

In the raw

Looking to *LOSE WEIGHT*?
A lifestyle cleanse featuring *RAW*
FOOD and *intermittent fasting*
can lead to *STUNNING* results.

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Not surprisingly, I suppose, “thinspiration” hit me in a fitting room. I had a devastating lightbulb moment as I tried to do up the zip on a pair of Balenciaga pants. They were the size I wore pre-baby. The zip caught and the fabric pulled mockingly around my hips. It was then I realised that I had been eating like I was still pregnant, even though my son is 18 months old. I knew I shouldn’t be eating the flaky ham and cheese toasted croissants or sourdough toast spread with peanut butter for breakfast, but I just didn’t have the power to stop. I didn’t need a juice fast. I needed a lifestyle cleanse. It was then I resolved to get professional help.

I’d heard great things about trainer Ricardo Riskalla. Known for his cutting-edge and sometimes controversial ideas about food, the Brazilian raw foodist has whittled the physiques of some very high-profile models and actors, but is annoyingly discreet about whom. Suffice it to say I can’t print the name of the park where we train on Sydney’s North Shore, because the last time this happened his clients were hounded by paparazzi. He has written two books, *The RawFit Diet* and *The RawFit Diet Cookbook*, and created an app, *A Million Workouts*. I know that a big factor in weight loss and firming up is diet, so I decide to enlist his help.

On day one, Riskalla comes to my place for the consultation. He’s clad in Adidas sweats, carrying a gym bag and doesn’t look like your typical beefy trainer. He is low-key and softly spoken. He hands me a bunch of forms to fill out and gives me the Spanish Inquisition about my lifestyle, diet and fitness and health. He measures my body fat percentage with calipers – it’s 23 per cent. He believes that’s way too much for my height. “I would like to see you down to 13 per cent body fat, which is an athletic range,” says Riskalla.

I mention that I’ve been having crippling stomach cramps since returning from Fiji the week before. “Do you have a rash

around your neck? Are you more tired than usual?” I do ... I am! “Could be a parasite. Lots of people have them without knowing. I get everyone I work with to do a parasite cleanse to start. I want you to do a detox for the next week: no alcohol, caffeine, red meat, grains, dairy or processed food. Try to have a couple of colonics and take black walnut and garlic capsules twice a day. And no breakfast for seven days.”

I blink at him. No breakfast? The most important meal of the day? “That’s crap,

the cereal companies made that up in the 1950s. Give your system a rest, it’s called intermittent fasting,” he says.

Riskalla never eats breakfast – fasting from an early dinner at 6pm until midday the next day – believing that it puts his body into repair mode and will prevent disease long-term. Indeed, there’s quite a buzz around fasting in the nutrition world since doctor and presenter Michael Mosley explored the concept in his BBC documentary *Eat, Fast and Live Longer*.



He tried various types of fasting but found the most achievable is to eat what you like five days a week and then cut back to about 500 calories (600 for men) or 2,000 kilojoules a day for two days of the week – this diet is known as the 5:2 diet or the Fast Diet. After losing 11 kilograms and curing himself of diabetes, Mosley penned a book with Mimi Spencer, *The Fast Diet*, which has been topping bestseller lists worldwide and has well and truly turned the spotlight on intermittent fasting.

Riskalla also tells me I'm eating way too much protein – another big surprise. "For your size you need to eat about the size of your hand without your fingers." Riskalla is staunchly against the high-protein diets promoted by reality weight-loss shows and other trainers on the circuit. "It's ageing and too taxing on your body. I take a holistic view. I want what's best for your health, not necessarily for weight loss, but that's often a side effect."

He asks me to walk around my living room. "The back of your body is too tight and strong and the front is too weak. We need to strengthen the front and stretch the back. Do you get neck pain? Shoulder pain?" Again – he's got me. I have been to a series of osteos, chiro and physios about my shoulder pain and I frequently wake up unable to turn my head. "Don't worry, we work on strengthening that," he says confidently.

