

# The great workout challenge

Has your bum lost its perkiness? Are you embarrassed by your skinny legs? Our writers hit the gym to get in shape for the new year

**Rachel Johnson**  
My goal:  
a perkier bottom

My quest started when I read a gushing piece in this very newspaper, drooling over the Jessica Rabbit proportions of a woman who'd undergone invasive surgery and now boasted a bigger, plusher bottom. The piece revelled in the procedure and its "staggeringly bootylicious" results.

I'm afraid I saw red — can't we just be unhappy with what Mother Nature hasn't given us? — but I also saw a challenge.

Back in the day I had a neat boy's behind, so jaunty that when I was at secondary school I once found a ditty — and drawing — in praise of my bum inked on to a wooden desk and signed by a boy in my year.

Now — several decades later — I try not to look at it too closely, especially from the side, as it has subsided, deflated, and is slowly sliding south.

So, what to do? According to aficionados of the BBL (the Brazilian Butt Lift, which sucks fat out of your tummy and thighs and squirts it into your bum, death rate one in 3,000) you can't bring sexy back without a dangerous and expensive operation after which you have to wear a compression garment and can't sit down for months.

No. You can't even hope for va-va-voom from diet and exercise alone, I was told.

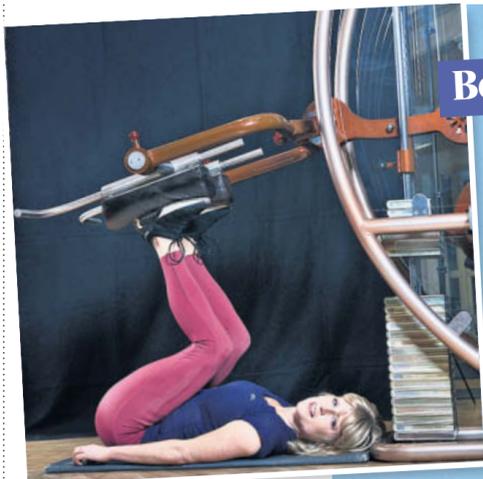
I was resigned to this sorry state of affairs until I bumped into my friend Char. I hadn't seen her for a while and she was in tight Lycra leggings.

"Char!" I screamed, "Where did you get your bum?" Physically she had morphed from mum-bod to supermodel: lean waist, and the shivering withers of a thoroughbred topped by two high half-globes above where her buttocks used to be.

"The Library," Char said, namechecking one of my local gyms in Notting Hill. Reader, I marched straight there. Could I get my perky bum back in just six weeks without surgery? Here's how it went.

Zana Morris, a zippy blonde nutritionist, trainer and owner of the Library, was ready to assist — but she told me I had to commit: not just to her exercise regimen, but also to her diet plan.

I would train for 15 minutes with weights every day, but she also wanted me to cut out everything but fat, basically. No carbs, no booze, no fruit... no veg, even.



Before

You have to only eat fat and, lo — your body will burn fat faster. It is not for sissies, nor, indeed, for vegetarians or vegans.

I didn't want to lose weight, but I did want more of an hourglass shape. "If you go on a high fat diet you will lose fat from your tum but keep your bum and boobs," Zana promised, as she took my measurements at the beginning of my six-week bootycamp. My weight was 129lb, waist 30.5 inches, tummy 34 inches, boobs 32DD, and my butt was 35.75 inches, but the most scary stat was: I was already 34.8 per cent fat.

Zana then handed me a diet sheet and I blanched. It was all cream cheese, oily fish, red meat, white meat, eggs, and avocados, with a few nuts. She explained that the high-fat diet was all or nothing. If you wanted ketosis (ie when the body burns its own fat) you had to eat only fat. I didn't really take this bit in, but it's important.

I started the workouts, four to five times a week, and did "my version" of the high fat diet which was an enormous piggy mound of eggs and smoked salmon and avocados three times a day, washed down with coffee and double cream.

After a week I rolled back, plumply, feeling as if I'd eaten four Christmas dinners in one day, like Dawn French in *The Vicar of Dibley*. As I suspected, I had put on weight — 2lb — as I hadn't grasped that with the high fat diet you "only eat when you're hungry" (ie all the time) and at most, twice a day.

At this point I realised I wasn't going to hack it as I never wanted to see another avocado, or packet of Philadelphia, so switched to a more flexible medium-fat diet, while continuing the almost daily workouts, which focus on two muscle groups at a time.

One day I would take to the Perspex and bronze instruments of medieval torture in the Library to do shoulders and arms; on another day I would do chest and back; then on another legs and calves (always adding in an abs routine) and did some extra work on the glutes. Then repeat.

