

THE CHRONICLE *of the* HORSE

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EVENTING
ISSUE

► BETWEEN ROUNDS WITH:

MEGAN KEPFERLE

Your Horse Deserves A Healthy Rider

After lying about her fitness level much of her adult life, our columnist weighs in with wit and wisdom on the hypocrisy of unhealthy equestrians.

As horse people, we're all very concerned with the health and fitness of our animals. Some of us, like myself, even make a profession out of it. We spend thousands of dollars and thousands of hours paying attention to every little detail to make sure Mr. Ed isn't too fat or too thin or too tired or too wired. But at the same time, we work 67 hours a day and eat erratically (most of the time on the road) with little regard to our own health and performance.

I would bet that if I asked every professional groom what their horses eat, they could tell me down to the ounce, then proceed to list off precise content of fiber, fat, protein, starch and sugar, combined with a long list of minerals, vitamins and supplements, with direct regard to a strict feeding schedule and most certainly the reasoning behind all of it. But if I were to ask them what *they* had eaten in the last 24 hours, and why, they

would look at me sideways.

Being fit has always been important to me; I've never self-identified as a fat person, nor an unhealthy person. But alas, inner conscious and outer conscious do not always see brain to brain. I could be cliché and say that I've "struggled" with my weight for the better part of my life, but that would be a lie. I really hate it when people say it like that. Everyone thinks they're a victim, when actually, most people are just blind to what's really happening. Like the people who feed their immobile retired Welsh pony 8 quarts of high performance feed and wonder why it founders.

But before you go and get offended, you should know that I'm allowed to make these generalizations, because I was one of those people. I used to eat and drink like an alcoholic marathon runner, and surprise! I got fat. No real struggle there.

"Even if excess weight isn't your particular problem, the nutrition and fitness level of most riders and grooms these days is atrocious. Get together in your barns and create a system of accountability," said professional groom Megan Keperle, who organized a yoga session at The Fork Horse Trials (N.C.) this spring through her how-to website, Howdaa.com.

SAMANTHA CLARK FOR EVENTING NATION PHOTO



▶ Meg Kep's Dos & Don'ts

DO:

- ▶ Eat lean protein at *every* meal. No, Lunchables do not equal lean protein.
- ▶ Eat more vegetables than anything else. You've really got to learn to love these guys. They can be the life of the party, I promise. You just have to invite them.
- ▶ Drink so much water. Not Gatorade. Or Vitamin Water. Or bourbon and water. Just water.
- ▶ Enjoy a piece of cheesecake, but never from Walmart. That was just wrong, and I am ashamed I ever did it. Especially more than once.
- ▶ Work out six days a week. This may seem like overkill for a lot of people, but try to do *something* every day. I feed off my "me time," and the gym is the only place in my life that is just for me.
- ▶ Tackle the challenge of making healthy choices by thinking, "Eat *this*, not *that*." This outlook is much easier (and more successful in the long term) than "I don't eat any of that."

DON'T:

- ▶ Eat processed food. It makes you feel processed.
- ▶ Eat fruit in large quantities. Guru's little voice in my head says: "Fruit is nature's candy." *Swat!*
- ▶ Have more than two alcoholic drinks in one sitting. (Guru tells me "one and done," but I'm more of a "two and do" kind of girl.)
- ▶ Give up on yourself if you have a weak moment. "Oh, s***! I just ate some Texas toast and bacon sugar donuts with grits and a frappuccino, so I guess I'll just start my diet over on the first of the next month and binge eat until then." Stop. Doing. This. It will change your life.
- ▶ Think fat is the devil. Au contraire! Sugar, my friend, is the devil.
- ▶ Reward yourself with a treat after the gym. This one has made the biggest difference in my life. Just don't do it. Adrenaline is your reward, you greedy American!

The Yo-Yo Life

My name is Megan Kepferle. I'm a lot of things, and most of them don't really fit together. I was a high school athlete, but I smoked for 10 years—sometimes heavily. I thought I was a frat boy in college (my nickname was Kegferle), but I got really good grades despite rarely going to class. I love eating; I hate being fat. I think of myself as a "city girl," yet I've ridden horses nearly my entire life with a primary goal of being a professional, and I've now settled into an active country lifestyle as eventer Sinead Halpin's head groom.

Although I've shelved my professional rider aspirations for now, it was always something I took seriously, even at a young age. I'll never forget when I was 17 and quite thin (remember the era of Stackers and Xenadrine, pre-multiple

cases of professional athlete heart attacks?) and thinking, "The lighter I am, the faster my horse can go."

