

THE BODY COACH

THIS MAN WANTS YOU TO *EAT* MORE (& EXERCISE LESS)

That's the key to transformation, says Instagram's fastest-growing guru Joe Wicks, aka The Body Coach. Emma Laurence meets the man who's changing the face of fitness – one selfie at a time

Photographs SUKIDHANDA

Confession: I've been following The Body Coach on Instagram for the best part of a year, and not once have I contemplated doing one of his workouts, let alone signing up for his 90-day diet and fitness plan. Despite the jaw-dropping before-and-after body-transformation pictures liberally sprinkling his Instagram feed, and the fact that I'm getting married in five months and still have two dress sizes to drop, it's taken a work assignment (this feature) to make me sign up. But, all this time, I've never once thought about unfollowing him, either.

There's something about the larger-than-life Wicks you see bouncing around on Instagram, with his short-and-sweet food-prep videos and cheeky selfies, that has kept me hooked – and it's not just that he's handsome. I'm one of many: while his client list is close to 15,000, his Instagram followers number more like 300,000 – and that's not including Twitter, Facebook and Pinterest.

He's got quite the buzz. When I mention at dinner I'm going to interview him, one friend describes herself as 'obsessed'. Wicks' Instagram following has more than doubled since the beginning of the year – helped along by a pivotal appearance on Channel 4's *Sunday Brunch* in March, which brought 10,000 new followers in a single hour. And with two recipe books and even his own TV show in the offing, no doubt you'll be hearing – and seeing – a lot more of him.

'It's crazy,' he admits, when we meet one sunny afternoon in London's Soho. 'I had no idea how successful it was going to be, and it all came from Instagram. At first, I was just this nutty guy with his Nutribullet and his Selfie Stick, and no one was liking my videos. And now, because of the power of social media and friends telling friends [referrals make up 60% of his business], it's just growing and growing.'

But for all the brash confidence he displays in those Instagram videos (if you haven't seen one, think Jamie Oliver meets Russell Brand, but with more muscles and better hair), in real life Wicks, 29, is quieter, more relaxed, and seems genuinely overawed at his success.

Out of his usual body-con sportswear and away from his smartphone camera, I'm almost not sure what to make of the nice, softly spoken man sitting opposite me in a T-shirt and jeans, one shoelace coming undone, sipping a giant green juice. I don't touch anything but water for fear of judgement. I've already – shame alert – had to send in pictures of myself in a bikini as part of my pre-plan assessment so, really, I'm not fooling anyone, but still.

'The Body Coach, he's a bit of a character now,' shrugs Wicks, when I tell him I expected him to be, well, higher-pitched. 'I know when to turn it on because people expect that. But I'm not just messing around; I'm trying to give people knowledge. There are so many online videos but I deliver in a different way, and I think people like the laughter and the midget trees [Wicks' pet name for his favourite green veg, broccoli]. I don't >>

The Body Coach convincing Emma she'll never do a low-calorie diet again

take it too seriously, and people keep coming back.'

The videos he's talking about are 15-second clips of him preparing his 'Lean in 15' recipes, shot, narrated (loudly) and edited by him – so called because they can all be made in 15 minutes. They're entertaining, yes (I always stop scrolling to watch), but they're also a powerful promotional tool, hooking you into his core offering: the 90-Day Shift, Shape & Sustain plan. It's not a diet, says Wicks, but a personalised manual for healthy living. 'My aim,' he says, 'is to get rid of all the diets – someone's got to.'

After training as a PE teacher ('I wasn't cut out for it – the kids were always pulling my hair') and qualifying as a personal trainer in Surrey, where he lives with his girlfriend of nine years, Wicks began using social media 'just as a way of spreading my knowledge and inspiring people'. But, he recalls, he soon started getting a lot of weight-loss requests... which led to the plan. The problem with diets, he says, is that people have to keep doing them. (He doesn't need to tell *me* this: I'm a classic yo-yo dieter.)

