

‘Now I feel more than just a mum’

Three children in five years have left Karen Flower, 26, feeling stressed and unmotivated. We help her find new inspiration...

WORDS LIZ FROST PHOTOGRAPHS JULIE FISHER



KAREN TOLD US...

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‘My husband and I had our first child when I was 21. Now, five years and two more children later, I’ve forgotten how to feel like anything other than a mum. My home life is really hectic – even when the kids have gone to bed, it’s hard to relax. I can escape by going to the gym, and I’ve made some headway in getting my figure back, but my workout is boring and I don’t think I’m benefiting from it. As far as clothes go, I love this season’s skirts and boots, but I’m so used to dressing down that when I try to wear them, I feel like mutton dressed as lamb – even though I’m only 26!’

‘Karen should aim to exercise every other day – if the gaps between sessions become too long, she’ll stop improving’

the personal trainer



Rane Spandler is a fitness instructor based at the Hutton Moor Leisure Centre in Weston-

Super-Mare, Somerset.

Rane says ‘With three young children and a husband who travels a lot, planning regular training times is difficult for Karen. Since her last pregnancy, her weight loss has been good, but she now feels that she may have reached a plateau and would like more muscle definition. Karen and I worked together to find regular time in her diary to exercise.

‘Part of the problem is that Karen is exercising in one go at the weekend – one hour on Saturday and an hour on Sunday – and then not exercising during the week. A well-trained body can take up to two weeks to lose muscle when going for long stretches without exercise, but ideally the average body would benefit from exercising every other day. When the gaps between sessions become too long, your body begins to revert back to its original state, so it feels as though you’re stagnating and not improving.

‘Karen tends to do mainly aerobic exercise with no weight-training. Aerobic exercise is good

for general fitness, but she needs to build muscle for real results.

‘We decided on two short classes on Monday and Friday mornings. Karen prefers class-based exercise as she finds this more motivating than a gym workout. On Monday, the focus is on weight-training, followed by Bodybalance, which combines tai chi, yoga and Pilates to strengthen and tone. On Fridays, the focus is on cardio followed again by Bodybalance.

Because Karen’s body would need stimulation again at least 48 hours later to really benefit from training, we needed another option, ideally midweek. She wouldn’t be able to go to the gym as she’d need childcare, so I devised a home regime that she could do either during the day or in the evening once the children were in bed. I suggested using Gliders, which are a pair of nylon discs that you stand on and side, like a skiing action. This movement uses all your leg muscles, but especially stimulates your outer and inner thighs (£14.99; to order, call Physical Compan on 01494 769222).

‘On the days when Karen isn’t doing structured exercise she usually goes for a walk instead. I suggested that she increase her walking pace so she’s power-walking. She can boost her speed by completing a certain number of circuits of a route within a given time and then aiming to increase the number of circuits each time that she goes out.’



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the life coach



Martin Drake is a life coach. To book an appointment or for more information, call 07958 63808 or visit www.drakecoaching.com.

Martin says 'One of the questions Karen asked me was, "What can I do now?" She's concerned about her future: whether to be a stay-at-home mum or to go back to work and, if so, in what capacity. I think she's focusing on her roles rather than her identity. Being a mother is one of the many roles that Karen plays well, although it does not define her identity.'

'Karen had explained that she often feels guilty about reacting negatively to her children's behaviour. By talking more about this, we identified that she was reacting to situations instead of responding to them. The difference is that responding comes from a position of choice and strength, whereas reacting is acting from an emotional standpoint without control. Simply being aware of this will really help.'

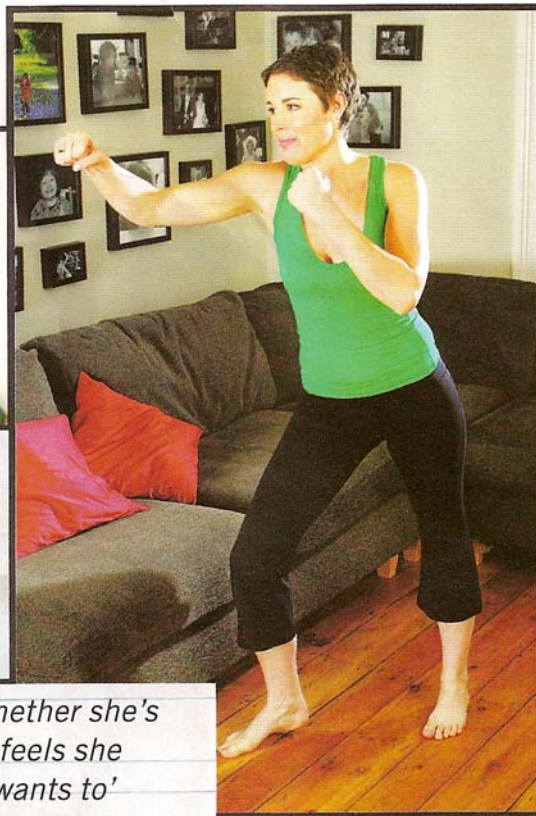
'I also suggested that Karen create a mantra for herself that she could use regularly to help her remain calm in stressful situations. She chose to put the word "Smile" on her fridge where she would regularly see it. For Karen, this simple word symbolised her desire to behave with a positive attitude towards others and to remain calm and in control.'

