

IN FOCUS RICHIE NORTON



CHAOS TO CALM

The road from the maelstrom of the rugby scrum to the meditative state of the yoga guru is one less travelled, but for Richie Norton it's a transition that has allowed him to discover the full potential of both body and mind

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ichie Norton is the ex-rugby player turned 'yogi adrenaline junkie'. He started his fitness career playing rugby in the UK before moving overseas to New Zealand and the US, but for the past ten years he's been working alongside sports professionals and some of the most respected pioneers of human performance. Today his day job involves getting actors movie-ready and athletes game-ready, experimenting with meditation, breathwork, callisthenics, capoeira and his beloved yoga.

It's been quite a transition – and one which was forced upon him. "I was in my mid-20s," says Norton, "I'd suffered a combination of various injuries throughout my rugby playing years: my sciatica had become quite bad, I dislocated my jaw, suffered from concussion and had an MCL rupture." The game had taken its toll on his body and the outcome would hit his mental state, too. "It led to me being told I'd struggle to recover fully. After a few years of battling this mental torment, I found yoga."

Norton is evangelical about his conversion to yoga and now devotes his life to introducing it, along with meditation and mindfulness, to others. "My aim now is to help clients on a journey of self-discovery, giving them all the tools to unlock and develop their full physical and mental potential."

It's not the stereotypical ex-rugby player's patter, but then Norton was never your run-of-the-mill egg-chaser. Born in the Middle East, where he says he was an active "Mowgli type of kid", his parents moved back to the UK for him to start school. He found rugby, which provided him with a sense of belonging as well as an outlet for his physical expression. At 19, on the advice of a coach at Chester Rugby Club, he >>

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➤ accepted the chance to play in New Zealand where he settled into an unorthodox sporting lifestyle: sheep shearing, joining the volunteer fire brigade and enjoying the odd beer. After playing in the USA, England and Portugal – where he added lifeguard to his CV – the rugby and party lifestyle took its toll. When his career was cut short, however, he made a conscious effort to become more mobile, which he says liberated him from pain.

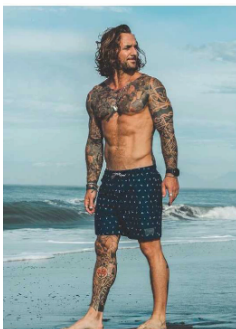
MOVING TO MINDFULNESS

Now based in London, his appearance – distinctive tattoos, ponytail and skateboard in tow – further detract from his rugby background. “I did find the transition from rugby to yoga difficult,” he says, “but this would be down to my ego. I, like many other rugby lads, felt it was mainly for women in Lycra and that intimidated me at first, because I wanted to be good at it and thought I’d get laughed at. Also, the idea of sitting still and doing breathing exercises made me think, ‘Nah this isn’t my thing!’ But my advice to anyone would be, leave your ego at the door and get stuck in; yoga is for everyone and only gets more powerful the more you let go.”

Indeed Norton insists those who, like his former self, spend most of their exercise time in the weights room building strength and conditioning muscle, can benefit their performance by embracing yoga the way he has. “Mindfulness and breathing techniques are 100% beneficial in the weights room. This is pretty much all I teach to my athletes and students when we are looking for those performance hacks. Breathing is the lowest hanging fruit when it comes to preparing for training and speeding up recovery. Simply observing the breath is a powerful mindfulness tool that can be used to boost focus and calm a busy mind.”

Norton certainly is a busy man, even if he’s managing to keep his mind calm. He’s the founder of wellbeing brand, The Strength Temple, from which he advises men and women on how to achieve a better balance in life.

“My aim now is to help clients on a journey of self-discovery, giving them all the tools to unlock and develop their full physical and mental potential”



BUSY MAN'S MEDITATION MANUAL

NORTON EXPLAINS HOW TO INCORPORATE MINDFULNESS AND BREATHING TECHNIQUES INTO YOUR DAILY ROUTINE



■ TAKE A DEEP BREATH

"Observe your breathing all day. Sit comfortably in a quiet place with your eyes closed and focus on your breathing without any distractions. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, letting your breath flow effortlessly in and out of your body. Let go of anything that needs your attention. Do one to two minutes of practice two to three times a day - soon mindfulness breathing becomes second nature."

