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# MY LIFE IN HEALTH

# ‘A POSITIVE ATTITUDE HELPS YOU STAY YOUNG’

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Sporting legend Dame Denise Lewis, 52, talks to Joanna Ebsworth about her secrets to staying fit in midlife, embracing the ageing process, and why having a positive attitude keeps you feeling younger.

**I was so busy being a mum in my 40s, I didn't exercise as much as I possibly should have.** After retiring from athletics and having my baby breaks, I was so done with routine and discipline. Also, everyone was talking about exercising for 30 minutes, but I was used to doing longer training sessions and didn't see the point of working out if I couldn't do it on my own terms. Naturally, I put on some weight, and I was cool with that. But, eventually, not exercising started to take a toll. I didn't feel like me and I didn't feel well. Our bodies are amazing, and we can get away with most things, but that crunch moment will come where you start to feel tired, and things hurt more.

**Sometimes, you must take action before you get to that point of no return.** For me, I had to repurpose and reimagine what exercise was all about and find out why it was beneficial to me as a person. Now, the thing that motivates me to train is being able to create a space for myself where I can step away from the house, my responsibilities, and the

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humdrum. I'm fortunate that I've got a little space down in my garden where I can just go and do some exercise – it's my separation from the chaos! In a nutshell, exercise for me now is about mental wellness. What I get out of it physically is a by-product.

**I get a double thumbs up if I train four times a week.** But the other week, I didn't train once because I was just too busy. When that happens, I've learnt you can't go beating yourself up about it. But at the same time, you can't let a week off slip into two or three weeks, because then the process becomes harder to get back into. So, I try to cut myself some slack, but then I get back on the horse and go again. I love spinning and lifting dumbbells and kettlebells, and I also love walking in green spaces, which I include as a workout. I never used to walk. It used to be something I did on holiday when I had oodles of time, but ever since lockdown I've found walking to be very therapeutic. Walking while listening to an audiobook is a real treat.



WORDS: JOANNA EBSWORTH. IMAGES: ELISABETH HOFF.

**Maintaining strength as you mature is essential for leading the life you want to lead.** You need to ask yourself whether you want to be asking someone else to open a jam jar for you in the future, or whether you want to have the grip and arm strength to open it for yourself. I know there's fancy equipment these days that can do it for you, but still! Don't you want to be able to walk up a hill and not be in agony and out of breath by the time you get to the top? Of course, you do have to listen to your body, too. I do a little bit of heavy lifting but not too much because I'm more nervous about getting an injury due to the old injuries in my body.

**As an athlete, my joints have definitely gone through more than the average person.** I pounded my body and had knee surgery as early as 17, so that can flare up every now and again. But I would like to continue my physical journey to life's finishing line as much as I can. To help, I take a liquid food supplement called Artron Collagen Extreme developed by the pioneering brand Gold Collagen, which is specifically designed for people like me who exercise and want to care for their joint health. It's been reformulated so it's one of the strongest collagen supplements on the market, and it supports normal bones, muscles and cartilage while helping to reduce tiredness and fatigue and it also boosts your skin, hair and nail health. It covers all my needs, and I also love the fact that it's easily digestible, tastes great, and is sugar-free so it doesn't spike blood glucose.

**I've always been aligned to the idea that you are what you do.** Good nutrition, hydration, movement and supplements all help your body to function better in daily life. And the thing with collagen is it's naturally in your body, but levels decrease as we get older, so you have to maintain your reserves. It's hard to put a percentage on the benefits I feel from taking Artron Collagen Extreme, but I know my joint mobility has improved and that I feel less stiff. I also feel more energised so I don't need so much downtime after exercise and I can run around with my little one. For me, it's all about that dual relationship of looking well and feeling well, because collagen also boosts the appearance of your skin, and who doesn't want better skin?!

'I'm feeling great, and I feel like I'm winning. I will embrace the greys when they come'







**We're walking hand in hand, ageing and I. I can't deny I've got a few more grey hairs, but I'm feeling great, and I feel like I'm winning.** I will embrace the greys when they come, and although I already dye my hair, it's not going to be a massive shock to me when I'm awash with white hair. I'll just try to make it look stylish! To keep my skin looking good, I cleanse well and always try to keep it hydrated. We all know good skin is down to several factors like genetics and lifestyle, but you can improve things with creams and make-up. I do what I can to preserve myself, and I make sure I baste my skin before I go to sleep. I'm like a chicken before bedtime!

**I don't do pampering sessions.** To me, they're something of a luxury because I really don't have the time, and when I do have time to unwind, I like to meet up with friends or go to the theatre or the ballet. I love performance, and those kinds of things really make me feel connected. Obviously, I also enjoy family time, when we can get it. My little one wants to spend time with me so that's a refreshing change! But my daughter, Lauren, who is in her 20s, is busy with her own training programme, and my teenage sons tend to want to do their own thing now with their friends or partners.

**I believe having a positive attitude to life keeps you feeling younger, 100 per cent.** I'm a very positive person, but it's a personal choice. It's a choice whether you want to look at life incidents positively and find solutions to problems that make you feel better. You've just got to say, 'okay, that's s\*\*t, and it doesn't feel great, but I'm going to seek something that makes me feel good'. I just believe that a positive mindset really does help. And if you believe in something, you're going to become the embodiment of it, and that will reflect in how people see you and how you interact with others.

Another thing I will say as well is we've got to stop comparing what 50 looks like in 2025 to the perception of what 50 looked like 20 or 30 years ago. Because we still feel energised, and we've still got that "go get it" attitude. There are enough examples of amazing women out there doing amazing things in midlife that show us we should be celebrating ageing.





## ‘Being true to your authentic self does take courage, but it’s critical for unlocking your true potential’

**It is so important to take on new challenges in midlife.** Having a can-do spirit awakens and renews you, and I think that’s so important for longevity. Just like your skin renews itself, you want to renew your mind so it feels refreshed, too. Change might feel scary at first, but it conjures up creativity and forces you to reach out to other people to help you or further your knowledge. Leaving the BBC after 15 years of being a commentator to become the president of UK Athletics was scary, and I worried I would disappear if people didn’t see me on their TV screens. But that’s fleeting. I’ve had many iterations of having to step away from something that I love and realising that I’ll be okay.

**I couldn’t have written my new book in my 30s because I didn’t really know enough!** But, over the past

decade, I’ve seen a real convergence of all my experience and knowledge on and off the track in terms of adjusting to change and juggling different roles, so I wanted to share that in *Adaptability: Seven Lessons To Thrive In A World Of Competing Demands* (£25, Piatkus). Life seems to be getting busier and more overwhelming, so my book helps people to become their own life coach by harnessing the power of adaptability so they can cope with all the pressures and demands they are put under. While it gives you real examples from my experiences, it’s more of a self-help book than a memoir because it provides lots of practical tips and tools to help you overcome challenges, build resilience, own your space, and know your values. Being true to your authentic self does take courage, but it’s critical for unlocking your true potential.

Artron Collagen Extreme is available to buy at [gold-collagen.com](http://gold-collagen.com) and [boots.com](http://boots.com).