The exercise part, though I say so myself, was a total success. I'd never worked with weights and pulleys and in short sharp bursts, but the science is that this stimulates muscles and growth hormone,

prompting a higher metabolism, toning and heightening fitness levels.

After only a couple of weeks I started — I think — seeing some definition to my porridge midsection, even the shadowy hint of a six pack. Arms grew lady-like biceps. From what I could tell there was even the beginning — or the beginning of a beginning — of a recovery in the posterior.

For six weeks I went to the Library four or even five times a week, and then it was D-Day. My final weigh-and-measure prior to the "after" photoshoot.

I made a full confession to Zana of my sins: among them baking loaves of additive five-seed bread, alcohol, and morning oat, hazelnut and banana smoothies.

"I don't mind you baking bread, but I'd rather you threw it in the bin than eat it," she said, which was me told. Then she got out her tape measure and calipers again (to measure body fat).

My waist had shrunk from 30.5 inches to 28.5. My tummy from 34 inches to 32, which means my waist-hip ratio is far from the 0.7 Golden Mean (when your waist is 70 per cent of your hips and bottom).

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Rachel Johnson with the trainer Zana Morris



After

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blessed butt? Well, the uplifting news is that I have added almost an inch to the circumference of my rear end. Meanwhile, according to Zana's calipers, my fat percentage has gone down from 34.8 per cent to 30.4 per cent, which converts to a loss of 5lb of fat to 6lb of muscle (no, I don't get it either). Weight stayed about the same.

The Library's pitch is that daily 15-minute weight training, combined with a low-glycemic diet balances the body's insulin levels and "allows instructors to sculpt your body to achieve the body you're looking for."

Well, for me it's not been exactly "new year, new you": I do not have a dramatic new apple-bottom, Kim Kardashian-style physique to Instagram — but nor did I want one.

I am more than happy with my slightly curvier, perter silhouette. Call me old-fashioned, but I am also pleased that nobody will be showing a picture of my bottom to a plastic surgeon, and saying, "This! I want a bum like this!" anytime soon, but just might decide to go the natural way to a better botty instead.

[thelibrarygym.com](http://thelibrarygym.com)

# Six weeks to change our bodies

COVER AND BELOW: AMIT LENNON, HAIR AND MAKE-UP CELINE MONON

**John-Paul Flintoff**  
My goal:  
beef up my chicken legs

Some years ago, on a holiday where hot weather called for shorts, my wife started calling me Mr Knobbly Knees. Haha, I laughed. It was true that I had skinny legs, and my knees stuck out. The following year, we had a daughter. And this summer, aged 14, she started calling me Chicken Legs. Haha, I laughed, although with less amusement than before.

The fact is, I'd come to believe that my legs were irredeemably skinny. Nothing could ever make them bigger. I've cycled a lot, swum a fair bit, and never noticed any difference. Swimmer friends have thighs like mighty oaks, cyclists can twitch muscles in their calves that I don't seem to possess. And if I'm honest, I felt I was over the hill: too old, at 50, to change anything. Running for a bus and not enjoying it, I wondered if I would ever run properly again.

My wife wouldn't have any of it. Get yourself a trainer, she said. I hated the idea. But she's often right, so I did.

Dalton Wong helps actors quickly transform themselves in preparation for roles: he helped Jennifer Lawrence (for *The Hunger Games*), Kit Harington (*Game of Thrones*), and most recently Taron Egerton (*Robin Hood*). He agreed to help me build up my legs in six weeks.

About halfway through, I asked Dalton why he had agreed to work with me. "Because you're old," he said. "Most people who want to 'get in shape' for a newspaper article already look great," he said. "But an old journalist, who's really tall, with skinny legs — that's different."

More seriously, Dalton's father died of a heart attack aged 41, and he's keen to prevent men keeling over by exercising too little — or too much, too soon.

Our work together started with a full health assessment. My cardio fitness turned out to be decent, my strength and flexibility not bad. I weighed 13st 6lb, and 20.6 per cent of my body was fat — higher than I'd expected, but still healthy for my age. As for my legs: could anything be done?

"It takes a long time to build up your calves — several months — but we can make a difference to your upper legs quite quickly. And as you lose body fat, your muscle definition will improve."

He put me on a diet of, essentially, no carbs or dairy; and told me to send him a photo of everything I ate, for at least a week. I felt silly doing it but it helped to know that he was on my case. I stopped eating marmalade sandwiches whenever I felt peckish, and had a glass of water instead. For breakfast, I swapped cereal for three eggs (scrambled) with tonnes of lettuce. And for main meals, I ate mostly chicken, mackerel or tuna, with as many vegetables as I liked.

