

KAYLA

NEW BEGINNINGS

She's spent the past decade building a workout empire, but Kayla Itsines is only just getting started. After a huge year, the fitness star reflects on the past, present and her next exciting chapter

By Alex Davies

Photography by Steve Baccon Styling by Nicole Adolphe



Aje Athletica sports bra, \$99, and bike shorts, \$110 (worn underneath); Aje skirt, \$395; Adidas by Stella McCartney sneakers, \$340; Apple Watch Hermès Silver Stainless Steel Case with Fauve Attelage Double Tour, from \$2,119

So, Kayla Itsines' plan for her 30th birthday this month is – according to her mum – “typical” Kayla. That is, relaxed, low key and with an unapologetic hint of grandma vibes. “Honestly, I’m not a party girl,” Kayla tells me, laughing. “I might take my friends and family away somewhere nice, if I can. If not, then something small. I said to Mum, ‘I want to have a pyjama party, like a barbecue and everyone wearing pyjamas,’ because it’s always cold here in May. She was like, ‘You’re so boring!’”

There’s no doubt the Adelaidean PT-turned-fitness-megastar has earned a chilled celebration. Her milestone birthday caps off a decade that saw her co-release a workout eBook, *Bikini Body Guide* (BBG), which kickstarted the growth of an empire. In its first year, the Sweat app topped App Store charts worldwide and now offers exercise programs from High Intensity and Zero Equipment (launched during the pandemic) to Post-Pregnancy and the brand-new Low Impact (inspired by her mum’s request for a jump-free, low-intensity routine). Kayla has led record-breaking international bootcamps; authored four lifestyle books; and been crowned Top Fitness Influencer by *Forbes*. Not bad for a girl who “grew up with no money... and never thought her programs would ever leave Adelaide”. As for personal achievements, her proudest by far is becoming a parent to two-year-old Arna, who is “so funny and sassy already – she’s just the best.”

Naturally, the past years have brought struggles, too. These include a battle with endometriosis

as well as a separation from Kayla’s fiancé, Sweat CEO and co-founder Tobi Pearce, which the pair announced in August 2020. It’s these highs and lows, though, as well as her close family support squad, that’ve helped to cultivate Kayla’s strength, resilience and sense of purpose. Even as she reflects on the past decade, she’s already looking ahead to the next. A big move for 2021? Retiring the term ‘BBG’ from the Sweat platform and replacing it simply with ‘High Intensity’. As Kayla says of the decision, “Things need to move forward. It feels like a positive move for the company and community.”

Community is everything to Kayla. There’s the Sweat one, for which she’ll be replying to Instagram DMs at 3am. Then there’s her personal community that’s all about family, food, strong women and watching Arna run around and eat figs in Kayla’s grandparents’ garden. It’s clear her dedication to both worlds will never change. Here, the trailblazing trainer opens up about confidence, regrets of her twenties, feeling empowered and what’s next.

How have you seen the fitness world change over the past decade?

✳️ Honestly, if I think about back in the day and how it’s evolved... Gyms used to be for men. There were programs for men that were *altered* for women. When you walked into stores, it was men’s clothing, and for women you had to go downstairs or upstairs. Now, it’s women first. Fitness used to be very aesthetics-based, too. It is still physical, but it’s also mental and emotional. There is a huge shift into mindset now, and mindfulness and self-love. It’s holistic. I used to laugh at yoga and meditation, and now I do them.

The mental benefits of exercise have become even clearer during the pandemic, right?

✳️ We looked to our community for advice – ‘What do you need? What are you feeling right now?’ – so that’s where the Zero Equipment program came in. And people just loved it. Especially [because many] women were feeling so... just lost. You’re working from home, you’ve got your kids at home, you’re doing everything from home. So [we thought], ‘How do we get you into gym gear and get you working out?’ It was incredible, and the feedback has been [that the program is] amazing for women’s minds.

Why are you retiring the term ‘BBG’ now?