I was doing primarily jumpers at the time, and no one needed to suggest I should be thin—I thought it on my own. It seemed a little crazy, and I didn't share it with anyone other than my perfect, 21-year-old schoolmaster, C.J. But as harsh as that sounds, it was true. Quite simply, the less weight they carry, the easier time the horse will have performing.

Now, my friends, I am not trying to spawn a new renaissance of eating disorders. Instead I want to tell you what I've learned in the decade since.

College came and went. God, I got so fat in college. I went from a size 4 to a 14 in a matter of two semesters. And my yo-yoing continued for the next

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Megan Kepferle remembers this moment, hugging “Tate” after his second-placed finish at the 2012 Land Rover Burghley CCI** (England) in September, as the best of her career. But seeing undeniable evidence of her weight gain made the image a bittersweet wake-up call.**

CALINA FOR HORSE JUNKIES UNITED PHOTO

few years, until I came back to horses full time and seemed just by nature to drop off weight and maintain it.

I was riding several horses a day and eating pretty much what I wanted, but I was working those fun hours of sunrise to sunset. In my mind, I decided that this was the best lifestyle for me: I didn’t have to diet, and I was happy with my health. I put

away the scale, and I set out on a path that I thought I could maintain for the rest of eternity.

But all good things must come to an end, and metabolisms adjust, and then you start living with teenagers, and before you know it you’re eating Cheez-Its by the pound, having slices of cheesecake from Walmart and thinking, “That scale must be broken.”

Ain’t Nobody Got Time For That

About two years ago I finally accepted that despite my “active” lifestyle, I had gained a whole bunch of weight.

I still consider myself a capable rider and am lucky to take the reins of Sinead’s top horses when she’s away. If you’ve ever met the two of us, you’d know you really couldn’t find two more different body types. Sinead refers to herself as a clothes hanger, and I call myself an apple on toothpicks.

Combine that disparity with the fact that Manoir de Carneville, aka “Tate,” was getting ready for the Olympics then, and I decided I just couldn’t be in the shape that I was in and continue riding that horse guilt-free. I had to make some changes.

Last year I coincidentally began working on my start-up how-to website, Howdaa, with a friend who also deals with weight issues. It was November, and I’d lost a bit of weight over the summer and was slowly gaining the motivation and momentum to kick it up a notch. And since my friend is a tech-savvy girl, she mentioned to me an online service called My Body Tutor that came highly recommended by online marketing genius Noah Kagan.

Now, if there was ever a skeptic of anything online pertaining to weight loss, let me tell you, that would be me. I know a lot about nutrition and a lot about *how* to lose weight, and I was aware that most of my problem was just a lack of self-discipline.

But for some reason I tried it. And within a few hours I had my first consultation with Adam Gilbert, founder of My Body Tutor and later nicknamed by me and henceforth referred to by all my friends as “the Guru.” (As Sinead would come to say: “Would Guru approve of this?”)

I liked Adam from the get-go because he prefaced our conversation with the fact that he wasn’t going to tell me anything I didn’t already know. Thank you! Finally someone who realized I already know everything.

The key to the program is just having someone to hold you accountable for what you eat every day—like a food journal, but one someone else reads and follows up with you about. It turned

out to be the perfect way to make me stop lying to myself, and surprise! I lost weight. (I suppose it could *not* work if you lied to Guru. But then you'd be paying to lie to someone... just seems silly. *Although*, I did just admit to him today that I lied about my starting weight by 5 pounds. Progress.)

“ Before you know it you're eating Cheez-Its by the pound, having slices of cheesecake from Walmart and thinking, 'That scale must be broken.' ”

Throughout the first few weeks I began to realize I wasn't as healthy as I thought I was, and Adam helped me make very small manageable changes to my meals. With a little consistency, the weight started coming off, and my energy levels started rising. After a few months, I headed back to the gym.

I used to be a gym rat but had somehow phased out of that lifestyle over the years. This time around I was going, no holds barred. I'm very competitive by nature, and without a horse to compete on, I started competing with myself at the gym. I applied similar training techniques that we use with our horses and started listening to my body, pushing harder when it was time and backing off when I was 4/5 lame on the jog strip.

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By January, I had lost about 20 pounds, and I thought I was ready to fly the nest. That is when I tried quitting MBT—multiple times, actually. The Guru basically laughed at me and said, “Ain’t nobody got time for that.”

My first thought was that he was after all my millions. But I know now that he wants to see me succeed as much, if not more, than I do.

