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# Shape Shift

CAN A FITNESS SLOTH REALLY GET BIKINI-READY IN TIME TO ENJOY THE BEST BEACH DAYS OF SUMMER? BY ALEXANDRA HALL

**S**ome people like to rollerblade. Some like to run marathons. Me, I like to sit on the couch and eat potato chips. That's what Mike D'Angelo, trainer extraordinaire at Revolution Fitness, was up against when I signed up to get in shape with him after two back-to-back pregnancies, neither of which saw me doing much of any exercise. Besides, that is, running — to the fridge.

But during and even after each pregnancy, I had missed seeing my feet. And in their aftermath, I had missed feeling strong. Above all, I missed fitting into my beloved wardrobe. So off to D'Angelo it was. A former weight lifter, he's got more energy — positive energy — than anyone I've ever met. But he also pulls no punches.

"If you don't get in shape and rebuild this muscle tissue now when you're in your mid-thirties, it's all going to be downhill from here," he says at our first session, just before ordering me to do a fourth set of ab crunches. "How's that feel?" he asks. "Like little angry weasels gnawing on my stomach," I answer. Just for that, he tells me to do 50 sit-ups. Not, thank God, in a row.

For the first three weeks, twice a week, we do more push-ups and lower-back raises and walking lunges than I ever knew anyone would do without getting paid to do them. Weekdays, when I'm not training with D'Angelo, I'm spending 45 minutes on hulking cardio machines either at Revolution Fitness, at the posh Equinox Fitness (on days when I need a good pampering), or at my trusty-but-perfunctory workplace gym (on back-to-back meeting days).

I get used to feeling constantly at least a little bit sore, and lose four pounds right off the bat. Then I start to be able to lift large objects — including both my kids at once. I continue to complain about having to work out to anyone who will listen, but secretly feel proud about getting

through them. I lose two more pounds. And then: the plateau. For weeks, my weight hovers at the same number.

"Are you doing your cardio?" asks D'Angelo. Check. "Are you following your diet?" Check again. "Are you feeling stronger?" No doubt. So why aren't the pounds plummeting anymore? Six pounds stand between me and my personal goal — an endpoint D'Angelo had settled on when we first started, based on a precise software program he uses to measure, track, and target clients' progress.

"Time to bring out the software again," he says. And he does: At my next session, he painstakingly collects measurements of no fewer than 10 body sections and taps them into his keyboard. The computer whirs and illuminates my new fat-to-muscle ratio. A smile creeps across my face; while my weight may be the same, I've actually replaced roughly six pounds of fat with muscle. D'Angelo's quick to explain what that means: heightened metabolism, more energy, better definition, and a honkin' boost to beneficial hormones.

The one result he forgets to add? A much-improved attitude — knowing the vitals of my progress was just the silver bullet I needed to go the distance — or most of it.

The next week, I somehow let D'Angelo talk me into doing 60 squats with a 75-pound barbell. The next week, I did it again. Somewhere along the line, the phrase "I can't believe I have to do this" changes to "I can't believe I just did that."

Now, three weeks later, with a bathing suit staring me down, two petty pounds sit between me and my favorite pre-pregnancy string bikini. That might bother me if I didn't know a lot of things — the skinny on my actual body composition; that I need a new bikini anyway; and that I can now happily do far more than 50 sit-ups. In a row.

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