

Fit & Fab

# Health problems a wake-up call for him

Jesse Quek went from excessive drinking and eating to being a fitness junkie who gets cranky when he does not work out

Amrita Kaur

**What is your secret to looking fabulous?**

There's no secret. A lot of us know it, but applying knowledge to action has always been the biggest challenge.

Aesthetics is a by-product of being healthy, by being consistent with your physical activities, diet and sleep. Many people tend to neglect getting enough hours of sleep, but it is so vital as most of our bodies' recovery and repair is done during this time.

I try to clock in at least 40 minutes of physical activity and eight hours of sleep every day.

**Has there ever been a time when you were not fit and fab?**

Absolutely. I was excessively drinking for years, smoking and eating whatever I wanted. It was evident I did not care for my health. I was lethargic, unfit and overweight, and convinced myself I was "doing enough" by playing recreational sports over the weekend to negate the lifestyle I led.

About five years ago, I started facing health issues such as chronic gastritis. That was a wake-up call and I decided to take charge of my life then.

**What is your diet like?**

While I did put myself through some short-term challenges and strict diets in the past, I now try to maintain a high protein and moderate carbohydrate diet that also includes avoiding processed food and being adequately hydrated throughout the day.

I don't really restrict myself from eating something, but I try to limit my alcohol consumption.

**What are your indulgences?**

I love my "lemak" food like nasi padang, nasi lemak and Peranakan food.

**How do you maintain a healthy work-life balance?**

Deciding to work out in the morning before work hours has been the game-changer for me.

This window of uninterrupted time before I start my day proper allows me to get a big endorphin boost which increases my alertness and focus during the day at work.

I tend to keep the weekends free for everything else I wish to do.

**What are the three most important things in your life?**

God, my fiancée and my health.



**What is your favourite and least favourite part of your body?**

I like them all. I'm just grateful to God who has blessed me with functional limbs, a living and healthy body that I can progress in and

journey together with my mates.

**What are your must-dos before and after a workout?**

No specific rituals. I do, however, prefer working out in a fasted state (exercising on an empty stomach).

It helps that I generally do not eat breakfast, although this is usually a contentious topic because it does not work for and is not agreed on by everyone.

**How important is it for you to keep up with your fitness routine?**

Extremely. Ever since exercising became a habit for me, I do feel quite irritable when I skip or miss a workout – I need the endorphins.

I work out six times a week and allocate about 40 minutes to an hour to each workout.

**How are you keeping fit during this period?**

Over the past few years, I built up my fitness primarily on high-intensity interval training workouts, but recently focused on calisthenics.

Because calisthenics is so versatile, I don't need any bulky gym equipment to put in a good workout. All I need is my own body weight. It has been perfect for the work-from-home situation.

**What are the changes you have made to keep exercising during this time?**

I always preferred working out with a community, so not being able to physically do that and working out alone was tough.

Thankfully, applications like video-conferencing platform Zoom have allowed me and my friends to work out together virtually in our re-

spective homes at the same time.

Interestingly, it also helped me to reconnect with old friends and build relationships with new ones through these virtual workouts.

**How has your active lifestyle influenced your family and friends?**

The truth is that many of them influenced and inspired me first. I was a stubborn child growing up and only recently realised the importance of an active and healthy lifestyle.

I rarely say it, but I guess this is the perfect chance to do so – whatever transformation I have experienced was not done on my own. Along the way, my friends and family have contributed to the positive changes I have made in my life.

**What is the most extreme thing you have done in the name of fitness?**

Snowboarding down a mountain dressed in a mankini (a sling swimsuit worn by men) in minus 20 deg C in exchange for a free snowboard bought by my friends.

It wasn't a pleasant experience, but it was a pleasant gift.

**How extensive is your collection of sports-related paraphernalia?**

Liverpool jerseys from every season since 2007 and trophies from my rugby playing days.

**Would you go for plastic surgery?**

I would prefer to save the surgeon from extensive work.

**Do you think you're sexy?**

Some days.

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Mr Jesse Quek works out six times a week for 40 minutes to an hour each time.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JESSE QUEK

**Fitness routine**

<b>Monday</b>	• 40min high-intensity interval training
<b>Tuesday</b>	• 1hr calisthenics
<b>Wednesday</b>	• 45min cardio
	• 40min high-intensity interval training
<b>Thursday</b>	• 1hr calisthenics
<b>Friday</b>	• 40min high-intensity interval training
<b>Saturday</b>	• 1hr calisthenics
<b>Sunday</b>	• Rest

Source: JESSE QUEK  
STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

**BioBox**

**JESSE QUEK**

AGE: 31

HEIGHT: 1.68m

WEIGHT: 65kg

Mr Quek played competitive rugby for more than 20 years – throughout primary and secondary school days, in junior college and also at Singapore Management University.

Playing a sport he loved taught him many lessons, he said. "There will be times during the game where you get hit so hard and it feels almost impossible to get up and keep playing. But once you find it in you to get back up, some of these moments also result in the most rewarding experiences," said Mr Quek, who has a degree in business management.

Even though he was also active in other recreational sports such as football on the weekends, his health began to suffer in 2015.

"It was caused primarily by a self-indulgent lifestyle of an unhealthy diet and frequenting the bars and clubs.

"Growing up, health and fitness was not a priority for me as I relied on my young age and involvement in sports to get by," said Mr Quek, who works in the finance sector.

He said "this over-confidence in youthfulness and sporting activity" eventually caused his body to succumb to health issues such as Meniere's disease – a disorder of the inner ear that can lead to dizzy spells and hearing loss – and chronic gastritis.

"It became serious enough for me to re-examine the lifestyle I was leading," said Mr Quek, who is engaged to a dietitian, Ms Olivia Wong, 31.

Three years ago, he decided to join a gym, F45 Novena, with his friends. He participated in two separate eight-week challenges that required him to adhere to a strict diet, exercise schedule and sleep patterns.

He was determined to work on his health and ultimately won both challenges among members in the studio.

His health has since improved. "I don't experience any symptoms from chronic gastritis now because I've been more watchful of what I consume and I also limit my alcohol consumption, which was a big contributor to gastritis."

Currently, he does not go to the gym and instead focuses on calisthenics during his workouts six times a week, using pull-up bars, parallel dip bars or gymnastic rings at home or at neighbourhood parks.

"What started out as an intention to fix my health eventually turned into a habit and lifestyle for me to enjoy and also to appreciate small wins along the way," he said.