And with that, he's gone. Leaving just me and a long hunger-filled morning stretching ahead. By midday, I'm famished, so I scramble some eggs with spinach and eat it despondently. I go to the organic supermarket and drop \$150 on some Paracleanse capsules, several bottles of kombucha (to help with gut flora, apparently), kimchi (a natural probiotic), cacao powder, bee pollen and other expensive things I've never heard of.

The next week is tough. I miss the crunch of my morning toast. Sometimes I cheat and have a handful of nuts at 10.30. Walking past the coffee cart at work I want to cry. All those smug people with their

lattes. I have cup after cup of green tea, hoping to get my caffeine hit like a twitchy addict. At lunch, I order Vietnamese noodle soup with no noodles and extra vegetables and nearly get laughed out of the cafe. I stir-fry vegetables with kiddie-sized portions of chicken for dinner. But, by day five, the stabbing pains in my gut have gone and I'm feeling leaner.

After my detox, it's time to get down to business. I'm allowed to eat breakfast again, but Riskalla encourages me to only eat if I'm hungry and to avoid grains and dairy ("Use them like a spice in your diet – occasionally"). My stomach has shrunk so much that I find I don't really need to eat breakfast some days, and often I'll just

have a green smoothie. I'm actually beginning to love a simple dinner of stir-fried vegetables with garlic, ginger, tahini and tamari. And now that I've beaten the latte habit, I feel fine about skipping milk. Toast is still a sore point but I allow myself a piece

here and there (yes, even with butter).

Riskalla then comes over to give me a raw-food "cooking" lesson, for which I need to get a dehydrator – the rawists's answer to an oven. I choose the deluxe nine-tray model by Excalibur (you need lots of trays as most recipes require at least 24 hours of dehydrating) and learn how to make raw crackers out of nothing but cashews, flaxseeds, spices and water. They taste great and are crunchy – no oven baking required.

Everything I "cook" is slowly crisped up at 40 degrees, as it's believed that at this temperature the enzymes and nutrients in the food are preserved. I make incredible raw sweet-potato chips seasoned with nutritional yeast flakes and cashew cheese, which is just like cream cheese but contains natural probiotics. And then there's a ridiculously good raw chocolate made from cacao, açai berries and agave. Interestingly, Riskalla is also against the demonising of sugar that's going on at the moment. He believes natural sugars are essential for energy. Also, I don't know if

it's the raw superfoods I've been eating or the Biotivia Transmax Trans-Resveratrol capsules Riskalla has prescribed me (for energy and to decrease hunger), but I notice my energy levels are insane. Somehow I'm working 13-hour days, dealing with toddler tantrums and I still have energy to train with Riskalla twice a week and by myself a couple of times.

I like that he changes up the sessions so you never get bored. There are Jane Fonda-style leg lifts and butt work, TRX training (arm and core exercises done on ropes looped over a branch) and, one day, he strings something called a slackline between two trees and makes me walk the tightrope. My homework is quite doable: sometimes it's a jog, sometimes it's just doing 15 minutes of the exercises on his app. There are hundreds of exercises, which can be done in a number of combinations, so you're constantly challenging your body. One day, I turn up to training so sore all I can manage is a *qi gong* session and some deep breathing.

After two months, I see a number on the scales I haven't seen since I was 20. I'm lighter than I was at my wedding. Best of all, my neck and shoulder pain has disappeared! Who knew all I needed to do was strengthen the front of my body?

Three months after we started working together, Riskalla brandishes those scary little calipers again and does a few calculations. I'm shocked to see I'm down to 13 per cent body fat. There are still a few wobbly bits that need tightening and some stubborn cellulite, but I feel so much better than I did. And it hasn't been that hard. There have been no tears on the treadmill or vomiting on the oval. Although limiting dairy and grains is tricky sometimes, cutting out the daily lattes and toast has made a big difference. I still eat what I like when I'm dining out, but I make up for it the next day with salads and soups. Rethinking my attitude towards protein has been a big one, but I can't deny the evidence. I feel and look better than I ever have. The intermittent fasting has made me more mindful of what I eat and it's something I want to continue to do long-term. And, finally, I'm ready to face the fitting room once again. There are some skinny pants I have my eye on. ■

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