On Wicks' plan, 'You can eat double those calories, do 20 minutes of training and you're going to burn fat. It's liberating.' Wicks says 90% of the people who come to him are undereating: 'Some of them are barely hitting 900 calories.' That's me, again. And although I've shifted four dress sizes in the last year, things have ground to a halt. 'It's so common for women to starve themselves before a holiday, for example. But why not just eat right and train right, then you can have the body you want all year round?'

So, the training: the first 30 days demands four to five workouts a week. An awful lot if, like me, you haven't

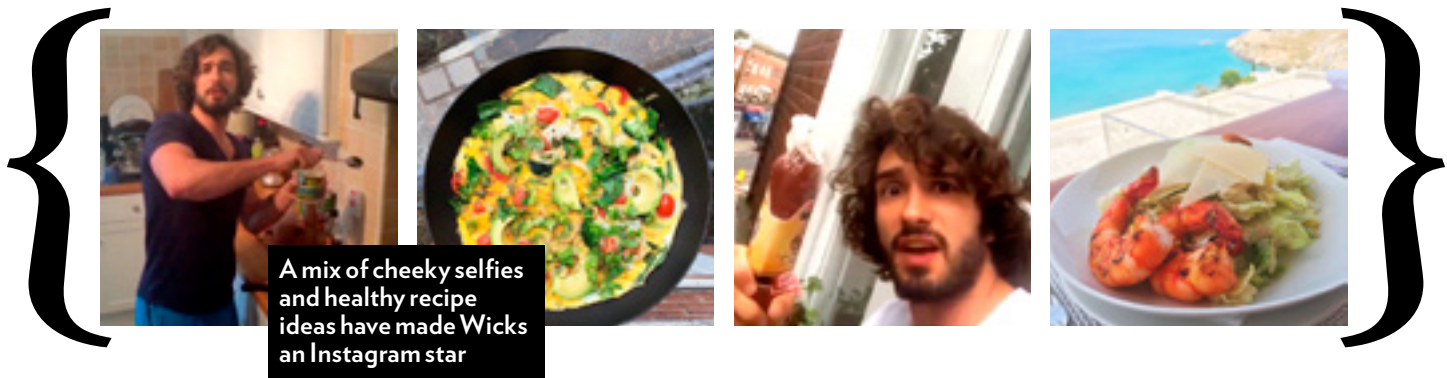
done any proper exercise in years. But each workout only needs to be 25 minutes, max, because it's high-intensity interval training (HIIT), alternating 30-second bursts of super-hard effort with 45 seconds of less effort to recover. Why HIIT? 'It's so much more effective because you burn fat for hours afterwards,' enthuses Wicks. 'It's perfect for busy people.'

Demand for Wicks' own time is so high now, he's having to train 10 new support staff each month to churn out the plans – which each come with 40 or so tailored recipes and snack ideas. Sign-up also hooks you up with The Body Coach community – one that's alive with enthusiasm and support. Complete Wicks' plan and you become one of his '#fitfam', inducted into a virtual, emoji-studded hall of fame, where you can instantly share, like and *be* liked.

Even so, when I see Wicks again a month later, at his *Red* photoshoot, I still haven't started the >>



Joe wears: T-shirt, Sunspel; Jeans, New at Harvey Nichols; Trainers, Adidas. Emma wears: Blouse, Collection by John Lewis; Egg run, Garden Trading; Herb pot, Sophie Conran for Portmeirion, both at John Lewis



A mix of cheeky selfies and healthy recipe ideas have made Wicks an Instagram star

plan. He's disappointed (the most devastating of all the emotional responses) and immediately reaches for his phone, determined to win me round with some 'outrageous' client transformations he's been sent that morning. As we're talking, his phone flashes constantly with emails and social-media notifications. 'Even after hours in the gym I'd never been as puffed out as after those first 20-minute HIIT sessions,' says one. Another: 'I've lost inches and fat... I will definitely continue to eat and exercise this way.'

He can see I'm not completely convinced, puts the phone to one side and leans in close. 'Just try it,' he says. 'And don't give it just 80%. If you stick to it and you commit to it, you *will* get results.'

