



Attitudes to exercise

Siobhan Mason dabbled with exercise in her carefree youth, but didn't take it seriously until she was a mum. Here, she ponders her changing attitudes towards working out as she and her children have aged.

I took up running when my children were one and three. It was the ideal way to reclaim my body that – through pregnancy and breastfeeding – had been theirs for a few years. I had surrendered it willingly but wanted it back. Just for a bit.

I tore a 'Walk-to-Run' guide out of a mag and went for it. To move one leg in front of the other at speed was a great antidote to the usual snail-paced walks to the park; the solitude and space the perfect counterbalance to the noise and busyness of life with little ones.

Saying "I'm going for a run" to my partner felt like a more credible excuse than "Could I just not be here for an hour?" I left him to bedtime duties while I ran through the city, getting a fleeting snapshot of the lives of others. I felt reflective, restored and returned home in a better mood than when I left.

A couple of years later, I signed up for a Saturday 7am park workout. I'd been getting up at 5:30/6am for a few years so it was no biggie. I did burpees and boxing, planks and push-ups, and stopped for a coffee

with my new classmates on my way home. Home by 8.30am, I felt invigorated and smug.

I entered a couple of 10k races, then started to get knee problems. A physio told me to work on my weak glutes with clam exercises, walking sideways with a band round my legs and drawing figures of eight with one foot while balancing on the other. I did this night after night for weeks, which sorted it enough to run both races. Then I never ran again.

The physio said, "You need to do Pilates," so that's what I did. Until the studio got knocked down to make way for a school (bloomin' kids ruining my core strength by all means at their disposal). I got a cheap off-peak gym membership instead but never went.

Eventually, I took up Zumba. Yeah, this is superior to running I thought as I waved my arms above my head and wiggled my body in all directions to salsa, samba, bhangra and bollywood. Classes were on Friday and Sunday evenings, framing the weekend nicely

and cancelling out any drunken debauchery in between.

As the years rolled on, I've kept up Zumba, added Pilates again and walk a lot. But my middle is expanding, perhaps due to the declining metabolism, loss of muscle mass and all those fun things that happen to your body in your late 40s. Or maybe it's because I over-reward myself. "Done Zumba, now for Netflix and Nachos."

I always exercised to stay sane for me and my children, to be a good example to them and hoped a svelte body would be a pleasant side-effect. Now I just want to prevent backache, and not fall over or pee myself when I'm older.

I could do with one more class and sometimes consider returning to that 7am park workout. But I'm not a morning person: I was only forced into it by motherhood. I have a teen and tween who lie in at the weekend, and so do I.

Ah well, it's only a few years before I can join the local 'over 50s' exercise class. Perhaps I'll hold out for that. ■