

Lisa, have you been active throughout your life?

My story is the familiar story of girls and women. When I started developing I wasn't confident in my body...I felt everything was wrong with it. You know...there was fat here, there was cellulite there, I didn't have enough boobs, I had too big a bum, my hips weren't right. I'm 6 foot tall. I was always the object of somebody's cruel joke. I think I spent a lot of time making myself invisible. I played hockey, I played netball, but I never really took it into my early adulthood.

So, then my career happened. Life contracted into a smaller place in Sydney. I was working overnight. I was doing shift work which is terrible for the body and mind. Then family started. I wasn't especially active beyond the extreme action you have to put in as a parent but no organised activities.

How did you get back into being active?

I was looking down the barrel of my fortieth birthday in 2009. And I thought something that I've always wanted to be able to do is run. I've always had quite chronic asthma, and I thought 'I'm gonna run'. I got the Couch to 5k app. And it trains you quite gently, from being a couch potato to being able to run 5km, all on your own! And so, I did that. And I've been running ever since.

Running with others

Back when I was first getting up to that 5k threshold there was a new Facebook group forming called *Running Mums Australia*. I joined that, and there was a lady who lived locally to me who said, 'If there's anyone interested, I can help you if you want to meet up for a run'. So, this was an absolutely random person who said, 'Come and meet me here, and we'll run around the river together'. And over the course of the next few weeks, more people came along. I met this random bunch of people. Some were like me, not all sort of fit or athletic. We started agreeing to meet more regularly and sharing the highs and the lows, and the injuries and life events, and it developed into this nice little community.

Running longer distances

I've done 4 half-marathons; I've been in 2 ultramarathon team events. I was training at the start of this year for the Simpson Desert Ultramarathon in June, but I got Covid in May.

What keeps you going?

The Sunday morning sessions keep me going. That's my jam. What gets me out of bed and what keeps me going are my girls, my ladies. I would never have known any of them had I not taken up running. And rain, hail, or shine we meet every Sunday.



How does running make you feel?

If I'm running with friends, I feel amazing. I feel validated. I feel like I'm unstoppable. I feel like a force of nature. I feel like all my problems are solved. We talk all the way round. It doesn't matter how fast we're going. If I'm running on my own, it feels like a slog. It feels like the hardest thing you've ever done. But if you're with someone else, it feels like the easiest thing to do. The thing that motivates me is doing it with other people.

How do you get yourself going when you're exercising alone?

I try and schedule it into my calendar. I've got an app that I use, which is called Final Surge. It will tell me when I open it up in the morning...it sends me an email even...and it lists on my calendar. So, it will say today you are (meant!) to do a weights session, or today run for 20 minutes at an easy pace, have a 5-minute break, run for 10 minutes at a faster pace, have a 5-minute break, then cool down. So it lists exactly what it wants me to do for the goal I've set it.

I'm not an elite athlete, I'm just out there for the fun of it.

How do you get back into being active after an injury or illness?

It's really hard. But once you get to a certain age you realise it's never an all-or-nothing game. You're allowed to start again and again and again. There's no rule book that says you can't. Some days I get out and it feels like I've never run before. And I think what on earth is going on. There's more recognition from myself and from lots of learned others, that our stage of life, the time of our cycle, all of that actually affects your athletic performance. So I give myself a lot of grace. There have been plenty of times where it might be 5 or 6 weeks, or a month, 2 months, 3 months even, where I've done almost no cardiovascular exercise beyond walking to the fridge. And you just go, ok, there's nothing in the rule book that says I can't just start again. I just start with walking.

I try to eliminate as many barriers as possible. I used to think to present yourself professionally you have to look a certain way. Now I don't give a shit. I've got sneakers on (with a skirt). I can just whip out for a walk anytime I want. I don't have to change my shoes.

Keeping active at work

There's a whole bunch of colleagues here. I can say 'Anyone want to go for a 10-minute walk?'. We can go for a whip around and be back in 10 minutes. It started when we signed up for *Steptember*.

Try to make it easy during the workday. I walk a good distance at least twice a week. I try to be really aware of not being sedentary. This is very much a Covid hangover, I started walking meetings. Because I was working at home, and because of where I live. I'd wear Bluetooth headphones and take my phone. I'd walk along the highway up near the road and do as many meetings as I could just walking. I'd have a notebook if I was meant to make a presentation or say something in the meeting. For the best part of 2 years, I'd try and walk. I'm doing 2 staff meetings each week for about an hour each. I got up to 6.5km just in a meeting. It's a really useful thing to just be active in a meeting. I throw my sneakers on and do laps around the building.

I would counter anyone who says otherwise, it actually makes you concentrate more on the meeting. If I'm sitting at my workstation and someone is talking in the meeting about something that's of no interest to me, I might be getting on with something else or looking in my diary. I actually listened a lot more during the walking meetings.

What would you suggest to others?

For me, I've found it has to be a social activity. I just try and keep a baseline level. The best way to do that is by walking. If you can't manage anything else just walking is good. If you can't manage walking, yoga of any variety is amazing.

Sense of wellbeing

When I am active and when I am happy with the amount of activity that I'm doing for myself, it's tied very, very closely to my sense of well-being. Conversely, when I know that I'm not doing very much, it's also easily understood that I can easily see that my lack of well-being is evident. I can see a direct arrow between the two. When I'm active and I'm happy with the level of activity, I'm happy. When I'm sedentary when I'm not looking after myself, when I'm putting everyone else first, when I'm making excuses... I really notice that my sense of well-being...all the things that constitute well-being but also my actual health, the way I perceive my health, goes down the toilet when I'm not active.