



Cancer shock

Despite her careful diet and exercise programme, Rachel's weight plateaued at around 14 stone. Then, in October 2010, Rachel received the shocking news that she had cervical cancer. "My routine smear revealed the cancer, and I was swiftly referred to a consultant at Queen Charlotte's Hospital in London, who recommended immediate surgery to remove the cancerous tissue. I didn't want a hysterectomy as my husband, Gordon, and I really want to have a family," says Rachel. "We had become engaged just before my diagnosis and the timing couldn't have been more poignant as we were planning our marriage and future when my cancer was discovered."

Rachel had her cervix and nearby lymph glands removed in November 2010. It was a serious operation and a worrying time, but she is now clear of the cancer. In January 2011, Rachel returned to Curves. "It was a relief to get active again and I was astounded to find that my weight started to drop quickly. Within 18 months, I shed another four stone."

Wedding belle

"While recuperating, I tried on some wedding dresses to cheer me up and keep me motivated, but the only ones that fitted were like big meringues" laughs Rachel. "But, 12 months later when I returned to the shop, the wider styles didn't suit my smaller frame and the slimmer, fitted gowns looked lovely."

Full of life

"I feel fully alert and agile now," says Rachel, who greets each day with enthusiasm. "Next month I'm climbing the O2 with a hen party. Before my weight loss I would have made any excuse not to go, but now I relish the challenge."



READER *re-vamp*

Q Dilini Ratnayake asks: "I'm a dancer and also do lots of rowing. During the day I have an office job and sit for long periods of time. But, no matter how often I train, I continuously have tight hamstrings – how can I improve my flexibility?"

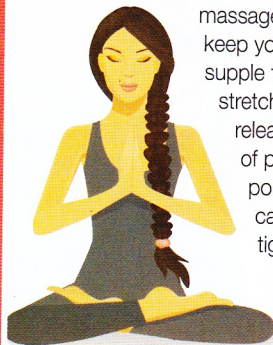


A Charlene Hutsebaut, personal trainer and fitness entrepreneur at The St. Pancras Spa (charlenehutsebaut.com) says:

"The reality is that sitting in a chair forces your hamstrings to shorten. Improving the flexibility of any muscle group takes regular practise and the correct combination of exercises, stabilisations and dynamic and passive stretches. If you are weight training regularly, be sure to have a balance of quad (front of leg) and hamstring (back of leg) movements. I suggest you downplay the hamstring work for a few months. Still working them, but less and with different moves to your normal routine. Avoid old fashioned machines where you isolate the muscles to a single (such as knee) joint action. Instead, perform bridges on the floor and hamstring drags on a Swiss ball. These bring more core stabilisation (abs and back) into the movement, allowing for more strength through your back. What this means for you, is that your hamstrings won't be able to pull your pelvis down, but be balanced more by the back muscles that pull your pelvis up. Even strength between these posterior chain muscles creates a neutral balance where the hamstrings don't take over."

"Include Pilates, yoga and both passive (non-moving) and dynamic (moving) stretches in your repertoire."

Another tip is to have regular Thai and/or deep tissue massages. They'll keep your tissues supple through the stretching and release of pressure points, which can cause tightness."



Now Try It!

Give these strength exercises a go to improve your flexibility and mobility...

- **Pilates scissors:** "Lying on your back, contract your abdominals, bring your legs into the air at a 45-degree angle to the floor, with your head, neck and shoulder girdle raised off the floor, so you feel anchored through your core. With almost straight knees, scissor one leg away from your torso, return it to the start and switch legs. Repeat eight times per leg, for two sets!"
- **Bridge:** "Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on a mat, about six inches from your bottom. Bring your hips up off the ground by squeezing your glutes, hamstrings and corseting around your core muscles. Hold for 20-40 seconds, then rest!"
- **Ham drags with Swiss Ball:** "Lying on your back, feet on top of a ball, lift your hips into a bridge, then drag your heels/ball towards your bottom. Be sure to corset around your core muscles to keep your back safe. Do 6-12 reps depending on your strength and stability!"
- **Pilates v-sit hold:** "Sit on your 'sit bones', reclining back slightly and bring your feet off the floor, bending at the knees so you're in a 'v-sit' type position. Grasp each calf muscle with your hands and one at a time, lengthen out your legs so you are sitting in full v-sit. Tighten your core muscles and hold the hamstring stretch! This is an advanced move."

Do you have a fitness question you'd like answered? Drop us a line at letters@bodyfitmagazine.co.uk with 'Reader Revamp' in the subject header and you could win a free six-month *Bodyfit* subscription.

OVER TO YOU...

This month we asked:

"What's your kit bag essential?"

Paula Shaw says: "I would be lost without my iPod, as well as my Nike Training Club app."

@poppy_fields11
Water!

@Munchinkin75
Clean socks

Kim Ingleby says: "A decent sports bra, like Shock Absorber, some great tunes, my Nike Free's, breathable kit that makes me feel good, a skinny headband, BPA free water bottle and focus!"

@myfittiession
Water, protein shake, apple and banana, lifting gloves, deodorant, towel, iPod and leg warmers!

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NEXT MONTH:

How will you adapt your workouts for summer?