

Above Average: I Talked To Fitness Expert Franci Cohen, Because She *Actually* Knows What She's Doing

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I've been doing a lot of talking here on this little column of mine, and while that's great people who love hearing the sound of my grating voice in their heads (I'm pretty sure those people consist of only me and maybe my parents. Maybe.), I understand that it can get a little one-note. I also would like to take this moment to point out that, despite the fact that I like to tell anyone who will listen that I'm basically an expert at everything ever, I'm not a fitness professional. I'm just a chick who's trying not to eat chicken nuggets for dinner every night.

That said, I've reached a point in my whole getting healthy/losing weight experience where I felt that just going off of what I know and what the Internet tells me isn't doing the trick. It's high time I brought in a real pro and listened to the advice she has for me. That's where **Franci Cohen comes in. Based out of Brooklyn, Franci is a Certified Personal Trainer and Nutritionist with a triple Bachelor's degree, as well as a Master's in both Nutrition and Exercise Physiology.** She's also the creator of Spiderbands, "a total-body cardio resistance workout that leverages gravity and your bodyweight with other intense exercise modules such as rebounding, kickboxing and indoor cycling." So yeah, Franci knows what's up in the fitness world. I talked to her about how she got her start in the fitness world, the effectiveness of fad dieting, and how to get fit and healthy in the most effective way. Check out the full interview below!

The Gloss: You have a Masters in both Nutrition and Exercise physiology—what made you want to focus on health and fitness as a career?

Franci Cohen: When I was a teenager, my friend adopted weird food practices (for example, eating mustard packets for lunch claiming the spice burned fat), which got progressively worse over time, until one day when I arrived to the lunch table and my friends were downing kelp pills, truly believing it would foster weight loss. Concerned, I came home that day and shared the story with my mom, who suggested I call the doctor with my questions. I did, and he had no clue what help was and was very dismissive, telling me, "If you're that concerned, just call poison control honey." So, I did my research and learned that, after years of residency, internship, specialty, and so much more needed to become a doctor, nutrition was offered only once as an elective only! Not ok with

that answer I decided to become my own nutritionist, as to never be at the mercy of doctors or others when it comes to my health.

The fitness came into my life at around the same time. I was an avid exerciser, and truly loved it in every way! One day the group fitness manager at the gym I frequented, commented on my fitness abilities, and insisted that I get certified and teach! I'm not one to turn down a dare, so I did! First AFAA, then ACE, ACSM, etc., then kickboxing training with a pro boxer and martial artist to get even better at my craft (didn't think a 9 hour certification taught me much), then finally the exercise phys.

With regard to nutrition and exercise, I spent many years in college, graduate school, seminars, and more! Learned soooo much, but if I continue learning daily for another hundred years, there will still be more territory to cover. Always something more to learn, and I love that!

TG: So, tell me about SPIDERBANDS. How does it work? Is it something you'd recommend for beginners, or do you already have to have a certain level of fitness?

FC: Spiderbands is truly a fitness phenomenon! I know I'm a bit biased, but anyone that knows me, knows that I am hypercritical of my self, and even though spider is my creation, if I thought it was anything less than spectacular, I'd be the first to admit it! Spiderbands is a series of classes (currently 24 class modules in the line up) that offer a unique hybrid cardio resistance workout juxtaposed with aerial concepts, to offer a complete totally body workout that yields unprecedented results in a short period of time, AND offers a crazy high fun-factor, AND always offers something new! How's that for "wow factor"? All classes in the spider series can be done by both beginners and avid exercisers alike. We've had participants as young as 14 years old, and as old as 72! Both beginners and advanced athletes can take the same exact spider class, and both will feel accomplished and successful upon completing the workout!



TG: I recently did a juice cleanse and found that it didn't really do much for me. Do cleanses like that actually have any health benefits, or are they just a fad? Are there any diet trends that you would recommend?

