



# WHAT A GEM!

We catch up with Gemma Atkinson, 34, to talk training, body confidence and her new book – and discover why she's never been happier

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STYLIST: Kelly Daggert HAIR & MAKE UP: Jo Clayton @ joclayton.com CLOTHING: My Protein Inspire Seamless Crop Top, £30 (myprotein.com), Falke 3/4 Ruffiness Women Tights, £85 (falke.com), Nike Metcon 4 Trainers, £114.95 (nike.com)

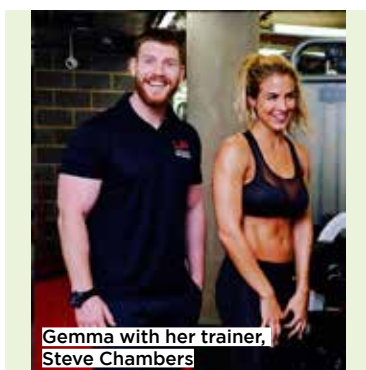
**T**o say 2018 was a very good year for Gemma Atkinson is something of an understatement.

**When H&F last met the multi-talented fitness fanatic, she was deservedly riding high after reaching the finals of the BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing* 2017 and taking part in the live tour. Fast forward 10 months to today's H&F photoshoot, and Gemma's showing no signs of coming down anytime soon – with good reason.**

Hot on the heels of her successful *Strictly...* stint, the former actress and model launched her own popular line of activewear, GA by Gemma Atkinson (gemmaatkinson.co.uk) while continuing with her 'day job' of presenting her Manchester-based radio breakfast show five mornings a week. The show, which she now co-presents with Gethin Jones and Dave Vitty, has since gone national on Hits Radio, recently earning her a Bronze award at the ARIAs (Audio and Radio Industry Awards) for Best New Presenter. And all the while, she has still found the time to keep her legions of admirers regularly updated, via social media, on her healthy lifestyle, workout regime and relationship with Gorka Marquez, 28, who Gemma excitedly reveals is moving in with her in the new year. She now has 781k Instagram followers, picking up 200,000 since we last met. But it seems the best is yet to come from Ms Atkinson.

## HER FIRST BOOK

Not only will 2019 see Gemma become an ambassador for both Reebok Women and



Gemma with her trainer, Steve Chambers

Lucozade's Fit Water – two brands she already used and was passionate about before signing up – but it will also bring the release of her first book, *The Ultimate Body Plan* (Harper Collins, £16.99), and Gemma couldn't be more excited to share her philosophy for a strong, healthy, happy body with her fans.

'I'd been approached a few times to do an autobiography or fitness DVDs and books, but it was always a concept they wanted me to fit in with, rather than my own, and I didn't want to put my name to anything that wasn't real for me,' explains Gemma. 'So when Harper Collins said it could be my story, my programme and my food, I said yes, even though it would involve a lot more work.' The final result is a frank, funny and motivating read that is half autobiographical/half body transformation plan, featuring 75 healthy recipes (including plenty of vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free options) covering breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, plus a progressive 12-week workout programme, with Gemma's witty, down-to-earth personality shining out of every page (she admits she read through the book eight times before it was ready for publication, often requesting for the swear words to be put back in!).

## PRACTICAL ADVICE

'I wanted readers to feel like they're sat in my living room chatting to me over a glass of wine about men, life problems and body issues, while at the same time learning that you can look and feel your best but still have a life too,' explains Gemma. 'Things haven't always been easy for me, but I've battled through the tough times and am now feeling my most confident ever with the help of good food and exercise. I just wanted to share with women the tools they need to be their happiest, healthiest self while still allowing for the odd slip-up. Because periods, holidays, Christmas and girls' nights out happen, and we will gain weight at times, but that's okay because we're human. The key is knowing how to get back to being your best self.'

