

## Ten Questions with Fitness Expert Franci Cohen

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**Franci Cohen is a personal trainer, certified nutritionist, exercise physiologist and 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.** With over 18 years of experience, Franci has been a mainstay in the fitness and nutrition industries.

Franci believes in a tough love approach to fitness and health. “We all have our fitness wake-up call at some point in our lives and it can be a powerful catalyst for change,” says Franci. “Unfortunately, many people overcompensate and try to change everything at once, which is a disaster. Making lasting change involves going through stages that aren’t necessarily linear. People fluctuate and transition between the stages. Knowing how to move through them can get you where you want to be.” Thankfully Franci was nice enough to answer some questions from us. Here they are!

### **1. Tell us about your childhood**

I grew up in Brooklyn, NY, the oldest of 3 children, and lived (still do) in a close-knit Sephardic Jewish Community, where friends and family are abundant, and the dangers and unpleasantness of the city (noise, traffic, smog, etc) are thankfully scarce.

### **2. What got you interested in nutrition?**

When I was a teenager, the school lunch table was a breeding ground for strange eating habits and behaviors, adopted by my peers in the hopes of dropping a few pounds and looking like the latest magazine supermodel. In retrospect, I laugh at how we believed sucking mustard packets would promote weight loss due to its spicy nature. One day I arrived at the infamous lunch table to find my friend swallowing kelp pills from what looked like a medical pharmaceutical bottle. Of course I declined, but that night, out of concern for my friends well-being, I asked my mother for her opinion on the matter. She advised me to call our family pediatrician, as he would have the knowledge to better educate me on the subject. After all, my mom is an interior designer, not a doctor-she joked. My call to the pediatrician was very unsettling to say the least. He repeatedly put me on hold, coming back on the line only to ask me a fourth and fifth time to spell the word “K E L P”. Finally, after about 10 minutes of juggling the phone line, he offered no advice, and advised me to call poison control for any further info. I hung up very disappointed, and shocked at how my doctor, who holds my well-being in his hands, had no immediate knowledge of basic vitamins and minerals. I vowed then, to learn for myself, and for my family, as to never be beholden to any doctor ever again. This is where my interest in nutrition began.

### **3. You have an abundance of education in fitness and nutrition – is this necessary for a career in the field?**

No. I believe that knowledge is fuel for both the body and the mind. Knowledge fosters growth. You can never stop learning, and regardless of how smart anyone is in any particular field of interest, one will never get to the point where they can rightly say “I know everything”. This is a great thing! I am always learning, and don’t ever plan to stop. Unfortunately, I have found that neither college nor any formal or informal schooling or training is needed for anyone to succeed in the fitness or nutrition industries. Most certifications from well-respected institutions offer 1 day certification programs that can be completed in a single 9 hour day. Would you go personal train with someone who was a pizza delivery guy yesterday, but took a certification today, and now tomorrow declares himself a trainer? Having no knowledge of physiology or the biomechanics of the body, or anything else related to health and proper exercise techniques and safety measures, how can this person effectively help others reach their fitness goals? The same goes for nutrition. Most nutritionists do not have their dietetics license, and have not gone to college for nutrition. Instead, they take online courses for a brief time to attain a “certificate” declaring them a nutritionist by a nutrition “institute”. Unfortunately, in an industry laden with ego, and hyper focused on good looks, people often choose the personal trainer or the nutritionist who resembles what they aspire to look like, and discount their lack of credentials. I believe my schooling has given me a competitive edge in my field, and that although it is not necessary to succeed as a personal trainer or nutritionist, I do believe it places me and others like me in a league of our own, and better equipped to chisel bodies into peak perfection, and helping others reach the pinnacle of health.

### **4. What is your favorite tasty indulgence?**

Anyone who knows me knows that chocolate is my kryptonite! In cookies, baked goods, or straight up-I’m definitely a chocolate kinda gal!

