



'I DON'T TRAIN FOR MY BODY'

British TV presenter and fitness queen **Davina McCall**, 56, tells us why exercise is crucial for her mental health and muscle tone

Words: Joanna Ebsworth Photography: Foodspring

'I TRAIN FOR MY BRAIN'

There's no doubt about it: Davina McCall is officially one of the UK's most beloved national treasures. When she's not entertaining the nation with hit TV shows including *My Mum*, *Your Dad*, *Long Lost Family* and *The Masked Singer*, she's educating us with critically acclaimed documentaries such as *Sex, Mind and the Menopause* and *Davina McCall's Pill Revolution*, along with her latest book, *Menopausal*, which scooped the top prize at the British Book Awards last year.

Then, of course, there's her successful fitness empire, which has seen the exercise guru, presenter and mum of three release no less than 15 workout DVDs with sales of more than 1.4 million, as well as the popular online fitness platform, Own Your Goals (ownyourgoalsdavina.com).

In fact, Davina has been extolling the benefits of exercise for so long, it's hard to remember how her foray into fitness first began. With that in mind, we took Davina on a trip down memory lane before asking about her preferred methods of exercise today, and finding out about her exciting collaboration with nutrition brand Foodspring on a range of protein powders aimed at supporting women. Get ready to feel inspired!

I didn't really do any exercise apart from clubbing until I was 25. In fact, up until I was 25, going out on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights to dance non-stop for six or seven hours was enough. But then I gave up smoking and I immediately put on a stone almost overnight. I thought, "I've got to do something about this!", so I decided I'd better start going to the gym.

I joined a local gym where the Wasps rugby team used to train. I would do absolutely nothing except talk to absolutely everybody until the team came in, and then I'd suddenly work out like a maniac to the point where I couldn't

walk for five days afterwards. I was very sporadic [with my training], trying to do it but not really understanding the physical or mental benefits. I just really didn't get it.

I kind of bounced back after having my first child. But after having my second child, Tilly, I thought, "I'm in big trouble here". You know how there are some women who look like somebody's just put a football up their T-shirt when they're pregnant and they don't gain weight anywhere else? I definitely wasn't that person. I put on weight everywhere, and my body was suffering. My feet were so swollen, I had to wear Crocs all the time and buy

flat shoes in a bigger size to wear on TV, I was that heavy.

I knew I needed to build a bit of muscle to support the weight. What I didn't know was whether I could start my workout journey while pregnant. I looked up personal trainers in my local rag and found a couple called Jackie and Mark Wren. I called Jackie and she said I could definitely start training while pregnant; I'd just need to start off very gently because my body was producing relaxin, a hormone that relaxes your muscles and tendons. She also said if I started training in pregnancy, we'd have a basis to work from once I resumed training after I'd had the baby.



**'DANCING
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'IT'S ABOUT HAVING VARIETY, NEVER DOING THE SAME WORKOUT AND KEEPING THINGS FUN'

After I had Tilly, I went back to Jackie and Mark. Around a year after the birth, I hadn't lost all the original weight, but I did look and feel miles better. I looked tighter, fitter and I was happier. I remember going to a red-carpet event where everyone was taking pictures of me and I was thinking, "bloody hell, what's going on?!". My picture was everywhere the next day, and I spent all day trying to explain that my "transformation" was down to training with Jackie and Mark.

Shortly afterwards, I said to my agent, "I think I need to do a workout DVD", but he basically said that doing a workout DVD was a bit tacky, and I shouldn't do it. I said, "no, this will be a real one, because these guys really did change my life and you'll see that in the DVD." And that was that! That's how I became "fitness lady".

My training completely changed when I became perimenopausal. I realised I wanted to do a lot more strength training, and I didn't want to beast myself anymore. Because I know myself, and I know that when I beast myself or try to do the most reps I can in however many minutes, my form suffers. And when my form suffers, I get injured. And then I'm out for a week and I get really depressed. I didn't want to do that anymore.

For me, fitness is about doing a bit of everything. I do some yoga, Pilates, strength training, bodyweight training, cardio, one or two runs a week and

maybe a Spin class. It's about having variety all the time, never doing the same workout, and keeping things fun. Ideally, I train three or four times a week, usually following one of my little fitness challenges that run on *Own Your Goals*. When I follow a challenge, it keeps me motivated to keep going back.

