

OVERCOMING YO-YO DIETING

British bikini pro **MICHELLE BRANNAN** reveals how she helped Sofi Smart eat more to get lean



THE CLIENT

Sofi Smart, 22, came to me early last year. She was a gymnast until the age of 13 and played netball until she was 16 so she was naturally sporty and athletic. But when we met she was carrying a greater amount of fat than ever in her life and appeared puffy.

Sofi had entered a bikini fitness contest in 2013 but made the classic mistake of dieting too hard. She didn't eat enough and in the six weeks before the contest lowered her daily carbohydrate intake from 100 g, which was already too low, to zero.

Her diet consisted mainly of lean proteins and minimal fats, and consequently she looked too skinny on stage.

Bikini fitness contests are supposed to promote an achievable, healthy look but it's difficult to get the balance right. After her contest Sofi increased her calories and carbohydrates and put on weight faster than ever before.

Our goal was to get her back to a place where she was happy with her body and then add some lean tissue rather than body fat. Diet was going to be crucial.

MY DIAGNOSIS: NUTRITION

Yo-yo dieting—periods of near starvation followed by periods of high calorie or uncontrolled eating—is common among women.

This is mainly because low calorie diets are unsustainable. Many women binge or eat more than ever once they are free from its shackles.

This phenomenon is also common among female physique competitors. During pre-contest dieting their bodies go into starvation mode so when they finally increase calories their bodies hold onto them as a defence mechanism. It doesn't want



to starve again so it lays down body fat stores because it expects to famine.

Because eating too little for too long can slow the metabolism down it is sensible to reintroduce calories slowly so your body gets used to burning them.

I started Sofi on a diet rich in quality proteins, high in carbohydrates and low in fats. We still included a healthy fat range and supplemented with omega 3 but kept the daily total low.

Being naturally lean, her metabolism responded well to the carbohydrates and this, along with an increased amount of training, soon saw her shedding fat. Eating little and often helped to speed up her metabolism further. Sofi wasn't being starved nor was she being overloaded with excess calories.

I started Sofi on cardiovascular training six days a week to lose weight and as she began to get leaner we gradually reduced the amount of time and frequency she spent doing it. I also upped her carbohydrates.

In addition to this, Sofi was weight training six days a week using a split body part routine. Keeping carbohydrates in her diet enabled her to continue to train hard and prevented muscle loss.

Usually I advocate a weekly "off plan" meal. This is helpful when socialising as I am not a fan of taking tubs to a restaurant. It also ensures your body doesn't get used to a consistent number of calories.

But I advised Sofi to have a carbohydrate refeed instead, which basically means periodically adding carbohydrate-rich food low in fats to restore muscle glycogen.

I did this because if you train all week on a diet designed to get you leaner, which usually means your body is in a slight calorie deficit, you will eventually run out of energy. A refeed refuels the muscles with glycogen so they're ready to continue training. Also, carbohydrates are anti-catabolic and keeping them in the diet helps to prevent muscle loss.

As Sofi's next contest approached, she was having refeeds at least every five days and her cardio was cut to a minimum.

She was getting leaner but with a more shapely muscular appearance. We had managed to speed up her metabolism sufficiently to prevent the need for an extreme diet in the six weeks leading up to the show. In fact, by this stage we were adding more food not taking it away.

MY DIAGNOSIS: TRAINING

Here's the programme I devised:

Day 1: Legs

This consisted of heavy compound movements to build her legs. We did lots of squats, leg presses and lunges and also included a few isolation

exercises, such as leg curls and leg extensions.

Day 2: Shoulders

We focussed on the lateral, rear and front deltoids to create a rounded shoulder cap. I tend to steer clear of too many presses and upright rows: they can thicken the upper traps, which is not a feminine look.

Day 3: Chest and back

I like to superset chest and back to keep the upper body balanced.

Day 4: Hamstrings and glutes

On this day we incorporate stiff-legged and Romanian deadlifts with different feet positions to hit different angles using full range and partial range of movement. We use glute isolation exercises, such as single-leg work and kickbacks. The emphasis isn't on how heavy; it's about really targeting the right muscle group.

Day 5: Arms, shoulders, calves

We super-set biceps and triceps and add some extra shoulders in to the mix.

Day 6: Hamstrings and glutes

Same as day 4 but with a different range of exercises and focus.

THE RESULT

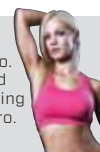
Sofi trained extremely hard, was regimented with her diet and brought a lean, balanced and healthy-looking physique to the stage in less than six months of working together.

She won a UKBFF qualifier in Leicester and subsequently went on to place 6th at the British Championships in the tall bikini class.

Sofi is much happier with how she looks both on and off stage and has learned about the perils of yo-yo dieting. **M&F**

ABOUT MICHELLE

Michelle Brannan is an IFBB bikini pro. She also runs a coaching team called Showgirl Fitness and the online training subscription resource BodySculpt Pro. www.michellebrannan.com



SIMON HOWARD