

**ADRIAN SHEPHERD**  
**INTERVIEWS**  
**SUMI SINGH**

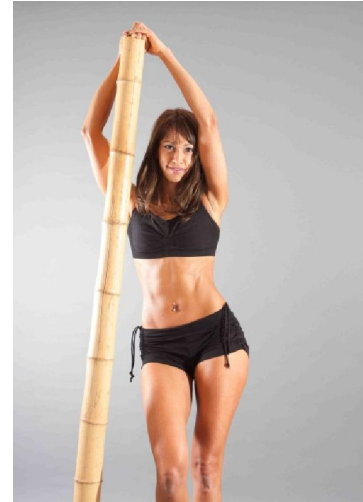
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**Adrian:** Hi guys! Adrian Shepherd here, author of *iSucceed* and creator of [isucceedbook.com](http://www.isucceedbook.com), and today I'm on the line with Sumi Singh. Sumi is a fitness trainer with over 10 years experience and someone who most definitely walks the talk. She is in fantastic shape and helps clients transform their lives through diet and exercise. It's a pleasure to have you on the line with us today, Sumi.



Sumi: The pleasure's mine, Adrian.

**Adrian:** So let's start off by asking the obvious: How did you get into fitness?

Sumi: I became hooked on fitness the moment I first laid hands on a set of my dad's dumbbells when I was 12. He lifted every morning. Nothing heavy, but it was a daily habit. Both my parents walked every single day, often twice a day. When I joined track in HS I did track (shot put and discus), I remember my coach telling me how strong I was for someone so small. His early encouragement of my athletic endeavors and that of my family's, inspired me on a lifelong fitness journey where I achieved several milestones: losing all the baby weight less than 2 months after a C-section; bench pressing my own body weight; and finishing a 5k in my personal best time and regularly placing in my age class.

These proud moments are especially important to me as an Indian woman given the tendency of our culture to dismiss the value of athletic activities. But that's hopefully changing.

**Adrian:** What have you learned along the way?

Sumi: That there are absolutely no quick fixes. If I ever wanted to get stronger, it took time in the gym. To lose body fat post-baby, it

can take months and can be painfully slow when you're not sleeping well or struggling to find the time. If you want to run strong, you got to put the miles in week after week after week. But know that with every step, no matter how small can propel you onto a healthier path. It may be a slow process but this is a good thing; creating and ingraining healthy habits that last forever.

**Adrian: What mistakes did you make?**

Sumi: Trying to do too much on my own without help. For years I burned myself out, working a "responsible" job and doing training part-time. When I had the momentum to pursue my passion (fitness), I worked (and still do!) twice as hard, but am so much happier. If you have a supportive spouse, or enough income saved up, or can otherwise ask for help---do so. The same is true for your own fitness, if you're striving to attain a goal. A good personal trainer, "diet coach," a workout buddy, or a support network is a useful thing to line up in your fitness arsenal. We could all use a little help.

**Adrian: What are some common myths about fitness?**

Sumi: That doing more is somehow better. That there's a magic workout, or a special supplement or shake you need to kickstart your progress. It really doesn't take that much to start. I advocate a "baby steps" approach. Even walking 15 minutes a day to begin is better than sitting on the couch. But START.

Another myth is that there's a magic diet, or secret combinations of foods that you must eat to lose fat. Whether you like to eat 5 to 6 snacks a day, or 2 huge meals, or if you avoid gluten or don't isn't what matters. You simply have to eat enough to meet your caloric needs. The more active you are, the more you need to eat. If you're eating too much junk and not moving enough, it doesn't

matter if you're following a low-fat, or a sugar-free, or doing Paleo or whatever. Barring hormonal issues, you're not going to lose weight if you're eating too much.

**Adrian: What the most common mistakes you see people make when it comes to fitness?**

Sumi: If you're training one-on-one with me, I'm going to make sure you're performing the lifts safely and correctly. It's a process. I don't like to think that people are necessarily making intentional mistakes. It might take client weeks, or even months to ingrain the movement patterns properly for a complicated lift like the barbell squat.

I think the average newbie might plunge into a fitness program gung-ho, get burnt out quickly, or get injured by doing too much too soon, or perhaps expect that they're supposed to get beat up after every single session. And there are lots of trainers that just train their client into the ground. I want my clients feeling stronger and empowered, so they come back for more.

I think another mistake people make, along with the too-much-too-soon approach is thinking they need a healthy diet to be "kick-started" via a detox or cleanse. There's nothing wrong or dirty with your body that isn't already taken care with a good sweat session and plenty of fiber.

