are kind, helpful, thoughtful, sensitive, sensible, mindful and intelligent. That's what will come back to you as well."

Your thoughts on the various fitness fads that keep going viral around the world, claiming to be the benchmarks of fitness...

"Fads are just that – they are fads! They come and they go. Eventually, fitness is not a fad, it is a way of life. It is really about what you think of yourself – how much do you respect yourself, what you want out of your life. Once you have tasted the benefits of fitness, you will never, ever let it go. It is also very hard to describe to somebody who has not been there – it's like trying to describe sight to a blind man. There are workouts which are not just fads, they contribute a lot on a long term basis. We at Body Art encourage our members to go by the eye test: look in the mirror, see and judge what you like and don't like in yourself. Everybody is *not* going to share your views. So, go with what works for you. You tell us what you want to change, based on what you see and what makes you happy."

One gyming or workout myth that you feel is harming many...

"There are many. The one that comes to mind right now, though, is: 'The more I sweat, the more fat I burn.' Not true. Water loss is NOT fat loss and sweat is only water loss! Burning



fat and sweating often go hand-in-hand and are, therefore, confused as being one and the same thing. However, excessive water loss through sweat can be very harmful as it can lead to dehydration, heat exhaustion and even heat stroke, in extreme cases. Water loss hampers the ability to continue any form of cardiovascular exercise as the body overheats and is unable to effectively get rid of this heat build-up. To facilitate fat loss, one must drink water before, during and after exercise to remain well hydrated, or else you will just end up exhausted and unable to continue with your exercise programme."

Please share your personal fitness regime and diet.

"Firstly, I never workout for more than an hour, a day. Most of the time I am teaching a class during the week days anyway, so that is when I get my own personal workout in as well. That's it, nothing else. In the Aerobic Workshop classes that I teach, there is a large cardio component along with a muscle toning component. Flexibility, mobility and functional fitness are also targeted. On days that I am not teaching, I may go for a nice long walk and combine it with a bit of body weight training, or I might engage in a Pilates workout. My diet is super healthy. I get a large variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds in. I avoid all the whites and substitute them for healthier options like

quinoa, multigrain bread, chapattis made of quinoa, *nachni*, *johar* or *bajra* flour. I avoid fried foods and use cooking methods such as boiling, baking, steaming and grilling instead. I avoid all sorts of batter. I'm a huge dessert buff and need something sweet after every meal. But, even my desserts are free of white sugar, oil, butter and white flour."

You are an accomplished entrepreneur, one of the directors of Raymond, a mother to two beautiful children, a wellness icon to many... how do balance your professional and personal lives?

"Diarise, diarise, diarise! Everything goes in the diary. I love my life. I juggle a lot, but I would not have it any other way. Everything fits if you want to make it fit. Anything you want, you will make the time for. Anything you don't want in your life, you will postpone for later, and that 'later' will never come. It's just a matter of one's priorities. Simple."

Do you think it's important to inculcate the tenets of fitness from an early age?

"For me, it never came from an early age. It came at a later stage and perhaps that is why I am so particular about my fitness now, because I know how terrible it was when I didn't have it. I'm often asked to train young kids and I've always maintained that kids are very active, anyway. They play, run, dance, do gymnastics and engage in sports. They don't need regimented fitness the way adults do. In fact, it's better not to have them join a fitness centre at an early age as all their physical activities are fun when they're young. It is important not to take the fun out of it for them!"

Your own wellness icon...

"It's difficult to pinpoint because I have many wellness icons, in many different ways. My friend, actor Sonu Sood, who is heavily engaged in fitness, was telling me that he pushes nearly 300 kilos during his leg workout. I laughed and said that's more than six times my own body weight - I weigh between 49 and 50 kilos! But, on the Indian front, he's my icon. Internationally, maybe I would say, Sylvester Stallone."

Your mantra in life...

"Be the light, always. Back to my religion, Zoroastrianism - Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds - our own, that is. Do just what your soul came down here to do."



Nawaz (above and left) admits that she does not workout for more than an hour, a day. On days when she doesn't conduct a fitness class (seen top), she chooses to go for long walks



TEXT: SREEMITA BHATTACHARYA