

She's just kickin' it

In nine months I punched out 50 pounds of extra weight and found my self-esteem

■ *By Karla Rodríguez*

THE POUNDS STARTED PILING ON after I graduated from the police academy. I worked midnight shifts, which meant I ate at odd hours. Huge sunrise breakfasts followed by eight hours of deep sleep became the norm. The rest of the day I felt lethargic and out of touch with the rest of the world, most of which was at work.

Fifty pounds overweight, I couldn't even make it up a flight of stairs without huffing and puffing. Then I severed my wrist muscles while attempting to take a reluctant suspect into custody and had to have surgery. My doctor recommended exercise to strengthen the muscles. I joined a gym, but I couldn't get motivated. It wasn't just the wrist injury that had me feeling low. It was what I saw when I looked in the mirror. My small, athletic frame had ballooned, and I couldn't fit into any of my clothes.

Then one night while out to dinner with my husband, I became extremely uncomfortable around our tiny, bubbly waitress. Instantly I covered my belly with my hands. At that moment I realized how self-conscious I'd become because of my weight gain. I was also moody and borderline nasty at times. I wasn't happy with myself, which meant I couldn't be happy with anyone else.

Later that night I got down on my knees and prayed for motivation. I needed to do something about the way I looked in order to change the way I felt. Instantly I felt as if things were about to improve. The next morning I was up before the alarm rang. Suddenly I had an enthusiasm I hadn't felt in ages. I wanted to get up and go to the gym. It was as if my prayers had truly been answered.

I took every exercise class I could make time for, hoping I'd fall in love with one. Then I discovered cardio kickboxing. And I got hooked on 60 minutes of calorie-blasting moves. There was something about the loud, fast-paced music, the punching and kicking, the clenched teeth. The magical combination filled me with power, strength, and energy.

For months I went to every kickboxing class I could. Nothing made me feel so empowered. When the teacher yelled, "Come on, give me more," I punched with all I had and expelled every bit of negative energy. For one hour I became the strongest, most willful woman in the world, and I felt ready to tackle anything.

As the months passed, the weight melted away; so did the negativity and the low self-esteem. The boost in feel-good



Kickboxing Karla Rodríguez

New to kickboxing?

Kickboxing is a form of aerobic exercise that combines boxing moves with martial arts kicks. It improves flexibility, strength, stamina, and coordination.

Looking for a cardio kickboxing class in your area? Check out these gym sites for class schedules: crunch.com, equinoxgym.com, ballyfitness.com, or your local gym.

Think you'd like to get certified to teach cardio kickboxing? Contact American Fitness Professionals & Associates (afpafitness.com or 609/978-7583).

hormones you experience when you exercise was working its magic. I lost 20 pounds in the first three months. I became addicted to the high I got from all exercise, but especially kickboxing. Slowly I changed my eating habits, too. I cut out fried foods, ate several small meals instead of three big ones, and cooked separate dinners

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Una buena vida ■ How I got healthy

for my husband. It wasn't easy watching him wolf down rice and beans and *chuletas* and *plátanos maduros* while I ate grilled chicken and vegetables, but I had come too far to risk going back. I also started a journal, which helped me pinpoint where I could go wrong. If a candy bar made its way to my mouth, for example, I added a few minutes more to my treadmill workout. Sundays were cheat days. I ate whatever I wanted to and didn't let myself feel guilty about it. There was no reason to, really; I was the healthiest I'd ever been.

It took me more than nine months to lose most of the 50 pounds. I wasn't skinny—and I'm still not—but I am strong, toned, and full of energy. It's a feeling I like to share with others, which is why I'm now a certified kickboxing instructor. I teach four classes a week. The energy rush is invigorating, and I get a kick (no pun intended) out of seeing other women feeling it, too. □

Karla Rodríguez, 27, is a detective with the Hartford, Connecticut, police department.

Toda una luchadora ■ Comencé a aumentar de peso tan pronto me gradué de la academia de policía. Como trabajaba de noche, me acostumbré a comer a horas raras. Cargaba 50 libras de más y casi no podía subir escaleras sin agotarme. Después de someterme a una operación por una lesión a los músculos de la muñeca, el doctor me recomendó que hiciera ejercicio. Me anoté en un gimnasio pero no tenía ánimo para ir. Me sentía mal, no sólo por la lesión sino porque estaba tan gorda que mi ropa no me quedaba.

Un día mi esposo y yo estábamos cenando en un restaurante cuando me fijé en lo delgada que era la mesera y me sentí muy incómoda. Enseguida me cubrí la panza con los brazos. En ese momento me di cuenta de lo mal que me sentía debido al aumento de peso. Además, siempre estaba de mal humor y a veces me portaba mal con la gente. No me sentía feliz conmigo misma y, por lo tanto, no me podía sentir bien con los demás. Esa noche recé pidiendo ánimo para hacer ejercicio. Sentí que tenía que hacer algo para cambiar mi estado de ánimo. Al día siguiente, me desperté antes de que sonara el despertador, llena de entusiasmo y me fui al gimnasio. Era como si mis plegarias hubieran sido contestadas.

Luego descubrí kickboxing, un ejercicio que combina movidas de boxeo y patadas. Esta combinación mágica me dio fuerza y energía. Durante meses asistí a cuanta clase pude. Nada me hacía sentir tan poderosa y en control de mí misma. A los meses empezaron a desaparecer las libras así como mi falta de ánimo y mis sentimientos negativos. Además, cambié mis hábitos de comida. Dejé las comidas fritas, empecé a consumir varias comidas livianas al día en vez de tres comidas grandes, y le cocinaba por separado a mi esposo. También comencé a anotar todo lo que ingería, cosa que me permitía saber dónde tenía que mejorar. Si, por ejemplo, me comía un chocolate, agregaba unos minutos más a mi rutina de ejercicios. Los domingos me daba el lujo de comer lo que deseaba sin sentimiento de culpa. Tardé más de nueve meses en ponerme en línea. No era flaca ni lo soy ahora, pero soy fuerte y estoy llena de energía. Es algo que deseo compartir, así que ahora soy instructora licenciada de kickboxing y me encanta ver a otras mujeres llenándose de vigor, como lo hice yo.

¿Qué es kickboxing?

Kickboxing es un ejercicio aeróbico que combina el boxeo y las artes marciales. Aumenta la flexibilidad, fuerza, vigor y coordinación.

¿Buscas dónde tomar clases de kickboxing en tu área? Recurre a los siguientes gimnasios que tienen sitios en el Internet: crunch.com o ballyfitness.com.

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