**Adrian: What do you consider a "good" diet?**

Sumi: I'm going to assume that we're talking overall nutrition. Obviously, one that's high in fiber (from lots of vegetables, fruit, whole grains), broadly diversified in terms of lean protein sources (lean cuts of meat, fish, beans, eggs, yogurt, and vegetarian/vegan sources), a sensible amount of fats (cheese, nuts, oils (fish, flax, plants) etc), and lots of water. Try to minimize the overly processed stuff (e.g., candy) and hard liquor.

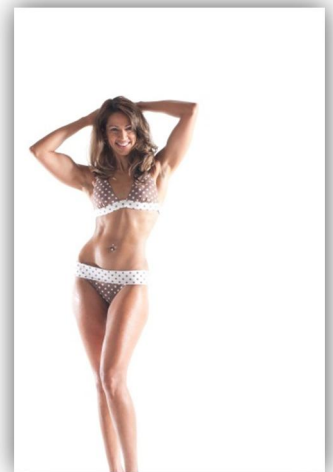
**Adrian: How did you develop / settle on your method?**

Sumi: There's no one method. I think the job of the trainer/coach is to listen to what the client needs. Whatever training program or nutrition program you feel would suit them has to take into account their likes/dislikes, their schedule/constraints, food allergies, their injury history, what they want to accomplish, what their training background is, etc etc.

Listen to them.

**Adrian: Now before I go any further, I just have to ask, what's your secret to your gorgeous figure?**

Sumi: Thank you! There's no secret. Just remember the picture you see is the result of years and years of hard work. I've been a trainer for over a decade, and have lifted longer than that.



**Adrian: Well, even if there's no secret, I'm sure there things you do recommend to clients so what do you feel are the top 2 or 3 things (exercises, health tips) that are the most effective for clients?**

Sumi: 1. Start small, but just START. We all just need to move a little more. 2. Eat more vegetables and drink your water. 3. Find a good personal trainer or smart workout partner and learn some basic strength training exercise (squat, bench press, pushups, split squats/lunges, rows, curls). I have these on my website too:

<http://www.shailafitness.com/exercise-videos-by-sumi-singh/>

**Adrian: Do you indulge from time to time?**

Sumi: All the time! Every single day I eat the things I love. And you should too! The programs I create for my clients allows them to eat the things they love to eat. There are certainly days where I

know I've indulged a little too much, and it's not a big deal. I encourage my clients to not look at those things as slip-ups. If you start to view food as "good" or "bad" it sets people up for failure. I want my clients to succeed, and feel like they CAN do this!

**Adrian: What one exercise, if you had to choose, do you find is the most effective for clients and why?**

Sumi: There's no single exercise. It has to be one that the client enjoys, and keeps them coming back to the gym for more. I think the majority of my clients will tell you I love the squat because it's super effective in that it works many muscle groups, is challenging, builds leg strength, hip and knee stability, works the core and upper body (once you incorporate weights), and gets your heart pumping. But not everyone enjoys squats and I'm certainly not going to force someone to do them. The most effective exercise choice is one they enjoy progressing in.

**Adrian: What books do you suggest to your clients when they want to get in shape?**

Sumi: As with anything, a more complete education will involve reading several books and traveling the path yourself. "Get in shape" could mean anything to anyone. Does their "get in shape" goal involve building muscle or getting stronger? Do they want to be a powerlifter and get in shape by being the strongest chick in the gym? Learn about rapid fat loss? Get in shape after baby? What about eating? Do they have emotional or disordered eating? Is their mindset something that needs to get in shape too? For each of these I have some of my favorite authors and books. Feel free to contact me at [sumi@shailafitness.com](mailto:sumi@shailafitness.com) for that. Of course, once you get your library in order, it's important to put that in practice.

**Adrian: Great, I'll remind people who are interested to email you at the end of this interview. Anyway, moving on, what's the toughest part of your job?**

Sumi: Even though it's super physical work, I love working with my clients. Scheduling and rescheduling can get problematic.

**Adrian: For clients?**

Sumi: Having to look at my ugly mug and listen to me for 30 minutes and count incorrectly. I suppose some might expect faster results since we're all conditioned to expect quick fixes. But the majority of my clients know it's a process and that it takes time to achieve whatever fitness goal they have. They know that if it's worth fighting for, it will be hard work.