### **5. What advice would you give to someone who wants to lose weight and keep it off?**

The best advice I can offer for someone to lose weight and keep it off, is centered around 2 critical pieces of information:

1. Exercise daily throughout the weight loss process
2. Make only healthy dietary changes that you are comfortable with, that don’t feel restrictive, and that you can happily maintain for a long period of time.

While losing weight, your body’s homeostatic mechanisms kick in telling the metabolism to slow down, because less food is entering the body, and as a safeguard, your body will slow down your metabolism to preserve fat stores for energy if the food intake ever becomes dangerously low. As a result, once you’ve achieved your weight loss goal, and begin eating regularly again, you will gain back the weight you worked so hard to lose insanely fast! And then it’s back to the diet table once again. Hence the term yo-yo dieting. By exercising throughout the weight loss process, you jump start your metabolic function and force it to stay revved up despite the dietary adjustments made to promote weight loss. The result here is the weight loss you desire coupled with a now increased metabolic function. Now that’s success!!!

In terms of food, many people adopt diets that are too restrictive, induce depression, and entirely engulf a person’s psychological in a negative way. Don’t look to lose an unsafe 10 pounds per week. Instead make only “doable” dietary changes, that do not make you unhappy. You will lose small bits of weight each week, but the dieting process will not take over your life, and the weight loss will most likely be permanent.

## **6. What are the easiest exercises for staying in shape?**

Kickboxing! All punches and kicks require a degree of core stability and balance, which engages muscles in a way that fosters a strong trunk, which enables stronger and fiercer strikes for an all around total body workout with no equipment needed!

## **7. What is your favorite sport and why?**

My favorite sport would have to be gymnastics. My 3 daughters are avid gymnasts, and I teach aerial fitness classes that incorporate elements of gymnastics and acro. I love watching them practice, as well as playing with them on hammocks and Lyra at Fuel as we teach each other new moves and postures. It's fun, interesting, and something fit that the 4 of us can do together!

## **8. You stress the importance of “lasting change.” Can you expand on that?**

For a lifestyle change to last, it must be a change that you can continuously maintain. Any extreme measures taken with regard to diet or exercise do not constitute a “lasting change”, because being extreme translates to being difficult to maintain, which in effect equals non-compliance. In order for someone to succeed at a diet and exercise regime, it must be one that the client can easily maintain for a long period of time. There are many variables that effect what defines “easy to maintain”, and these variables vary from person to person as well. Hence the need for guidance from a nutrition and fitness professional. My advice is “be honest” with your nutritionist as well as your fitness trainer. The more honest you can be, the better equipped they will be to help you, and the faster you will reach your goals.

## **9. Tell us about Fuel Fitness – do you have plans to expand?**

Fuel Fitness began as the breeding ground for my wacky and creative fitness mind. In a time when most gyms were all offering the same monotonous class designs, I wanted to break free, and wanted the creative freedom to use my knowledge of science and the body, coupled with my love of fitness, music, and people, to create really unique and fun out-of-the-box fitness experiences for my clients. My clientele of approximately 1600 active members (ages 6 months to 70 years old) consist mainly of the Sephardic Jewish Community, of which I am a part of. We live in Brooklyn during the winter, and vacation at the jersey shore during the summer months. We have no plans to expand to other locations at this time, as we are amply meeting our clients needs with our 2 community locations now. However, as we are currently outgrowing our current location of over 11 years, we are building a brand new Brooklyn location for 2015-an exciting state-of-the-art facility designed like no other fitness center out there. We are really excited! I am currently in the process of launching our flagship SPIDERBANDS® studio in NYC, where we will offer many class designs from the SPIDER series and hope to gradually expand SPIDER throughout the nation!

## **10. What celebrity do you think has the best body?**

I think various celebrities have various assets with regard to their bodies (great abs, super toned arms, etc), but I can't single out 1 celebrity as the one with the “best” body. Some celebs do not have great figures, but are so fashionable, and somehow dress so fantastic, that their body looks like a 10! It's really all subjective, but anyone who has a long and lean toned body, with the confidence and smile to match-that's a 10 in my book!