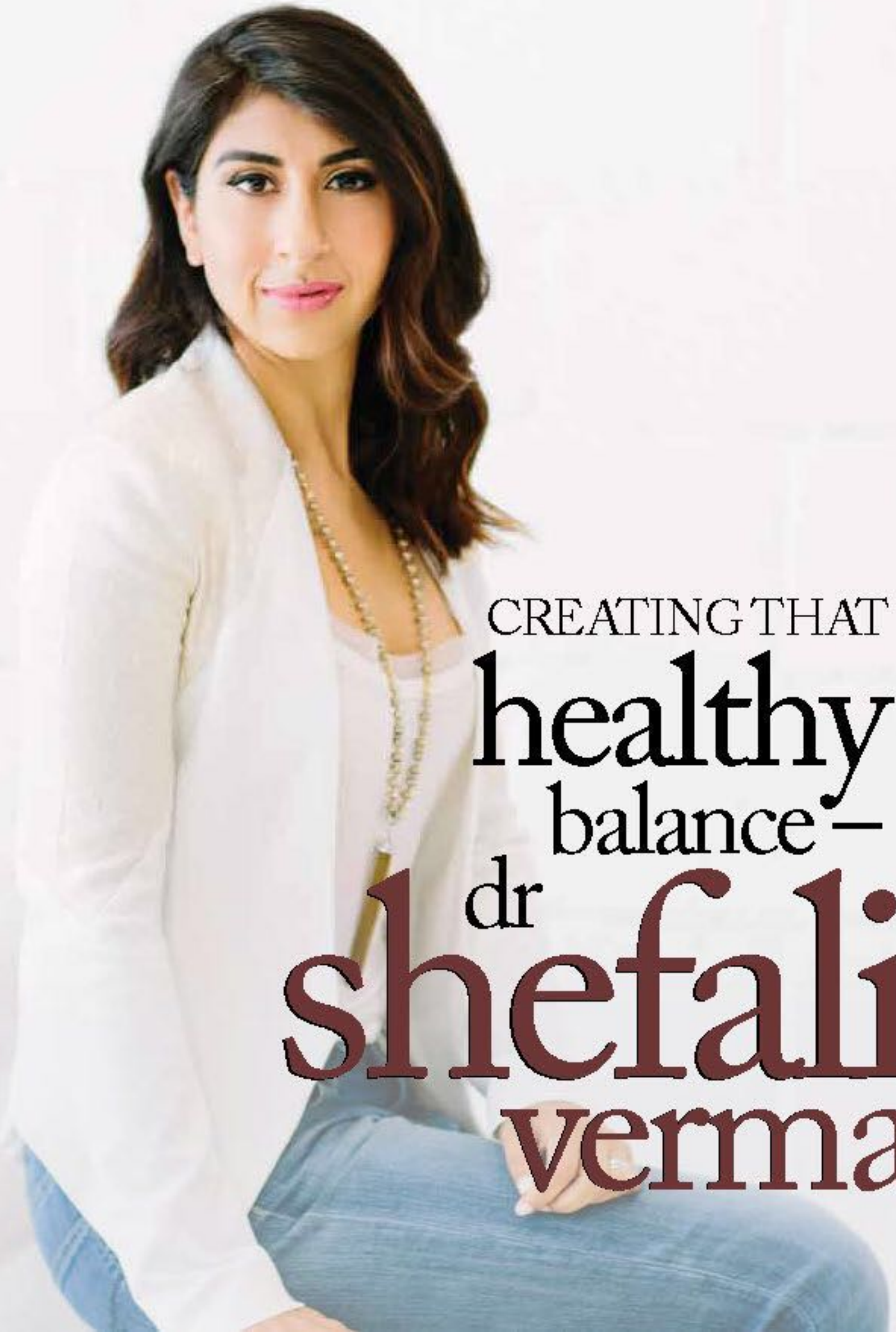


A MOTHER OF TWINS, WIFE OF ONE OF THE LEADING SPORTS THERAPISTS IN DUBAI, BRAND AMBASSADOR FOR HAULETIC, A DOCTOR WHO SPECIALIZES IN NUTRITIONAL THERAPY, STRENGTH COACH; PHEW!!! DR. SHEFALI VERMA IS ALL OF THAT AND MUCH MORE! SHE IS AN IDEAL EXAMPLE OF A SMART, SUCCESSFUL WOMAN WHO EMBODIES ALL THAT A MODERN WOMAN STANDS FOR. TeleLIFE TALKS TO HER TO FIND OUT HOW SHE JUGGLES IT ALL!



CREATING THAT
healthy
balance –
dr
shefali
verma

A Functional Medicine Specialist, Dr. Shefali specializes in the treatment and management of a variety of chronic conditions. Food intolerance and allergies, management of digestive diseases, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, detoxification, stress, prevention of disease and weight management are just some examples of what Dr. Shefali deals with on a day to day basis.

How did you become involved in this field?

Honestly I fell into it. My father passed away in my final year at medical school and seeing him surrounded by all these doctors (he was a surgeon in Sharjah) admitted in the same hospital he worked at and not being able to help him, I became really disillusioned. As soon as I qualified and worked for a year to get my full registration, I knew hospital medicine would be difficult for me. Having been the relative of a patient I definitely became more "soft" to the families and emotionally I felt that to feel empathy was a natural emotion and if I stayed in hospital medicine I would have to become "harder". I didn't want that. I did my masters in sports medicine. I was/am a huge lover of sport so that decision was a great one for me and it meant that instead of illness I would work with less life threatening acute disease but with sports and elite individuals and the worst thing for them was not death but not being able to play their sport. While working with athletes, their performance, recovery, nutrition and body composition all became important. Learning nutrition became the next obvious step. The healthier someone was on the inside the more it showed on the outside. First I saw sporting individuals, which at the start was mainly for body composition changes and then through word of mouth I started seeing different people with different problems.

