

by Joan  
MacDonald

# I became a 'fit-fluencer'

## in my 70s

it's never too late to transform your body

**T**HERE can't be many women who celebrate their 75th birthday by zip-lining across a canyon, but I've got white water rafting, parachuting and skydiving on my bucket list for future birthdays.

It is hard to believe I've become the family daredevil but, in the past six years, I've transformed my body and my outlook, and it's given me a completely new zest for life.

At 70, I weighed more than 14st, with high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol, terrible insomnia, acid reflux, ankles so swollen my legs looked like stumps and painful arthritis in my knees. I had resigned myself to a downward spiral into old age and ending up in a nursing home like my mother.

I never could have imagined I'd be transformed into a fitness fanatic with 1.7 million followers on Instagram.

But here I am, aged 76, and off all medication. I'm 5st lighter, with strong and defined muscles, a flat tummy, shapely legs I never knew I had. And I think nothing of wearing figure-hugging Lycra leggings and crop-tops (not just at the gym), and even posting bikini pictures on social media.

I'm thrilled that my transformation has created such a buzz — and I love how my photos and videos inspire others to get fit and strong.

At first, I found social media tricky — the technology had me in tears of frustration — but people quickly started communicating, and I'd chat back, and then someone said I was 'influencing' them. I thought, really?

I was so excited to reach 1,000 followers, but things have grown so fast I'm struggling to keep track. I spend a few hours a day chatting online, answering queries and encouraging people.

I love reading the uplifting stories of people I've inspired, often they are much younger than me. When you feel loved like this it's easy to give it back, and the love and support just magnifies.

To be honest, I only started lifting weights because my daughter Michelle told me to.

And quite honestly? She saved my life.

**M**ICHELLE, 51 and her husband, Jean, 41, are competitive bodybuilders and fitness coaches. When Michelle came to visit and saw me shuffling up the stairs one at a time, she told me to join her online course.

I was reluctant at first — I was miserable, unwell and I thought it might be too late for me — but I finally relented and started three workouts a week and one yoga session to increase the range of movement in my joints.

It wasn't easy, but I was determined to get off the cocktail of drugs I was on for all my ailments. And it was hugely rewarding to find I actually had muscles hiding

under the layers of fat that had built up over the decades.

As I got fitter and stronger, Michelle increased the intensity of the exercises, adding new challenges (such as the pull-up bar, can you imagine?) and I've now settled into a happy routine which sees me doing five 90-minute gym sessions a week (which combine weight training, cardiovascular work and stretching).

I might only be 5ft 3in tall but I can push 145kg on the leg press and a 95kg bar for hip-thrusts — more than many fit young men.

I've repeatedly read that people who do weight training plus cardiovascular exercise (such as running or cycling) reap the biggest benefits on their health — and research shows weight training can help to reduce your mortality rate by a whopping 40 per cent.

I'm in the gym every morning and it's the best part of my day. The work I do is just for maintenance and because I absolutely

love how it makes me feel. I couldn't have achieved this transformation without making radical changes to the way I eat, too.

I'd yo-yo dieted for most of my life but only gained weight until Michelle taught me about the importance of eating protein (fish, meat or eggs) with every meal, and to switch from three to five or six small meals a day.

Canada is my home, where the winters are really harsh, so I do know how difficult it can be to motivate yourself to keep up your fitness regime when it's cold and dark outside.

I used to be a terrible hiberna-



Health-kick: Joan MacDonald, 76, has turned her life around

tor, snuggling up indoors and rarely going out. But that's no way to live. You can't sit around and wish for a change in your life, you have to make it happen.

The good thing is you don't need an expensive gym membership or a personal trainer. You can do so much at home, without any fancy equipment, as long as you've got some kind of expert guidance through an online course or app.

I'm living proof that you're never too old, never too sick and never

too overweight to turn things around. You just have to believe in your own potential and get to work. You'll be amazed what you can do if you put your mind to it. If I can do it at 70, anyone can.

Big changes like mine only come as a result of daily triumphs over negativity and old habits. Every day I have to recommit myself to my new habits and my new attitude, but hell, it's worth it!

As told to  
**LOUISE ATKINSON**

■ FOLLOW @trainwithjoan on Instagram or download her training app: Train with Joan (\$19.99 per month). Her book, *Flex Your Age: Defy Stereotypes And Reclaim Empowerment* is out now, £20, DK, via [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk).



Scan the QR code to join Joan for a workout at [mailplus.co.uk](http://mailplus.co.uk)

## NOW'S THE TIME TO BE MORE JOAN IN YOUR OWN HOME

TRY this simple series of exercises to start weight training. You don't need equipment, just focus on doing it all slowly and correctly. When it feels easy, increase the challenge with more repetitions or by adding hand weights or resistance bands.

### 1. Plank shoulder taps

THIS exercise helps to build your shoulder, wrist and abdominal strength, as well as stamina.

Stand 1.5m away from a kitchen surface and place your hands on the work top, shoulder

width apart. Brace your body in a strong straight line from shoulder to heel. Pull your tummy in and lift one hand at a time, tapping the opposite shoulder. Don't let your body twist.

Increase the difficulty by using a lower surface such as a chair seat, stepping your feet away to keep your straight line. As you get stronger, lower the incline until you can plank with your hands and feet on the floor.

### 2. Sumo squats

HELP to strengthen the powerful muscles of the buttocks and thighs, and increase flexibility in the hips. Stand with your

feet wider than shoulder width apart, toes turned out. Pull in your tummy muscles, tighten your buttocks and sink your bottom down, keeping your knees out wide and your back very straight, aiming to get your bottom in line with your knees.

Keeping your buttock muscles clenched, rise back up to standing. Build the number and depth of your squats over time.

### 3. Dead bugs

THIS will strengthen the abdominal and back muscles, helping to improve

balance and co-ordination. Lie on your back. Tighten your tummy muscles and flatten your back into the floor. Raise your legs and arms (in an upside down 'all fours').

Slowly and with control (do not allow your ribs to pop out or your back to arch), lower one heel to the floor and drop the opposite arm behind your head. Return to the starting position and switch sides.

When this feels too easy, try it with one leg straight, or lower all four limbs at once.