Dalton said that I needed to train four times a week. On Tuesdays, I did squats, to work on my quads and vastus medialis



Before



After

John-Paul Flintoff. Below: Dalton Wong

## Deep squat: the best thigh exercise

**The squat**

There is no exercise as effective at engaging all of the key leg muscles than the squat. Start with the feet shoulder-width apart. Squat by bending your knees and lowering your bottom until your thighs are parallel to the floor. Rise back up and repeat. Aim for 3 sets of 10 reps to start with.



Hold a weight in each hand as you get stronger.

oblique (or VMO, the muscle above and just inside the knee). Thursdays: step-ups, for the back of the legs — calves, hamstrings, glutes. Fridays: lunges, for the quads again, and hips. And dead lifts, on Saturdays, worked the lower back, glutes and hamstrings.

Leg work, it turns out, is necessary even if yours don't happen to be spindly. "A lot of people set out to build up their arms and their torso, but it's leg exercise

that generates growth hormones," Dalton said. As well as doing weights, he administered severe doses of cardio work with every set of exercises, and upper body work. "I don't want to just build your legs, but make you healthy all round."

In my first few sessions, I felt like vomiting after a meeting of high-intensity workouts on his monstrous Versaclimber machine. The nausea persisted beyond the exercise and through much of the day. But after a week or so I realised that I no longer felt sick, even though he kept raising the resistance. "That's because you're fitter than you were," he said.

Forgive me, if this is obvious to you. It wasn't to me.

The immediate aftermath of sessions could still be hard. One morning I hired a bike to cycle to a meeting two miles away. It was incredibly heavy work. Had Dalton broken me? When I reached the bike docking station I saw that I'd cycled two miles, uphill, with a flat tyre. I was stronger than I realised.

Even after three weeks, I began to see tiny improvements in muscle definition. Running for a bus, I moved faster and recovered quickly. I started to run for buses routinely, just for the fun of it.

One day, Dalton told me I never did have particularly skinny legs, they just look like that because they're long. I told my wife what he'd said, and seconds later she sent me a rebuttal: a photo of the vast thighs of Usain Bolt.

Weeks passed. I became a connoisseur of tiny changes to the routine of squats, step-ups, lunges and dead lifts: heavier weight or more repetitions; lunging sideways instead of front-back; stepping up higher. "Keep changing it up," said Dalton, who wouldn't even allow me to settle on a single flavour of post-exercise protein shake. "Keep changing it up!"

This would help me when I started going to a gym on my own, he said. I'm not looking forward to it: I'm going to miss working with Dalton.

[twentytwotrain.com](http://twentytwotrain.com)

More exercises on next page

## Power lunge: the ultimate bottom-sculpting exercise



**The extended lunge**  
Stand upright and step forward as far as you can with your left leg, then bend at the knee so your leg is at a 90-degree angle. Make sure you push your weight into your front (left) heel. Pushing into your heel forces you to recruit your hamstring and gluteal muscles much more than with a regular lunge. Return to the start position and repeat. Perform 10 repetitions on this leg before changing sides. Do three sets in total.

# 4 Body + Soul

## Henry Dimbleby

### My goal: lose the paunch

I am an intermittent extremist when it comes to fitness. A yo-yo exerciser. Long fallow periods — during which my weight rises, my sleep becomes more twitchy and my skin slowly succumbs to a grey pallor — end abruptly (normally at 3am, bolt-upright and sweating) with me thinking “I’m going to die, I must exercise”. There follows a registration to some long-distance event, selected pretty much at random after light googling, and about eight months of intense, spreadsheet-regulated training.

I’ve done three marathons (Barcelona, London and one, much to the amusement of my wife, on a rowing machine in our sitting room), a couple of half-marathons, an aquathlon, innumerable 10km running races and a 10km swim down the beautiful River Dart in Devon.

In the early days I tried to go quite fast. I was so excited by my first marathon that for six months afterwards I would bring every conversation round to my Barcelona time (3 hours 34 minutes, despite doing my calf in during the last 5km, since you ask). But recurring injuries — I HATE stretching — mean that I have been forced to slow down. I now adopt the mantra that Ranulph Fiennes said helped him to conquer Everest: “plod forever”.

I’m a naturally good plodder, which helps. A lot of this, I think, is due to rowing as a teenager. I wasn’t a brilliant rower. At the acme of my career I was put in to a pair with the Olympian Matthew Pinsent (then 16); we smashed into the bank of the Thames — because he pulled so much harder than me it was impossible to keep the boat moving in a straight line. But that adolescent training regimen seems to have left me with a strong heart. I have a resting heartbeat of 45bpm, and the engine ticks along steadily when I start to train.