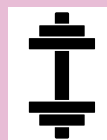
Adamant that the plan should be accessible to all women, Gemma called

## GEMMA'S BODY TRANSFORMATION TIPS



'Small changes make a big difference. Cut out the caffeine and alcohol, drink lots of water to stay hydrated, eat

nutritious food regularly to fuel your workouts, try to get eight hours' sleep a night, and schedule yourself in some 'me time', even if it's just having a bath and putting on moisturiser afterwards. If you look after your body, it will thank you. Move it, and you'll get good results.'



'You don't need to go the gym to follow my plan, but I'd definitely encourage women to join one, if only for the

social aspect. You have as much right to be there as the guys, to train and better yourself. I guarantee that after a month, you'll want to be there chucking the dumbbells around, showing you mean business and revelling in your new confidence.'



'Don't put a picture on the fridge of someone else you want to look like. Put up a picture of

you at a time when you were at your happiest (that doesn't mean when you looked your best). The goal of this plan is to get you feeling that way again. A constant reminder of your happy place will keep you going.'



'Enjoy the whole journey and appreciate the little gains you make along the way, like achieving a new PB in training,

noticing your jeans are a little looser, or realising you can play with your kids for an extra half an hour at the park because you're not so out of breath. Once you start feeling the differences, you'll want to keep going.'

*'I wanted to share with women the tools they need to be their happiest, healthiest self while still allowing for the odd slip-up'*

upon her trusty Personal Trainer Steve Chambers, aka 'Evil Steve' – the man who had put her through her first 12-week transformation only a year before – to help devise a new series of toning and HIIT workouts that could be done at the gym, or at home with minimal equipment, and still get results. 'He was like, "are you sure you want to put yourself through this all over again?", but I was determined to do it. Everything had to be tried and tested by me to make sure it worked. And to be honest, I needed to do it again to lose the stone of weight I'd gained from relaxing my diet and training while doing *Strictly...*'

Testing out the recipes for the book was just as important, though not as arduous, as Gemma says the day she went



to London to taste the meals and snacks she devised from things she eats was the best day of her life! 'There are so many meal options [in the plan] that are really tasty and substantial, plus there's sweet treats like frozen bananas dipped in dark chocolate,' she says. 'It just shows you really don't need to skip meals or live off just chicken and veg to be slim. I always say you can't out-train a bad diet, and you can't train without a good diet.'

When you get your food and training right, you feel like you can take on anything. In testing this new plan, my body, skin and energy levels improved in a way I couldn't comprehend, and my self-esteem went through the roof. It just reminded me that I can achieve anything if I put my mind to it, and that I'm stronger than I think.'

Far from being a quick fix, Gemma describes her plan as 'a marathon, not a sprint' so you can have a fun experience while seeing sustainable, long-term results, rather than 'killing yourself for a month to drop a dress size' as there's a risk you'll put everything back on afterwards.

## A BETTER YOU

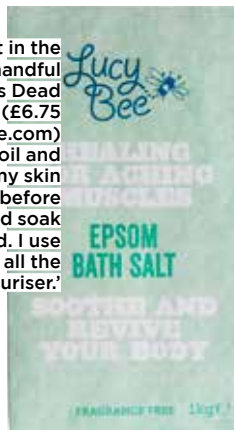
'You know that saying: "nothing tastes as good as skinny feels"?' she asks. 'Well I say, "nothing feels as good as health and strength feels". Feeling strong and

## 'MY BEAUTY MUST-HAVES'



'I'm terrible at doing my own make-up, but if I'm going out, I'll add a sweep of mascara, a nude lip gloss, and apply Mac's Cream Colour Base (£19; maccosmetics.co.uk) in Hush for a lovely, dewy glow – it looks great with a tan.'

'Before I get in the bath, I mix a handful of Lucy Bee's Dead Sea Bath Salts (£6.75 for 1kg; lucybee.com) with coconut oil and rub it all over my skin to exfoliate before having a good soak to unwind. I use coconut oil all the time as a moisturiser.'



