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Physical Fitness Begins With The Mind, Says Jessica Alba's Fitness Trainer Ramona Braganza

From sleeping patterns to breathing habits, Ramona Braganza reveals the small everyday habits that impact our physical fitness.

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What's the first question that comes to your mind when you think of Hollywood stars such as Jessica Alba, Halle Berry, Zac Efron, Ryan Reynolds and Dakota Johnson? Good looks, good looks, and good looks! The secret to looking good is not just fitting into couture gowns or having the access to best stylists and makeup artists, but also dedicating yourself to fitness to stay healthy and in shape. And when looking good is a part of your job, you can't take it lightly. Well, of course, they have the best trainers, who know how to chisel their bodies into shape and manage their mental health. Besides Hollywood, the common thread between these celebrities is their fitness expert – Ramona Braganza. Widely acknowledged as one of the top personal trainers globally, her mantra to transform the world one person at a time is simple – by blending the body, mind and spirit equivalently. A global fitness expert best known for sculpting fit, toned and "hot" bodies in Hollywood for over 20 years, Ramona has trained many A-list actresses, including Halle Berry, Sandra Bullock, Anne Hathaway, Scarlet Johansson, Dakota Johnson, Jessica Biel, Kate Beckinsale; and actors like Bradley Cooper, Michael Weatherly, Zac Efron, Ryan Reynolds and many more.

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We recently had the chance to quiz Braganza on what fitness means and she was quick to answer that it is an ongoing journey, not a one-stop destination that takes time and dedication to see long-term results. Speaking exclusively to Zee Zest before her fitness programme kickstarts at Kandima Maldives, a wellness retreat, she tells us the basic importance of sleep in everyday life, her experiences with training celebrities and more in this exclusive tête-à-tête.

1. What is the optimal routine for anyone starting their fitness journey?

I think a big part is getting to know yourself — not trying to run through life with everything. And then sometimes, we have people advising us to slow down or find time for ourselves, which in turn, means they're noticing things about our personality that maybe we don't even see. So for many of us, we are almost on the trend of moving at a reasonably fast pace. I think we're terrified to hear what our family or friends say. Stepping into the unknown is always hard and scary, but that's how you can live a balanced life.

2. Any tips to start training the mind and body?

I think it's the mind that needs to be controlled first. Your mind has the confidence of being able to do something that you set yourself to. The minute something interferes, you fall off the apparatus because your focus is gone. So if you can harness the focus in your mind to do the thing that's right in front of you versus ten other things is the way to go. That's why they talk about your breath. You know, you start making the focus smaller and shifting it to the one thing at hand. So I always say live in the moment, live in the day. With the pandemic, we saw how things could go out of our control. You can start your day by listening to a motivational message or a gratitude prayer. You can start by focussing on one single deed for the day and not 10 other things. So, once you start practising that, your mind starts getting trained to handle the stress because it is calm on the inside.

3. So, what is the right way to check or control our breathing?

When we are in states of panic, stress and anxiety, we are mostly breathing from our chest and not from our belly. If you look at regional yoga, the air moves through your body to your brain. However, our posture on computers right now is stopping the full flow of air. We're leaning our shoulders forward and we're concave. So being aware of your posture throughout the day is very important which helps with breath work. You need to breathe through your nose — it's better than breathing through your mouth.

I think it's everybody's responsibility to learn about their body. It's the first step that one can do for oneself. If you start your day with the thought that both your body and mind are a temple in themselves, that's how you can see the changes and connect within. It's all about giving yourself that little bit of attention and time which is so critical today.

4. How important is sleep? How does it impact our physical and mental well-being?

Sleep shuts down the body and its mechanisms. All of the systems are regulated by our sleep which helps in recovery. Suppose you had a 10-hour highly stressful day, then your brain has had to work way over time and it needs to relax. Imagine it to be a battery that's so hot, you better unplug it soon. If you're not sleeping enough, you're not recharging your battery. We might be in fast environments and eras now, but our bodies have been the same for thousands of years. And I think we tend to forget that and try to push ourselves always, thinking we are machines that can keep going on and on. That's how diseases start to take over our lives.