I Am You

So here I am six months later, Guru still on my case. I’m also lighter than I’ve been since I was 19, and I’m actually 6 pounds below my goal weight. I’m crushing personal records in the gym and in races as well as on the scale and loving every minute of it. My last 5k time was 24:40—almost 8 minutes faster than my previous race.

I am not a calorie counter or a

record-keeper, and I don’t measure any food out. It is a simple balancing of fat, fiber, protein, starch, sugars, minerals and vitamins, just like we do for old Mr. Ed. I am *that person*. What does that mean? Don’t even pretend—you know exactly what that means.

I am you. I am an average American with an average metabolic rate subjected to years of misinformation and really sneaky marketing campaigns. The first step is to realize you’re way more in control of your health than you think, and it most certainly is never too late, or too hard, or too much.

If you think your horse is back sore because your custom saddle doesn’t fit, yet you continue to eat and drink what you want because horseback riding is the one sport that doesn’t have limitations of size and age, think

again. Self-awareness (and learning how to properly sit the trot) will be the best thing you can achieve for yourself, as well as your four-legged friend.

To succeed, you have to think long term and sustainable. This means eating 500 calories a day and going on juice binges aren’t going to work. In fact, they’ll probably make you fatter in the end. Think of it this way: You buy a 3-year-old off the track in April. You enter him at Burghley in September. How do you think that’s going to go? But if you buy him in April, start slowly and consistently and build a tiny bit each day, all of a sudden you have this awesome young horse, and in a few years maybe he could go to Burghley and almost beat Andrew Nicholson’s Avebury.

Your health should be as important to you as Mr. Ed’s. Even if excess weight



“I recently began boxing lessons, which are no joke. And sometimes when I’m literally about to pass out from overexertion I remember how far I’ve come in such a little amount of time,” said Megan Kepferle, who’s lost more than 35 pounds in eight months. PHOTO COURTESY OF MEGAN KEPFERLE

isn't your particular problem, the nutrition and fitness level of most riders and grooms these days is atrocious. Get together in your barns and create a system of accountability. Think weight loss challenges, recipe sharing or gym memberships; there are so many things you can do out of the irons that will benefit you while you're in them.

These days I have that "never thought this was possible" feeling. I recently began boxing lessons, which are no joke. And sometimes when I'm literally about to pass out from overexertion I remember how far I've come in such a little amount of time. I have more energy for my job, I ride better, and I have no work-related pain. Last year I was gimping around on a daily basis, and now the only time I'm sore is if I overdo it on the burpees.

And I'm not going to lie, I look pretty good. To be quite honest, the compliments I receive make me uncomfortable, only because through accepting them we're both silently admitting that I used to be a fatty. (There was one especially backhanded compliment along the lines of, "Wow! What did you lose, like 250 pounds?" Um, more like 35, but thanks for thinking I lost The Backstreet Boys.)

Last weekend Sinead was away, and I galloped the horses. Tate, who's quite sensitive, felt amazing. He felt fit, and he was uncharacteristically pulling me up the hill. I chalk most of that up to Sinead and her fitness program, as well as the fact that Tate is abnormally awesome, but a very big (yet svelte), happy part of me felt confident that I was as fit and healthy as him. 🐾

Megan Kepferle

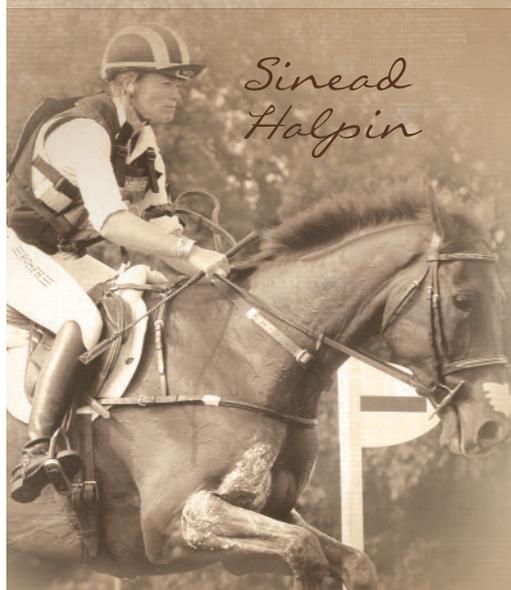
"Meg Kep" as she's best known in the U.S. eventing community, resides in Chester, N.J., and works as head groom and manager at Sinead Halpin Equestrian. Meg, 28, is also committed to sustainable avenues promoting good horsemanship and the sport of eventing, and her recent dedication to fitness has inspired her to share her story and help others toward "the path of awesomeness" at MyBodyTutor.com.



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