**Adrian: Since you've been doing this seriously now for some time what upsets you most about the fitness world?**

Sumi: I dislike that certain entities try to take advantage of the desire of many people who are at their wits' end when it comes to weight loss. We all know that magazine cover images are photoshopped, but that's not what I'm talking about. It's when companies falsify data, or use catchy phrases like "all-natural," "miraculous results," "scientifically proven," "rapid results," or something that leads the consumer to believe that a given product will help them achieve a weight loss result faster. Marketers know that many people want a quick fix, or an extra edge. A pill that will make the fat melt away to reveal six-pack abs.

The marketing folks and the people who sell the quick fix approach are making money and will continue to do so, unless consumers think critically about their purchases and not react emotionally when they're being sold to.



The slow-motion, boring, un-sexy message that I advocate is that it takes time, consistency, and dedication to achieve your goal. I have nothing to sell you.

**Adrian: Time, consistency and dedication. Speaking as a high performance coach, I couldn't agree more. I might borrow those when I give my next talk.**

Sumi: Please do.

**Adrian: If you could go back in time to your younger self, what would you tell yourself?**

Sumi: Pursue your passion now and do what makes you happy. I was probably too responsible and practical, and could have taken more risks sooner. But I was also married at the time and the breadwinner in the family. When I had my daughter I was less likely to take risks, so given my role in the household I also forgive myself for that decision. For many years, I worked hard at a job I really wasn't happy with. But when I pursued fitness full time, as opposed to part time, I was much happier. What I do makes me a stronger, better mother.

**Adrian: What's your take on supplements?**

Sumi: It seems that whenever I turn on the TV, there's some new, amazing supplement being talked about.

Supplements are the tip of the iceberg. If your overall nutrition and training is crappy, supplements are the last thing you need to be worried about.

**Adrian: Well said. Now I know there isn't any magic pill to having an amazing body, but do you have any "secrets" (so to speak) that you find help people reach their goals faster?**

Sumi: There's no magic pill, nor are there any "secrets" for rapid weight loss. For my clients who've had to shed weight super fast



for a big event, like a wedding, photoshoot, for a contest, etc, the “secret” that everyone’s well-aware of is a high protein diet. Something with a lot of lean proteins, whey protein shakes, veggies, and some essential fatty acids and electrolytes. And adding in activity via cardiovascular activity helps burn more calories. But that’s hardly a secret. Competitors will often use dehydration tactics to shed weight, but this can be tricky and dangerous. Dehydration isn’t useful if your bodyfat percentage is high and you’re aiming for a visual difference. And none of these are a long-term solution.

**Adrian: Do you have any tips on fruits and vegetables? We all know they're good for us, but which stand out for people in the US? What about people living in Asia?**

Sumi: Other than eat them and like it? (lol) I encourage people to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, at least 5 servings a day. That might mean in a sample day, include some veggies in your omelet at breakfast or berries in your oatmeal, fruit blended into your smoothie as a snack, a salad with lunch, some whole fruit along with your afternoon snack, and grilled veggies with your meal at dinner.

I think no matter where you live, try to shop local and what’s in season, and experiment with all the different choices that are offered at your store. And there’s absolutely nothing wrong with frozen fruits and vegetables. If that suits your budget better to do so, then frozen is perfectly fine.

**Adrian: How has your approach to fitness over the years changed? I mean, we often start out one way, and then tweak things as we learn new techniques.**

Sumi: It really hasn’t changed that much. I’ve always favored basic barbell training for strength. Fads come and go, and it’s

good to keep an open mind and see what you can learn from passing trends. For instance, when I started off it was mainly cable stacks, squat racks, and free weights, but now we have sandbags, battling ropes, TRX suspension systems, chains and prowlers, and much fancier cable stacks. But the bottom line is pretty much the same, push, pull, lift, and work the body against an object of resistance.

As I've gotten older, and especially as I've gotten busier with clients and become a single mother, the demands on my own training schedule have changed. In my 20's I was able to get away with longer workouts, and that's not the case anymore. My workouts are shorter now, but harder. I encourage busy moms and working professionals to schedule in their workouts so they don't neglect this critical aspect of self-care. I used to split my routines up where I was training different body parts on different days, but now I just split up my own training upper and lower, 2/week and that allows me to recover better too.

My view on food intake is also pretty old school. It's boring as hell to say moderation is best, but that's what works. If people don't get to eat what they like to eat and suits their schedule, or if you force them to exclude food groups or foods they love there's no way they are going to stick with that. As with training, it's interesting to see the diet fads come and go. Gluten-free, Paleo, low-carb, low-fat, high protein, sugar-busters, etc. I try to glean what I can from them all and see what's beneficial, and what can serve my client best. It's also my job to keep an eye on what's trending.