5. Are there any tried and tested methods to get good sleep that ensures you're well-rested?

Well, I have this 3-2-1 philosophy. Everything is 3-2-1. I believe you should stop eating three hours before you go to sleep. A lot of people eat right until they fall into bed and crash out. Then, you should turn off any kind of work two hours before and avoid anything with blue lights, which is your computer or phone, one hour before. All of these things activate the brain and keep it on at a time when we want to bring it down. I believe now there are red dimming bulbs which signal your body to



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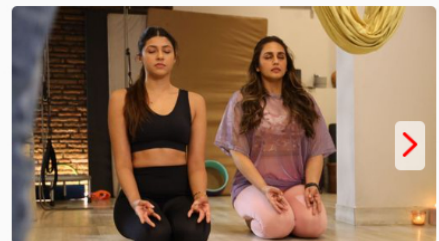
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shut down. If you are sleeping, make sure the room is at the right temperature, otherwise, your brain will stay awake.

6. What do you think about the recent rage of taking sleeping supplements or gummies?

Melatonin is the one recommended supplement you can take and it's natural. Most people rely on green tea. I would recommend avoiding anything that's not natural to get your body to sleep. I've heard people use different sleep aids but you start becoming dependent on them and before you know it, it's an addiction. So, I believe you must try natural and habit-changing methods before you turn to supplements.

7. According to you, what is the biggest nutritional mistake that most people make?

Probably going on a diet. It's a big mistake. I think it's better to make small changes that are going to last a long time. So, don't do a big diet and then on the third day already, you are unhappy about it. Just keep trying to include and do bit by bit.

8. What is your opinion about the Indian diet, in terms of eating habits and ingredients?

I really love the fact that I've discovered more about India. I am now fully immersed in my South Asian culture. I love it. I used to eat dal and rice with all the beans, vegetables and natural spices. And I have realised the health benefits. The West is discovering more of these that aid in the vegan lifestyle too.

9. You've trained many Hollywood celebrities. Which was your most challenging assignment?

Most challenging would be for the new moms. I worked with Jessica Alba, Haley, and Ashlee Simpson shortly after they had their babies. I was also the trainer who helped them throughout their pregnancy until about six months. For example, Ashlee Simpson put on quite a bit of weight. I found it most challenging to watch what she ate on a specific programme. I think mentally keeping her up was a challenge because most moms feel they will never lose the extra weight gained. I think when you talk about it, you perpetuate this negative energy. You should just not mention it. Don't talk about it to anybody. Just do the work.

10. And how do you help the new mothers get back into shape?

I have a programme. According to the programme, in the first phase, you do 40 minutes a day for four days a week, and in the second phase, you do about an hour for three or four days a week. After doing more cardio, you might want to add some weight training. I think in a 12-week programme for 3 months — you could safely lose around 10 kilos.

11. Do you think that it's difficult for women to keep up with a fitness programme amidst all their responsibilities?

All women are different and they come to me with various needs. I look at what their needs are and most of them are managing so many responsibilities in their life that they have the perception of what they should be and want to be. But, that is so far from what's important. So I try to bring them back to the right reason, which is you want to be healthy. Most of the clients I have now are in their 40s — they all have children and I want them to be able to run around their kids even after 10 or 20 years. So I try to inspire them to be healthy and to work in the right way towards that goal — whether it's just by getting enough rest or exercising. All women are different and trainers must deal with each one separately. As women, we can really support each other, learn about ourselves, and do our best, and I want to help my clients become their best selves.

12. Tell us about your fitness programme at Kandima Maldives.

The programme is called 'Strong Body, Strong Mind, Gentle Spirit'. I want women to develop strength of mind at my retreat. I want them to find ways, bring that to them and then the body will kind of do all of the working out and embrace the gentle spirit. It's a lovely philosophy to have, and a balanced ideology to follow.



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Strong Body, Strong Mind, Gentle Spirit will be held from March 14 to 21, 2023, at *Kandima Maldives*. Ramona Braganza will share the secrets of training celebrities based on her effective 3-2-1 workout and nutrition plans designed to boost metabolism and tone the overall physique.

Photo: Ramona Braganza



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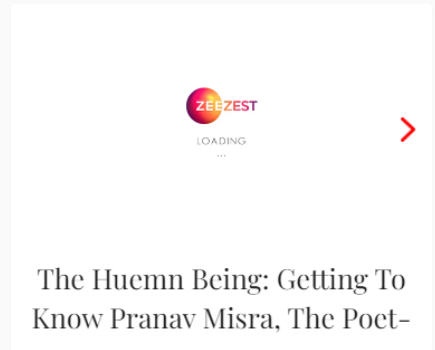
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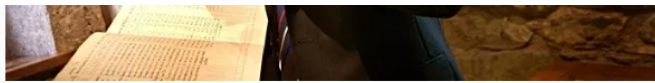
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