My scepticism, having tried and failed so many times before, is wavering; Wicks delivers a sucker punch. 'Once you've done my plan, you're never, ever going to do a low-calorie diet again. Why would you? You can burn fat eating so much food.' His work is done, but just in case, he leaves me with one final thought: 'My plan – it's going to be the next Weight Watchers' (a bold claim if ever I've heard one). And suddenly I get it.

Just as Weight Watchers and its competitors are built around the weekly meeting, The Body Coach, too, has shared experience at its core. You pay your money, you follow the plan for 90 days... and then you're a member for life. 'It's just a better solution to the diet industry,' says Wicks. It's the weight-loss wheel reinvented for a new generation. I'm sold. *The Body Coach 90-Day Shift, Shape & Sustain plan, £147; thebodycoach.co.uk*

My day on the plan

- **9AM BREAKFAST:** Granola, Greek yoghurt, linseed and blueberries – this is only actually in the plan as an 'emergency breakfast'; my other, better choice would be a three-egg omelette.
- **11.30AM SNACK:** Large handful of nuts (almonds, macadamias, cashews or walnuts).
- **1.30PM LUNCH:** Tuna salad with red peppers and tomatoes, sour cream and half an avocado.
- **4PM SNACK:** 1 boiled egg.
- **6.30PM WORKOUT:** 5 minutes brisk walking, 15 minutes HIIT on a stationary bike (12 sets of 30 seconds pedalling at max effort followed by 45 seconds at rest pace), 5 minutes stretching.
- **8PM DINNER:** Wicks' Thai green chicken curry with brown rice and steamed spinach.

Read Emma's post-Cycle 1 blog, and try some Body Coach recipes for yourself, at REDONLINE.CO.UK

THE 90-DAY PLAN IN A NUTSHELL

- The plan is divided into three 30-day phases: Cycles 1, 2 and 3. First, you fill out a detailed questionnaire, send in full-length 'before' photos, and pay your £147 fee. Now, you're committed.
 - The plan is based on 'macronutrient timing', simpler than it sounds. Macronutrients are carbohydrates, fat and protein. You eat carbs only after training, more healthy fats on rest days, and protein and vegetables at every meal. You 'fuel your body like an engine, because that's what it is', says Wicks.
 - Wicks uses 20 factors to calculate your individual magic macro formula – including height, weight, age, activity, habits, diet history and body composition (which is where the dreaded bikini pictures come in). 'No one else is doing it,' says Wicks, 'tailored plans, in volume, so accurate that they work for everyone.'
 - You eat *a lot* of food. Think three-egg omelettes, or two salmon fillets instead of one, plus a big hunk of cheese and a whole bag of spinach on the side. There are pancakes (albeit made from oats and cottage cheese), burger with (sweet-potato) chips, steak and rice... 'Why would you go back to eating 1,000 calories a day when I've got you burning fat on 2,500?' he says. And he's right – I'm never hungry now, which is something of a revelation. In Cycle 1, you follow his recipes; in Cycle 2, you learn to build your own meals to the same principles; and Cycle 3 includes healthy versions of favourites, such as curries and fish and chips. But still no processed food, and no alcohol.
 - In Cycle 1, you do four to five HIIT workouts a week. In Cycles 2 and 3, you add in resistance training, alternating HIIT with weights so it feels more like circuit training. I walk past a Virgin Active on my way home from work each day, and I can be in and out in less than 20 minutes. No eye contact, no changing-room fear; just me and the bike and my headphones. But you don't have to go to a gym ('They're scary, aren't they?' says Wicks) – you could do one of his YouTube HIIT workouts at home instead.
- MY RESULTS:** I've been doing it for three weeks and I have to say, it is totally doable. I've lost 4lb and my clothes are looser – and my stomach, in particular, is undeniably flatter. I feel brighter and stronger, and freer, too. I've conquered my gym phobia, and enjoy every bit of food I'm eating, no guilt. Bring on Cycle 2! 🍷