'I also suggested that Karen drops tolerations – things that she puts up with, but doesn't have to. I encouraged her to start doing things she enjoys every day, such as relaxing with a good book. She needs to acknowledge whether she is doing activities because she feels she should, or because she genuinely wants to do them. In time, she'll eventually learn to say "No" to other people.'

'Karen should define what she likes and loves to do. This will give her a foundation to become inspired about her life again.' →

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SMILE



'Karen should acknowledge whether she's doing something because she feels she should, or because she really wants to'

the stylist



Kelly Moseley is Zest's fashion assistant.

Kelly says 'Karen has a really lovely

figure – she's much slimmer than she thinks and doesn't realise how good she looks. As a busy young mum, she's got used to wearing "easy" clothes. Even though I know she wouldn't normally put on heels for the school run, I chose a pair of high-heeled boots and paired them with a bright blue dress – she doesn't usually wear bold colours and patterns, but the colour is really flattering. We added skinny black jeans as Karen is happier with a casual look. She can easily swap the heels for flat boots, paired with the skinny jeans and a jumper, which is practical, but still fashionable. It might take Karen a while to get used to her new look – it's always strange to try something completely new, but, at 26, she's young enough to wear adventurous clothes. I hope I've shown her that wearing something a bit more fashion conscious doesn't have to feel uncomfortable.

the hair and make-up artist



Susana Mota is a make-up, hair and bodypaint artist and has worked in film, TV and theatre.

Susana says 'Karen is a beautiful young girl with a very strong facial structure. Her skin is clear and fresh, her lips well defined and her eyes have a subtle green tone. Her nose is very well proportioned, too, and, with her jawline, gives her total look a strong impact.

'Our eyebrows and the expression that they give us are one of our most important facial features. Karen had never plucked hers before and, although she was a bit wary at first, she admitted to loving the result. I plucked the outer ends so that her brows "wing up", which illuminates and lifts her eyes. To

emphasise that, I applied some eyeliner, thinly at the inner corners of her eyes and then more thickly towards the outer edges. I kept the rest of her make-up as minimal as possible, using MAC and Laura Mercier products. A light pink/orange shade of blusher was enough to make her look fresh and healthy, and a glossy, light lip shade set the whole look off.

'When it came to Karen's hair, we broke up her fringe and added body with products from the TIGI range. Given the fact that her hair is already short, it wasn't possible to achieve a different look through cutting. My advice would be for her to grow her hair in a very layered cut down to her shoulders and have some highlights done to emphasise her eyes.'

the therapist



Chris Clarke is a stress management therapist based in Bristol. To book an appointment, call

0117 9692281.

'Karen puts a lot of pressure on herself to make everything she is responsible for perfect, so I used some Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques to help her learn to relax.

'First we worked on her breathing. She tends to take short, shallow breaths, which makes her feel more anxious, so I taught her to take long, slow, deep breaths, which send a message to the brain to relax.

'I then used a technique called anchoring to help Karen pull herself out of feeling stressed. I asked her to think of a time when she felt really relaxed and at peace, to picture the scene, the smells, sights and sounds around her, and how it felt to be there. Then I asked her to put her forefinger and thumb together to associate that action with being in the relaxed place in her mind. She can then use this action to re-create the feeling of being at peace.

'Another method I used is the rewind technique, which involves remembering a time when she felt really out of control, as if playing it as a film in her mind. For Karen, this was feeling agitated in the evenings after the children had gone to bed. I told her to then rewind the scene really fast while mentally playing a song in her mind that makes her smile. The idea is that the happy song wipes out the negative feeling, replacing it with a more positive one.'

TWO WEEKS LATER... THE VERDICT

'Having a personal fitness trainer has made such a difference. Rane worked closely with me to find a programme that suited my lifestyle – it didn't feel too much like working out because it was based around things that I enjoyed doing. Now, if I feel myself getting stressed, I just remember the techniques Martin and Chris went through with me and don't let things get on top of me. And with Kelly's and Susana's advice I'm beginning to feel less mumsy and more like "me" again.' [Z]