Ultimately, if you don't incorporate what the client enjoys eating, how they cook (and who cooks!), and what serves their schedule and budget, or if you don't give them plenty of options or corner

them into a limited, rigid plan, I don't see how they'd be successful in the long run.

**Adrian: What do you feel clients struggle with most? And how do you help them overcome it?**

Sumi: Portion control. Like I said, moderation is important for long-term weight loss and maintenance, but it's the most difficult concept to grasp for most people. Most people begin with no real idea of what a proper portion of a cooked lean protein is, as restaurant portion sizes are enormous and we're conditioned to viewing those portions as normal. 1 cup of cooked pasta is probably an appropriate serving size for most adults, but you're getting 3-4 times that amount at a restaurant.

Same is true for alcohol. I can say something like, red wine in moderation is okay, and by that I may mean a 5 oz glass of wine 2-3 times a week is fine for most smaller females. But we're used to seeing our margaritas served to us in fish-bowl sized glasses, so a 5 oz pour of red wine no longer looks quite enough by comparison.

We all have to go through a process of educating ourselves on portion sizes. I encourage everyone to get a kitchen scale and measuring cups and spoons when starting off. Weighing and measuring food may appear to be an extreme approach for some people, but it truly is a solid and basic way to understand portion size that has nothing to do with fad dieting or expensive memberships in a diet club or food delivery program. Rather than a quick fix, it's a good habit to develop, whether you're trying to lose weight or not. You don't have to use it forever. After a while you'll know what a proper portion size is.

**Adrian: Good advice Sumi. I have come to believe that's one of the main reasons Japanese people are so slender in comparison to Westerners. The portions are just smaller.**

**Now, are there any websites/apps out there that you recommend to clients to help them in their journey?**

Sumi: Myfitnesspal, loseit, spark people, are a few programs that my clients like to use to track calorie intake and stay within their weight loss goals. So, they pretty much get to eat whatever they want so long as they are accounting for every bit they consume (food and drink).

[www.eatthismuch.com](http://www.eatthismuch.com) helps people create meal plans and recipes and works in the reverse direction; the client puts in their daily calorie goal and the program spits out a template and recipes for the client to follow.

Youtube is full of free content for do-along workout videos, if you like to exercise at home. Just be aware that there's also plenty of terrible content on youtube too. [Fitnessblender.com](http://Fitnessblender.com) is another website that allows you to follow along to workout videos where you can pick the difficulty level, length of time, and type of workout you wish to do.

**Adrian: What are the two or three questions that you are constantly being asked by clients or potential clients?**

Sumi: That depends. For an online client, they'll often ask what online training is, and what I expect from them on a weekly basis. If someone's main goal is fat loss, they may want to know what is a reasonable expectation for weekly weight loss.

I think in the gym, the most common question for a newbie is "am I doing this right?" And that is a good thing. They're still learning the exercise, wondering where they should feel it; so seeking feedback is natural thing. They'll ask if they're going low

enough in the squat, or if their back is flat enough during a barbell row, that kind of thing.

Sometimes, they'll ask help in goal setting, like "how much should I bench press?" or "what can I expect to deadlift" if they have got a goal specific to weight training rather than aesthetics.

If they are trying to get leaner, they want to know how much (or how little!) cardio they need to do to stay healthy. I have guidelines for all this stuff too.

Oh, and "are we done yet?" is one of my favorites.

**Adrian: My son hears that last one from me all the time (lol)...OK, would you mind sharing your website with us?**

Sumi: Of course, it's [www.shailafitness.com](http://www.shailafitness.com)

**Adrian: Thank you so much for taking the time out of your busy schedule to share your thoughts on fitness.**

Sumi: The pleasure was mine. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me any time.

**Adrian: I'll do that. And don't forget that if anyone is interested in finding out about what books Sumi recommends to shoot her over an email at [sumi@shailafitness.com](mailto:sumi@shailafitness.com).**

**I really appreciate you taking the time out of your schedule today to share your thoughts on fitness, Sumi. Take care.**

Sumi: You, too, Adrian.



Sumi is also a diet coach and online personal trainer and customizes lifestyle-based nutrition and training plans for her clients. You can learn more about her at [shailafitness.com](http://shailafitness.com) or email her to see if she can help you reach your fitness goals at [sumi@shailafitness.com](mailto:sumi@shailafitness.com)

You can also order a badass shailafitness T-shirt. There's sizes and variations for the girls, the guys, and even kids! You're also going to find all of Sumi's latest publications in the products area of her website, too.



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