✳️ Language for me – when I speak to Arna, to my community, within Sweat and to staff members – is really important. I love words like ‘empower’, ‘inspire’, ‘strength’ and ‘confidence’ and I felt that, to be honest, BBG – *Bikini Body Guide* – seemed outdated. It wasn’t something I wanted Arna to grow up



Frame Denim blazer, \$979; First Base top, \$109, and bike shorts, \$129; Apple Watch Hermès Silver Stainless Steel Case with Orange Attelage Single Tour, from \$1,969



Cleo Harper crop, \$69, and shorts, \$69; Nike trainers, \$150; Apple Watch Series 6 Silver Stainless Steel with Kumquat Solo Loop, from \$1,049

with. It was an acronym developed 10 years ago with positive intent, of course, and this incredible and amazing community has grown. [With this change], I'm not going anywhere. I'm still there training with those programs they love; I think [the rebrand] will resonate more with women around the world.

Tell me about your own week of workouts

So, on Monday, Wednesday, Friday, I'll do a 28-minute high-intensity workout, or a high-intensity strength workout with some dumbbells and a kettlebell. But I do love a lot of the bodyweight stuff. Then, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, I'll walk on the treadmill for 28 minutes. And on Sunday, nothing – although when I say nothing, it's doing the washing, cleaning the house, running around after a toddler. Honestly, I don't think I've ever had a day in my life – other than if I'm sick – when I've sat and done nothing. I love to move. If I'm not exercising, I'll be rearranging a cupboard or something like that.

How do you approach rest and recovery?

Mindfulness, and all those apps like Headspace, Calm and Breathe, are incredible. The other day, I just did a stretch session on the grass and did a breathing exercise, and I felt so much better. I also don't sleep without my sleep sounds. I've got the app Relax Melodies – I use a sound called Starship, which is like the inside of a plane; Green Noise, which is the opposite to Arna's white noise; and also the Rainstorm one.

Since your separation, how are things going?

Well, things are going good. I'm not going to lie – obviously at times it's really hard. For everyone, and for every woman, in that situation, it is a really hard time. I think what's important for me is to just take time to adjust to life by yourself.

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In saying that, I'm very lucky and grateful to have this huge family. It is a lot harder for women who have no support network. For Tobi and I, our number one priority is Arna. So, it's like, 'how can we work together and be the best parents for her?' It's taken a long time, but we've got there. We work at Sweat together, we co-parent Arna together, we have this really great and open communication. It hasn't come without that really hard time but, like I said, you spend time by yourself, and with family and friends. You're open with your communication, and before you know it, it's really good.

Have you drawn on certain qualities that you hadn't before?

I say I have a lot of confidence, resilience and strength, and I've always had that in my life. But it *really* came out of me during that time. I'm proud of myself. I thank my mum, grandma and family for that. They've taught me that [resilience]. My family is all women – I feel sorry for my dad! He's like, 'Can I just get one boy?'. I have a really strong family and strong women in my life.

I understand you're in a new relationship now

It's early days, so I won't share too much. But I'm super happy. We have a strong sense of family and a love for fitness [in common].

How do you feel about turning 30 in May?

I'm so excited! I feel my best and most confident. I look back at my twenties and think, 'when did I ever stop to celebrate something?' If I could go back, I would tell myself, 'Every time you do something that you love, that you felt was awesome, celebrate that'. I celebrated my clients, but I was never like, 'Oh my god, I just did a huge bootcamp' or 'I've just released an app. I didn't grow up in Hollywood; I grew up in a Greek family in Adelaide and my grandparents still don't understand what I do, but I'll celebrate because it's amazing'. So, that's what I would tell myself: celebrate. You're not gassing yourself up; just do it.

When you think about the community you've built, what emotions does that bring up?

Every bootcamp, I stay for two or three hours to meet everyone and listen to their stories. And then I go back to my hotel room and I burst into tears. I can't switch off. I'll rehear the stories over and over and over again, thinking 'I want to help more, how can I do more?' So yeah, I am a really emotional person, even more now as a mum. The past decade, business-wise... what a rollercoaster. It's this journey of a girl who never thought her programs would ever leave Adelaide. I never thought I would be where I am.

How do you deal with bootcamp nerves?

I was nervous for this phone call. I get nervous for everything. I'm Greek, so you want to be the best host, and you want everyone to be happy... It's that sort of mentality. I was never good at public speaking, but as soon as the music goes on and I start training, it's like I become the most confident person in the world because it's what I do. But



beforehand, I'm like, 'What if I fall over? Am I going to stuff up?' I wish I'd had my meditation apps back in the day! That would've helped.

