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# At 41, the Best Shape of Her Life

Fitness competitor Mina Agnos found the right inspiration, and commitment to sculpt her figure. A key component? A regimented diet



Ms. Agnos went to Synergy Fitness Boca hoping to gain a six-pack. In the process, she has completely revamped her diet and workout routine and is training for a bikini competition. PHOTO: JOSH RICHIE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By JEN MURPHY

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16 COMMENTS

As Mina Agnos approached 40, she found herself wondering if she would ever achieve a slightly crazy fitness goal—six-pack abs.

A healthy diet and running regimen of 18 to 30 miles a week had always kept her thin. But she lacked muscle tone.

“I had strong legs, but my upper body and abs were not on the same level,” says Ms. Agnos. The president of Travelive, a tour company that customizes luxury vacations in Greece and the Mediterranean, Ms. Agnos splits her time between Athens and Boca Raton, Fla. Last summer in Boca Raton, her running route took her past Synergy Fitness Boca, where she saw “people with ripped arms” doing push-ups and sprints outside. She walked in and asked what it would take for her to get to get a six-pack. She left with an outline for a highly regulated diet and exercise plan.

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The gym has a team of women, the Synergy Show Stoppers, who compete in physique competitions, with categories that typically include “bikini,” “figure,” “physique” and “bodybuilding.” Judges score bikini competitors on balance, shape and overall

physical appearance, including complexion, skin tone, poise and overall presentation. Ms. Agnos was invited to join.

“To put on a sparkly bikini and strut around isn’t my personality,” she says. “But I thought it would take me way out of my comfort zone.” Synergy’s owner, Mark Van Bourgondien, told her she’d need to commit one hour a day to training; the rest would come down to changing her diet. To the surprise of her family, Ms. Agnos committed and now, at 41, is training to compete in the International Federation of Bodybuilding and Fitness and National Physique Committee Prestige Crystal Cup in Boca Raton in July.



Ms. Agnos gave up long-distance running for high-intensity training and weights. Here, she performs a barbell Sumo dead lift to high pull. PHOTO: JOSH RICHIE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“My husband was really concerned that a special diet and no alcohol would kill our social life,” she recalls. “He kept asking, ‘Why do you have to do this?’ But he saw the changes in my body, and also my energy and commitment, and is so proud.”

Ms. Agnos went into the program unable to do a single push-up. Within a month, she was doing 50 push-ups. “That was how I got hooked,” she says. While training, she also stopped distance running. “Extended cardio was resulting in too much weight loss and potential muscle loss,” she says.

In September, Ms. Agnos returned to Athens, where she found a trainer at Persona Grata Cross Training to help with the workouts Mr. Van Bourgondien emails. She meets monthly with a nutritionist to have her body-mass index measured.

“The hardest part has by far been the dietary restrictions,” Ms. Agnos says. As a mother of a 12-year-old and a 9-year-old, she says her regimen is “ultra-complicated,” she says. “Gone are the days when I could sample freely from whatever they are eating.”

The results, though, make her feel the discipline is worth it. “I never thought at 41 I’d be in the best shape of my life,” she says. “I have muscle tone, my skin has never looked better and my kids think what I’m doing is really cool.”

## The Workout

Ms. Agnos trains five to six days a week with a mix of free weights, barbells, TRX suspension training, rowing, body weight and high-intensity cardio. She focuses on two muscle groups each day. Mondays she works quads and shoulders. Tuesdays are hamstrings and triceps. Wednesdays are glutes and back, Thursdays are biceps and chest (with extra shoulder and quad work) and Friday is for plyometrics. Saturday is a glute day.

On two days, she tacks on a high-intensity cardio workout that includes sprinting while pulling a weighted sled. On Sunday, she practices competition poses and sends videos back to Boca Raton for her trainer to critique.



Ms. Agnos performs a barbell front squat as part of her strength routine. PHOTO: JOSH RICHIE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



Mina Agnos gets a helping hand from her trainer and Synergy Fitness owner Mark Van Bourgondien on the TRX at the Boca Raton, Fl gym. Agnos is a competitive body builder who trains at the gym for her bikini competitions. Photo by Josh Ritchie PHOTO: JOSH RICHIE FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The presentation, or posing, part of the competition requires each competitor to walk to center stage and do a front stance with hands on their hips; do a full turn for a back stance; turn again to the front and face the judges and then walk off the stage. High heels are required.

Ms. Agnos has been testing spray-tan tones. “They help achieve a uniform complexion and bring out muscle tone,” she says.

## The Diet

Ms. Agnos eliminated sugar, dairy, alcohol and “basically anything that comes in a box” from her diet. She eats five times a day and weighs all of her food. “I’ve become really good at eyeing how many grams of a protein I should eat,” she says. “And I’ve become that person at the restaurant who asks to hold the dressing and the cheese. My husband jokes that I’m a horrible date.”

Breakfast is four egg whites and one egg, 30 grams of oatmeal and one-third cup of blueberries. Her other meals are 93 grams of lean protein, 125 grams of vegetables and 81 grams of complex carbohydrates such as sweet potatoes or brown rice. If she craves a snack she’ll have an apple with one tablespoon of peanut butter.

Ms. Agnos preps her week’s meals on Sundays. “I eat out of Tupperware all week,” she says. She also times a variety of supplements around her workouts, including a multivitamin, Omega-3, proteins, amino acids and a recovery drink. She says she misses wine and cheese.

## Cost and Gear

Ms. Agnos spends about \$300 a month for gym and trainer fees, \$60 a month for her nutritionist and \$100 a month for massages. She spent \$125 to register as a National Physique Committee athlete. Competition fees range from \$80 to \$150. Competition bikinis start at \$200. Ms. Agnos spent \$500 on a custom bikini adorned with rhinestones and Swarovski crystals made by Buff Bikinis. She bought her acrylic high heels for \$50 on Amazon.

## The Playlist

Ms. Agnos has three workout playlists. “I listen to the Pearl Jam and Eminem lists when I need to up my intensity,” she says. “My girl power list comes on when I want at least 160 to 180 beats per minute and a positive message.”

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