I benefit so much from of exercise as it helps my mental health. And sometimes, that will be my one motivator to train. I'd probably say I don't train for my body - I train for my brain. The fact that exercise will give me shoulders or great calf muscles is a wonderful by-product of what it does for my mental health, for sure.

I use my own bodyweight a lot in training. With the changes happening in my body, I need to do strength training for my bones, but also especially for my muscle tone, because muscle tone is the thing that's actually really hard to keep hold of. It doesn't

matter how saggy or crepey your skin gets: if you've got nice muscle tone underneath it, you'll still look great.

Protein is so important for energy, brain function, building muscle - everything! In an ideal world, we would be eating a diet that gives us enough protein, but I know that for many of us, that can be difficult. Losing muscle tone is something perimenopausal women suffer with, so we need all the help we can get! I sometimes struggle to get enough protein in my diet, and that's when I'll reach for one of my Foodspring x Davina McCall Protein + shakes. Foodspring, got me in a lab coat so I could see the reality of what's behind its products and the science involved in what it makes. I wanted to come up with two products that would be great for women because, as I've learnt, protein plays a big part in my diet and it's important for every part of my body - it's not just about exercise.

I think there's a misconception that protein powders are for men with muscles, or that they might make you put on too much muscle. But if you're someone who works out a lot, or you're in midlife and you struggle to get enough protein, then a supplement can really work for you.

I usually have a shake three-to-four times a week on those days when I'm exercising, or at the end of the day when I think I might not have eaten enough protein, because work can often mean I'm not always eating as well as I should be. Protein has got to be a tailored thing, and you've got to adapt it for your own needs.

And I know I shouldn't have favourites, but sometimes I drink the Protein + Relax powder with warm milk at night because it makes me feel all cosy before bed! It has a soothing honey and spice taste that's fricking delicious, but it also contains ashwagandha to help my body and mind relax. And it's made using a slow-

absorbing protein called casein to help the body recover while it sleeps.

Until recently, I never ate protein for breakfast. Going back five years ago, I was a crumpet, honey and butter person, but I've learnt more about nutrition over the years, and I don't want to start my day with sugar and carbs anymore. These days, I intermittent fast, so I often don't eat until lunchtime. But having a protein shake is perfect for breaking my fast around 10.30am if I need something before 1pm.

Intermittent fasting doesn't suit everybody, but it really agrees with me.

I got to a stage after my mid-40s where I was bloating a lot at night, and it didn't seem to be going by the morning. I felt something was going on with my gut, so I took part in a bit of research on intermittent fasting through the free Zoe nutrition app (zoe.com). Every day, I fasted for 14 hours, which meant finishing dinner by 8pm and breaking my fast at 10am. I found that really achievable.

Intermittent fasting showed me I ate a lot more food after 8pm than I thought. I only noticed when I said to myself, "right, now it's just water until tomorrow morning", and then found myself reaching for carrots and

houmous or crisps when watching telly. I thought I ate dinner at 7pm and that was it, when actually I was having another dinner later on!

I feel miles better now with way more energy in the morning.

I always used to think I had to eat and then work out, but I don't need to do that anymore. I've got plenty of energy when I wake up, so I'll have a couple of black coffees before I work out and I feel amazing. Learning that my gut needs a moment to cleanse itself without throwing more food at it was an important lesson to learn.

My food philosophy is pretty simple.

I try to eat as many colours and as much raw food as I can. And because I now know a lot more about my gut microbiome, I'm trying to eat more live cultures. I'd love to say I'm as hardcore about sugar as I was after my sister died in 2012 - I've fallen off the wagon a little bit since then - but I'm really a lot better with chocolate. Sugar is my Achilles' heel, but the moment that I eat anything sugary such as cakes or biscuits, I know it's not good for me, because I can feel it.

I'm also trying to eat less red and processed meat.

I love sausages but I just know they're not great for me. Sometimes, knowledge is quite depressing! I avoid all the things I grew up with, such as salami and hams, which are forms of protein, but they're forms that are possibly not suiting my body. I also try to avoid saturated fats, but I know a little dairy is fine for me, and there's nothing wrong with some butter on your broccoli. It's all about adding interesting foods into my diet to make it better: not about giving too much stuff up anymore.🍌



The Foodspring x Davina McCall Protein + range, consisting of Protein + Focus and Protein + Relax (both £29.99 for 480g), is available at Superdrug (superdrug.com) and Foodspring (foodspring.co.uk).

'THESE DAYS I INTERMITTENT FAST, SO I OFTEN DON'T EAT UNTIL LUNCHTIME'