■ CHEW WISELY

"Focus on your food and how you eat it. Sit down, slow down, chew your food, notice the textures, shapes and colours, then, any smells and sounds. When you take a bite, notice the temperature, the texture and all the different tastes."

■ LOOK AROUND

"When you're moving, leave your phone alone and look up. Focus on a natural object within your immediate environment and relax into watching for as long as your concentration allows. Explore every aspect of its formation and allow yourself to be consumed by its presence."

DIGITAL DETOX

He's pushed his own body to the limit, and knows the impact failing to find that balance can have. As a result, he now creates workouts that include desk exercises and breath work, all with the aim of improving sleep, stress-relief, focus and mindfulness. "I'm encouraging people to be Headstrong, an initiative developed by AXA PPP healthcare, which encourages us to view the mental and physical as one. These are intertwined elements and work collaboratively to give you complete health, particularly in different circumstances, like lifting weights."

By passing on the knowledge he's garnered as a student of yoga and meditation, encouraging people with busy lives to slow down and take time to focus on their breath, he believes he can make a huge difference to their lives the way it did with him. "Yogis, monks and spiritual healers have been using breathing practices for thousands of years, but we now have science-backed studies and lab research that has provided breathwork tools to lift mood, help calm the nervous system down before you go to sleep, manage anxiety and adapt to many other forms of stress."

DESK-ERCISES FOR IMPROVED POSTURE

STEP 1

Slowly roll your head, neck and shoulders. Drop your chin down to your chest, move your head to the left and to the right, then create controlled circular motions.



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STEP 2

Next, slowly start rolling your full body in controlled circular movements, maintaining your steady breathing. This will help move and mobilise your spine.



STEP 3

Seated or standing, reach your arms behind your back and interlock your fingers or grab the back of your chair. Inhale, open your chest, roll your shoulders back, release your arms, then drop your chin and reach forward.

STEP 4

Grab the side of your ribs, crossing your arms so that you open up your upper back, and take a deep breath in. Do a small rotation from your hips, going both clockwise and anti-clockwise, making a small circle with your spine.



STEP 5

While you're sitting, spread your feet shoulder-width apart, reach your right hand to the outside of your left thigh and position your left hand on the back of the chair. As you take a breath in, lift your chest up. As you breathe out you need to twist as far around as you can. Gently come round to face the front and switch sides.



For more on Headstrong, AXA PPP healthcare's initiative to help enable an active approach to our mental wellbeing, visit axapphealthcare.co.uk/headstrong

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Men's Fitness

EDITORIAL

Editorial Director Christina Neal
Editor Isaac Williams
Art Director Xavier Robleda
Editorial postal address:
 Kelsey Media, Cudham Tithe Barn,
 Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent, TN16 3AG

ADVERTISING

TANDEM MEDIA LTD
Managing Director Catherine Rowe
 01233 228750
 catherine.rowe@tandemmedia.co.uk
Account Manager Ben Rayment
 01233 228752
 ben@tandemmedia.co.uk
Ad Production Manager Andy Welch
 01233 220245
 mensfit@tandemmedia.co.uk

MANAGEMENT

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 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
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EDITOR'S LETTER

FITNESS IN ALL ITS FORMS

Men's Fitness' mission has always been to provide you with the most practical and instantly applicable information for living the fittest, fullest, happiest life you can. Somewhere along the line, though, 'fitness' became synonymous with lifting weights – and while there's no doubt going to the gym is how many of us choose to keep fit, many also take advantage of the big wide world of exercise opportunities that exists away from the weights room. This issue and those that follow, therefore, will seek to reflect the huge variety of options at your disposal for leading a life of health and happiness.

Of course, looking good is part of that – the cover model physique is something we can all aspire to – but feeling good is of even greater

importance, and sadly six-pack abs are no guarantee of peace of mind. That's why these pages will also be a space not only for physical fitness, but mental wellbeing; at a time when men's mental health is facing something of a crisis, the best thing we can do is encourage wider debate around the issues that can affect us all.

Whatever your reasons for picking up this copy of *MF*, I hope you will find all you need to keep both body and mind fighting fit.



MINDFUL MAN: TURN TO P34 TO FIND OUT WHY THIS FORMER RUGBY PLAYER MADE MEDITATION A CENTRAL PART OF HIS LIFE



Editor
 Isaac.williams@kelsey.co.uk
 @IsaacWilliamsHQ

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