I’m also an obsessive. When I was training for my rowing marathon, I took the rowing machine everywhere in the back of our white Berlingo van. That Christmas we stayed in a tiny cottage in Seaford, East Sussex. On Boxing Day, I set up the rowing machine in the backyard and embarked on a two-and-a-half-hour training row. My late father-in-law, the writer Jeremy Lewis, kept peering through the kitchen window at me with a troubled brow. He found the modern obsession with exercise baffling. An hour into my row, worried that I must be dying of boredom, he brought a chair out of the kitchen, sat down and started reading to me from a novel by Trollope.

Lord knows what Jeremy would have made of my trainer Matt Roberts. Matt is an absurdly ripped, walking advertisement for his brand — a chain of personal training gyms that mix the allure of celebrity (he has trained Samantha and David Cameron, Michael McIntyre and Tom Ford) with state-of-the-art equipment and



Before

Henry Dimbleby with the trainer Matt Roberts



After

## Killer plank: Matt Roberts’s waist-whittling technique



### Plank with forward reach

The plank is a true test of core strength and will do wonders for firming a middle. Adding rotation or reaches makes it even more effective. Lie face down with your elbows on the ground. Elevate your body on to your forearms and the balls of your feet, distributing your weight evenly between your forearms and feet. Keep

your elbows bent at 90 degrees and back straight with hips raised off the floor. Squeeze your torso and reach forward with your right arm. Hold momentarily, then return to the plank position. Repeat with the left arm, alternating for 10 reps (5 with each arm). Do 4 or 5 sets. Gradually increase the reps in each set to 20 (10 per arm).

techniques, and a baffling array of nutritional supplements. He is a man who would be incapable of being bored by exercise.

When we first meet, he talks me through the theory behind my six-week intensive exercise programme. The objective would be to increase vigour in the ageing male (this one aged 48). “We are going to pump up testosterone and human growth hormones,” he tells me, “meaning your body will become charged up, stronger and [therefore] faster burning. At the same time, we will be making your body more able to regenerate and you will feel less drained.”

The method: an intricately crafted series of exercises, conducted over three sessions per week. Each session consists of pairs of heavy weight lifting exercises, each exercise designed specifically to exhaust some tiny isolated muscle you never knew existed, followed by a sharp shock of high-intensity training (HIT) cardio and complete exhaustion. It often took me a good five minutes to get up off the floor at the end.

Roberts’s exercise regimen is supplemented by a large box of supplements to take daily: dried oyster body extract to “boost natural testosterone production”; Japanese knotweed to “protect the body against damage from ageing or stress”; grape skin extract to “maintain the elastic quality of skin”; pine bark extract to help “control the glucose/insulin balance”; ashwagandha “for brain health and sleep”; you get the gist.

I confess to initial scepticism. I’ve always been suspicious of supplements — they have a whiff of quackery about them — and besides, for me, the primary benefit of exercise is mental rather than physical health. I love the calm, hypnotic feeling that you get from a long-distance session. It doesn’t start until about an hour in, when the endorphins begin to flow and all the blood that normally fires an overactive mind is directed to your legs. I was worried that these shorter sessions wouldn’t deliver.

I was wrong. My biceps have grown (by 1cm), my waist has shrunk (by 5 cm). My clothes fit better and my wife says I look “very slightly more buff”. Physically I feel much more robust. I cycle more enjoyably, I can lift boxes more easily and fight off my children with greater ease when they jump on me. In the gym, I can now do press-ups for a minute without collapsing in a heap (41 vs 15 at the start of the programme). I can lift more — 115kg to 145kg. And I can row 1km much faster (decreased from 3 minutes 44 seconds to 3 minutes 29 seconds).

But what has surprised me has been the transformational effect on my mood. Roberts made me text him “scores out of five” every morning: sleep, mood, energy, stress and stiffness. The stiffness hovered around the 3 level, as I was taken to my physical limit in every session. The quality of my sleep, my mood, and energy levels, have soared. I now feel positively jaunty most of the time — or “perky in all ways” as Matt puts it. Occasionally, the feeling is almost euphoric.

It hasn’t been easy. It has been quite a time commitment, and you don’t have the freedom of the lone runner able to head out on to the streets whenever you want. You must visit your exercise dealer on his turf at the agreed time. But the hit is so good I’m going to carry on into the new year. I’m even going to keep munching through the dehydrated oysters. So what if it’s just a placebo effect? I’ve always thought the placebo effect was highly underrated.

[mattroberts.co.uk](http://mattroberts.co.uk)