FC: Yes, that's what I'd expect. God, in his infinite wisdom, created the human body to work like a finely tuned machine. There are homeostatic mechanisms set in place to account for any environmental dangers, including food-borne ones. For example, our stomachs are acidic to kill off any germs that may enter the body via pesticides in food, and although we do need to eat protein, the nitrogen component is toxic to the body, right? Well that's why the kidneys filter out the nitrogen through the urine.

My point is that juice cleanses aren't needed or useful as a "cleanse" for the body. I once had a client who came to me after his first myocardial infarction. His doctor recommended an angioplasty to clear up arterial plaque, and he said, "I just ordered this expensive juice cleanse online! It'll flush the plaque

right out of my body, and I'll be as good as new. Right?" Sorry, Eddie (that was his name), but it

doesn't work that way. The American public often misinterprets things when it comes to diet and overall health. I've had many breastfeeding clients who juiced thinking they'd ingest concentrated amounts of vitamins which would enrich their breast milk, only to realize that drinking spinach, kale, and broccoli juice will leave their infants gassy and screaming in pains for days and days. So bottom line? Juices are good for people on the run who choose a fresh juice blend instead of a soda or something, but a juice cleanse? It's definitely trending, but my vote is no.

Click to the next page for more diet, exercise, and weight loss advice from Franci Cohen!

TG: I work out frequently, but I've been getting bored with my routine. What do you recommend for staying out of the exercise rut?

FC: The answer lies in a simple three word phrase "Mix it Up"! It's as easy as that. Change your workout often (kickboxing, indoor cycling, trampoline workout, boot camp, etc), vary intensity, duration, tempo, etc. Even if you love a particular activity, you can mix it up within the confines of that sport of class. If kickboxing is your passion (that's how I started my fitness career), then glove up and box on Monday using a heavy bag. Shadowbox on Tuesday, do cardio boxing on a trampoline on Wednesday, box with weights on Thursday, etc. Just mix it up!

TG: What diet and exercise plan do you give to women who are looking to get back in shape, and does it differ from what you recommend for women who are just trying to lose weight? If so, how and why?

FC: To get back in shape, I often advise a lowfat diet, no refined carbs, and light on the dairy. Basically, a lot of fruits, veggies, lean protein, and whole grains. We start light on the exercise but progress fairly quickly, and such a client will usually be seeing me at Fuel five to six days a week for an hour each time.

To lose weight, we focus more on consuming foods with high satiety levels (high fiber, high protein), high water content (veggies/some fruit), skip the calorically dense foods even if they are healthy (like avocado, dried fruits, and nuts), and consuming a specific number (not an exact number but a range) of calories daily. This number is derived from a formula that plugs in gender, weight, age, etc. another key component of this program would be eating your food in small divided portions seven to eight times during the day in order to foster weight loss by increasing metabolic function and keeping blood sugar levels stabilized throughout the day. The workout schedule is usually five to six days a week for an hour each time.

Whether the goal be to get back in shape or lose weight, five to six days a week is usually the magic number for the best result. One rest day, and then exercising daily to move closer and closer to your goal.

TG: You've said that you take a "tough love" approach to fitness and health—what exactly does that entail?

FC: It means that if you take my class, and I see you are not pushing yourself as hard as I know you are capable of, I will encourage you to push through whatever it is that is hindering your efforts. Although I do offer modifications for beginners or those with injuries, you'll never hear me say in my class, "Take a rest, it's okay, maybe you'll try harder tomorrow!" Everyone has an inner athlete inside them just waiting to be unleashed. My job, and my pleasure, is to help you make that happen!

TG: What's the most rewarding thing about being a health and fitness professional?

FC: Being able to transform people's minds and bodies, and to get them to believe in themselves and in things that they never imagined possible. Where there's a will there's a way, and if it doesn't challenge you, it won't change you. I help you find the will, I give you the challenge, support you through every step, and then watch you change. It's a beautiful and rewarding experience that occurs each and every single day. Lucky me!

You can learn more about Franci and Spiderbands [on her website!](#)

(Photos: Franci Cohen)