'I like using products that are as natural as possible as I'm very aware that anything I put on my skin goes into my body, so I use St Ives Invigorating Apricot Face Scrub (£4.19 for 150ml; boots.com).'



'I heard about the incredible Egyptian Magic Skin Cream (£29 for 118ml; boots.com) from Janice Dickinson when I was in the *I'm a Celeb...* jungle. The ingredients are all-natural, like olive oil, beeswax and honey – I smother it on my face and it leaves me glowing.'

comfortable in your own skin is far more important than fitting into size 8 jeans. It's about being the best version of you, because strong has no size. Sexy has no size. That's the message of the book.'

But what about those who might feel a three-month programme is too great a commitment to stick to, or argue they don't have the time to fit in Gemma's prescribed four workouts a week and cook homemade meals? 'Twelve weeks is nothing in a lifetime,' counters Gemma. 'Think of it as a celebration of what your body is capable of, rather than a punishment. It's all about getting into the mindset that you can do anything. Everyone has 12 hours in the day – it's up to us how we use them. It always baffles me when women say, "I've got three kids so I won't be able to do it". Well, let me tell you, growing and birthing a baby and

*'Feeling strong and comfortable in your own skin is far more important than fitting into size 8 jeans'*

being a mum makes you Wonder Woman anyway. If you've been through that and grown three babies, you can do a 12-week plan! I don't think us women give ourselves enough credit. Just set yourself the challenge and think of the end goal.'

The end goal, Gemma is keen to stress, is not that you should try to look like her. 'I want women to rediscover their own inner warrior princess by focusing on what's good for them, because we're all unique,' she explains. 'My mum always told me that comparison is the theft of joy, and that if you compare yourself to others there will always be someone slimmer, prettier, curvier or more successful than you. I went through a phase in my 20s of wanting to look like Kylie Minogue, but the last time I looked anything like her was when I was nine years old! As I get older, I appreciate that I'm 50 per cent my mum and 50 per cent my dad, who are the most important people in my life. So why would I try and fight or change that? You have to work with what you've been given. I'd like women to read the book and think "I don't need to look like anyone else, because I look like me and I feel great." I want all women to feel good about themselves.' Amen to that.

# GEMMA'S WORKOUT PLAN

Inspired to try Gemma's workout? Do the moves below twice a week, plus two HIIT workouts a week, for four weeks. Then try the progressions or up the weights



## Glute bridge

■ Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Make sure your knees are flexed at a 90° angle (A).

■ Lift your hips up, driving your weight through your heels and squeezing your glutes. Don't arch your lower back. At the top, hold for a second, continuing to squeeze your glutes and making sure your body is in a straight line from knees to shoulders (B).

■ Slowly lower yourself back down to the starting position, rolling your spine down from the top to bottom. Pause, then repeat.



### PROGRESSION:

## Single-leg glute bridge

■ From the same start position, elevate one leg in the air so it's almost straight.

■ With the other leg, drive your hips up into the air, pushing your weight down and through the heel of the fixed leg. Taking your hips as far as you can without arching your lower back, squeeze the working glutes as hard as you can (see image, below).

■ Control the lowering phase back to the starting position and repeat for the desired number of reps, then repeat with the other leg.



## DB shoulder press

■ Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, holding the dumbbells up at shoulder height with elbows at a 45° angle (A).

■ Drive the dumbbells straight up towards the ceiling, keeping form by only using your arms, not legs, to drive the weights up (and don't lean back).

■ Pause at the top (B), then slowly return to the starting position and repeat.



Aim to do 3-4 sets of 15 reps for each move, resting for 40 secs between each set. Follow the moves in their order for best results, and remember to warm up before the workout and cool down after.

### PROGRESSION:

## DB front squat into push press

■ Standing in the same start position with your back straight and chest up, squat down towards the ground.