You wrote about your endometriosis recently. What drove that?

To be really honest, I did open up about it when I was younger on social media. A lot of people were like, 'thank you so much for posting. I have endo, too.' But then some comments were, 'Are you scared about fertility?' [since endometriosis can cause fertility issues] and I was like, 'Wait, what? Am I not going to be able to have a baby?' So, I actually removed the post and thought, 'I'm never talking [in public] about this again'. Honestly, it came from this place of me being so scared. [Recently though] I thought 'Right, I'm mature enough, I've had a baby, I'm confident enough to be able to speak to my experience'. I had more knowledge, so I felt way more confident to share my story.

You had a surgery in February. How are you?

I feel more in control of my body. I had so many cysts burst in the 12 months leading up to that surgery, I was just glad to have my body back - just internally to feel like it's my body again. I got my first period which was a lot lighter - it wasn't an ice pack here and a heat pack there and needing to sit on the shower floor. There wasn't that big drama. I've got my second period now and here I am. Maybe [needing] an aspirin or anti-inflammatory, but not heavy meds to combat all this pain. It's just different; it's way better.

Has having to live with endo changed your relationship with your body, and in what way?

Yes, absolutely. There are so many benefits to being fit and healthy when you've got endo. Even if I wasn't a personal trainer, I would still put as much effort into my fitness, health and diet, because I've got endometriosis and I know how much better you feel. So, it's really changed everything for me.

What health advice do you have for women?

You should not be in excruciating pain when you're having a period. It should not be a debilitating event. If you feel like that, get help. If you feel something's not right in your body or mind in any way, seek advice. Talk to friends and community members. Put it out there, and say, 'Is this normal?' You've got people, we've got social media, so let's use it.

Lastly, what excites you about the next decade?

What I want more than anything is impact. How much impact can I have on the world and how much change can I make in a woman's life? How can I learn more? That's the next 10 years - more trainers, more disciplines, something for everyone no matter where you are in your life. I want to be a safe space for women to come to. I want them to think about fitness and go, 'Kayla'. *wh*

I feel more in control of my body

4th & Reckless top, \$37; Nimble bike shorts, \$79; Phillippe Model sneakers, \$649

Keeping up with KAYLA

Perfect weekend
Going to the beach with Arna on a beautiful day.

Energy snack
A Turkish coffee, and one of my Yiayia's biscuits, or an apple with peanut butter. A turmeric, lemon, ginger and pepper shot will wake you up instantly, too.

Surprise talent
I'm qualified in beauty therapy. I do all my friends' make-up and tans for their weddings. I love beauty stuff.

Go-to beauty kit
Envy U Skin Activated Charcoal Loofah is my favourite product. I also love Frank Body, La Roche-Posay and Pixi Glow Peel Pads.

Top workout move for women
High intensity, it'd be burpees. For low intensity, a plank. There's a [breathing technique] video on my Facebook page called Game Changing Plank Tip. So good, check it out.

Favourite show and film
The Blacklist, *Dead to Me* and any of the *Fast and Furious* movies - if I'm on the plane, I'll probably be watching *Hobbs and Shaw!*

WANT A YEAR OF SWEAT?

Of course you do! To celebrate Kayla's 30th birthday, you can score **12 MONTHS OF THE SWEAT APP - ABSOLUTELY FREE** - thanks to this exclusive WH offer. That's a whole year of access to the Sweat community and next-level workouts, from high intensity and strength to post-pregnancy, barre and burpee-free low impact. Sound good? Simply sign up through Sweat.com and enter the promo code **KAYLA30**.

Women's Health Australia readers will receive a 12-month free trial period to Sweat. Following the trial period, the membership will automatically renew to an ongoing annual membership at \$119.94. Subscriptions are billed the total annual subscription in full from the end of the free trial date and each subsequent renewal. This offer is only available through Sweat.com. No lock-in contracts. Cancel at any time. Offer valid until midnight 3/6/21 (ACDT). Available to new members only.

Nimble top, \$89, and bike shorts, \$79



I want to be a safe space for women to come to

Aje Athletica jacket, \$325, sports bra, \$99, and bike shorts, \$110

HAIR: JOEL PHILLIPS. MAKE-UP: AIMIE FIEBIG.