Does the functional medicine approach replace seeing a doctor?

One thing I truly believe is no one knows everything. I don't **choose** to see acute medicine, what I mean by that is that I mainly see patients with chronic diseases. I am happy to see people who are being seen by other doctors and I always encourage them to tell them they have come to see me. **Two heads are better than one**, most of the time 😊

What is functional medicine?

There are many definitions out there and I think you could have looked that up your self. What is functional medicine to me? Functional medicine to me is realizing when someone may not be ill but is definitely not well. It's listening to the patient. It's aiming at looking for the root cause. It's not just dealing with the symptoms presented to me but asking the question why. It's looking at the body as a whole and being that detective to listen well enough and get as many clues as possible to get to the main culprit. Its dealing with that culprit while educating and empowering the patient in trying to prevent a relapse or other related dysfunctions.

Who is ideally suited to see a functional medicine specialist? Why?

I can only speak for myself. I see all kinds of patients. I don't as I mentioned earlier see acutely unwell patients. I am known for seeing the more stable and chronic disease types.

It's a work in progress for me. I tend to see patients who have seen many other practioners and I come as a last



resort. They are by then thankfully stable and labeled as not "medically ill" but physically not "well".

Two points I would like to make and this may be going off on a tangent, is that nowadays people are making a habit of doctor shopping. You shouldn't go to a doctor to hear what you want to hear. If a doctor says something you don't like it doesn't mean he is a bad doctor. What we are in the habit of doing is leaving and then seeing another doctor, whereas what I think you should be doing is asking the doctor questions and being honest about how you feel. Doctors are not God, I learnt that when I watched my father on the ventilator for **eighteen** days surrounded by the best in the region! I learnt that when I was a doctor in the NHS in London! We should be able to answer and reassure. We should also not be afraid of saying we don't know. In my clinic we both should come together as a team. The other point is that I think people need to know what is an emergency and needing urgent attention. People are always afraid of having to wait for hours at the emergency department and so will wait days to see a GP or specialist etc.

What are major lifestyle diseases and how does one tackle them? How does functional medicine help?

Maybe we should talk about what aren't lifestyle diseases. Inflammation can be linked to most diseases. Your lifestyle can alter the inflammation. Learning to make better choices is the key. Our bodies are strong and very intelligent and physiologically we have inbuilt mechanisms to fight occasional assaults. If we overdo those assaults then the body shall breakdown. We are not invincible. I try to help manage symptoms and backtrack where the breakdown happened and try to not let history repeat itself.

How does the environment affect our health?

Environment consists of what we breath, what we eat, drink and who's around us. Air, water and food are the main things that we take in and physically put into the body. Psychological health plays a huge role as well. Stress actually affects us physiologically. It plays havoc with the balance of hormones, the immune system as well as the function of the gastrointestinal tract. Our genes haven't changed in **hundreds** and **thousands** of years but I believe as the environment has changed immensely in that time, we are discovering more and more diseases and they are becoming not only more prevalent but also more severe in its nature.

'A pill for very ill' is the philosophy today. Please comment.

Depends on the pill.

Your philosophy is 'An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure'. How does one go about practicing it?

1. Listen to the patient
2. Keep learning
3. Ask the question why
4. Know process of disease

5. Empower and educate
6. Get to the root
7. Refer if needed
8. Patients health is priority

Could you summarize a sample training program for a client for weight loss and toning?

High volume, high density

Name 5 cardio exercises not on a machine...

- ▶ Modified strongman
- ▶ Running
- ▶ Body weight HIIT (high intensity interval training)
- ▶ Skipping
- ▶ 3-5 minute rounds boxing with pads

Three essential exercises that are recommended for all...

- ▶ A full body weight squat
- ▶ The plank
- ▶ Face pulls (band or cable)

Your take on Organic food? Vegan food? Is it overrated?

The concept of organic is not overrated. The way in which food is treated these days is a real problem. The problem is importation and transportation conditions of the products to its final destination.

Vegan for me is not something I currently advise.

Detoxification and the immune system require protein and amino acids. There are essential amino acids that the body can't make and need to be ingested therefore unless someone is phenomenally good at mixing vegetable proteins to get all essential amino acids in the diet, then its not that "healthy".

Your fitness regime?

Currently I am in training for the Dubai Marathon. This entails 3-4 runs a week. This has been a goal of mine since 1999 when my father passed away. I also strength train a minimum of twice a week in the form of modified strongman sessions at Transform Fitness. I have been sporty since fifth grade. I played team sports all through school and basketball and squash at university. I only stopped basketball and squash in September 2013 when I dislocated my right shoulder for the second time while playing basketball one evening.

How do you juggle work and motherhood?

I started back at work when the twins were just 3 months old and it was a lot harder then than it is now. I try to work when they are in the nursery and other days I work half days. I try and spend as much time as I can with them and that's healthy for the three of us. I need to work and do "grown up" things like work - a big part of me from before becoming a mum. I also don't want them to be clingy and too dependent. Its creating that healthy balance for all of us.

If not a functional Specialist, what else would you have done?

If I had never gone into medicine then I would become a professional actor.