■ At the point your thighs are parallel with the floor, pause (see image, below) and drive your hips up to the starting position while simultaneously pressing the dumbbells straight up towards the ceiling. Don't rotate your palms. Allow the dumbbells to return to the starting position before repeating the movement.

# 3.



## DB squat to chair

■ Stand in front of a chair with your feet shoulder-width apart, back straight and head in a neutral position, holding a set of dumbbells by your sides.

■ Bend your knees as if you're going to sit down slowly, moving your hips back onto the chair. Keeping your chest up and back straight, sit down (A).

■ Drive your weight back up through the middle of your feet, without an excessive forward lean, to get back up (B). At the top, squeeze your glutes before repeating.

PROGRESSION:  
**DB split squats**

■ Stand with one foot flat on the floor and your back foot on a chair so the heel is slightly elevated. Keep your chest up and shoulder blades back; your hips and shoulders should stay parallel, facing forwards.

■ Slowly lower your back knee towards the ground until you reach 90°, stopping just before you touch the ground (see image, below).

■ Pause, then drive back up through the front leg to the starting position. Repeat for the desired number of reps for both legs.



# 4.



## DB stiff-leg deadlift

■ Stand up straight, holding a set of dumbbells, with a slight bend in your knees and your feet hip-width apart (A).

■ Keeping your knees fixed, slowly lower the dumbbells towards your feet by hinging your hips away from you, keeping your back straight. Keep moving forwards towards the ground until you feel a stretch in your hamstrings (back of thighs).

■ Pause at your end range without arching or rounding your back (B), then start to bring yourself back up to the starting position, squeezing your glutes at the top. Pause and repeat.

PROGRESSION:

## Single-leg DB Romanian deadlift

■ Start in the same position as DB stiff-leg deadlift. Lift one leg off the floor, keeping balance.

■ Flexing at your hips, lean forwards while taking the lifted leg backwards, keeping it relatively straight, arms swinging naturally towards the floor (as shown, below), until your torso is parallel with the floor. Don't arch your lower back – you should feel a stretch in your hamstrings.

■ Pause; return to the start position. Repeat on the other leg. You can touch down with your non-working leg between reps for balance.





## DB alternating reverse lunge

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and your arms by your sides, holding a set of dumbbells (A).
- Step back with one leg, flexing the knee to drop your hips towards the ground. Keep going until your rear knee nearly touches the floor. Keep your spine tall and the weight in your front foot towards your heel (B).
- Drive your weight back up through the heel of your front foot and raise yourself back to the starting position. Swap legs and repeat.

### PROGRESSION: DB side lunge

- Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, holding dumbbells by your sides, palms facing each other. Keep your shoulders back, chest up and a slight bend in your knees.
- Take a big step out to the side, turning your foot out just a little; making sure you stay facing forwards and as upright as possible. Bend the front foot, lowering yourself into a squat while keeping your trailing leg straight (as shown, below).
- Push back up to the starting position with the bent leg and repeat on the other side.



## Floor DB triceps extension

- Lie on the floor with your back on the ground and your legs bent at the knees. Hold a set of dumbbells directly above your shoulder joints in a neutral position with your palms facing each other (A).
- Slowly lower the dumbbells towards the front part of your shoulders without allowing your upper arms to move forwards or backwards or rotate. Stop just short of touching your shoulders (B).
- Use your triceps (backs of upper arms) to drive the weight back up to the starting position, locking your arms and squeezing your triceps at the top. Pause and repeat, avoiding your head at all times.

### PROGRESSION: DB pull over

- Lie on your back with your legs bent and feet flat on the floor. Hold one dumbbell with both hands at arm's length over the top of your chest.
- Keeping your arms straight, slowly lower the dumbbell backwards over your head towards the ground. Take it as far as you can without touching the floor (as shown, below), pause for a second and then, under control, bring it back to the starting position. Keep your arms straight. ■

