

KYLIE GATES: WHY I VIEW AGING AS A GIFT

By Sarah Shortt

Kylie Gates has spent her 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s immersed in the fitness industry. Learn how she's evolved her training and her mindset to enjoy balance – and supreme fitness – at any age.



You've spent three decades working in the fitness industry living and breathing fitness. What do you wish you'd known when you first started?

"I find this hard to answer because I don't regret. I believe you're where you need to be at any one time in your life. Maybe I wish I'd known to just trust the process – which comes back to trusting myself, not looking for external validation.

I used to be a cardio bunny, teaching lots of aerobic classes several times a week. As a naturally high-energy person, it suited me to be in that 'up' state a lot of the time. But what I didn't like about teaching lots of cardio was the massive highs and lows. I'd feel fantastic at the time, then I'd have the comedown after class. Because I was craving carbs I was probably also eating too much sugar, which doesn't agree with me. Today, I have very little sugar in my diet.

When I started teaching BODYBALANCE™, yoga was the thing that balanced me out. Not just physically, but also mentally and emotionally, because I am a super emotional person. And that's why now I like the yin and the yang of weight training balanced out by yoga."

Now you really value diversity in your training – in particular balancing BODYPUMP and BODYBALANCE.

“I love the feeling of weight training, holding that isometric contraction and experiencing the burn in the muscles, and then the release when you come out of it. Actually, I'm addicted to it – that feeling of burning and then releasing.

BODYPUMP™ makes me feel really strong. People do BODYPUMP because they want the results. As an instructor, my job is to push people to get those results, and I'm not scared to take them into the hurt locker with me. When we come out of that state, the release feels so good! That's when I celebrate their efforts, I'm like: 'We did it!' And that's on all levels – physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. BODYPUMP makes us stronger from the inside out. However, after you've done what feels like a thousand squats, your body just wants to extend again. BODYBALANCE helps to balance and lengthen the muscles

In terms of my approach to teaching yoga, I actually see it as getting to know yourself. If you're open to it, you can learn so much about who you are as a person. I've enjoyed a real transformation through yoga. I know that whatever I learn on the mat, I take into my life. You're not just learning physical postures; you're actually changing your mindset. There's so much research about the power of yoga to heal, and for me, it all comes back to being kind to myself. It's a form of self-care and self-love. We have to have compassion for ourselves before we can have it for others.”

**Have you always been so positive – and what does it take to maintain such a good outlook?
I've always been optimistic and when I moved into my 50s I felt like I'd stepped into a new dimension of myself.**

“I turned 50 just after I moved back to New Zealand from Perth [Australia] for my job as Les Mills Creative Director. Over that time I've really got to know who I am. For me that means not being influenced by others, just being really comfortable in my own skin. I have fewer needs now – for material things or lots of people in my life. I have a close inner circle that I enjoy spending time with, but I understand myself and what my needs now are in a way that I just didn't when I was younger.

Coming from a background in dance taught me about consistency and discipline, amazing skills to have. On the flipside, I also became very critical of myself at times, which we know can have demotivating and limiting effects on us. Probably that's what I'd wish I'd known in my 20s – that I should just be happy with my body and where I was in my life. I wanted to grow up too fast. Age has helped me get perspective on that. Sometimes I watch myself on a LES MILLS video and think, 'OMG, that's a bit cringeworthy'. But then I can laugh because, you know, it was just what happened in the moment – so it was actually perfect.

I think one of the great things about aging is that you don't have to stay as you are. Sometimes people think, this is my lot. This is who I am, you know? Like, this is it. But it's an ongoing evolution. I'm not the same person now as I was when I was 40, and in another 10 years I'll be different again. That's what I love about getting older – you go through these transformations of yourself where you get all this growth and learning. And then of course you have the fallow periods where you can just sit back and soak it all in.

The other thing to remember is that aging is a gift. I mean, not everyone gets the gift of getting older, right? I try to look at the positives. So I don't just go, 'Oh yeah I've got more wrinkles', but rather I reflect on my life and feel really proud. I had a health scare last year, which made me look back on my life, and actually, I wouldn't change a thing. It made me realize, I've had a freaking awesome life with plenty to feel grateful for.”

The fitness world can be competitive, with lots of younger, fitter Instructors coming onto the scene. How do you cope with that?

“At my core, I’m very much about work ethic. Walking the walk, talking the talk and doing the work has got me to where I am today. I’m good at what I do because I do the preparation, and that’s why I can stand with authenticity in my space.

It’s around switching your mindset to focus on what you bring, rather than on what you lack. I’ve done the years, I’ve done the work... the time. I know what I bring to the table. I’ve got more self-belief now than I’ve ever had. There will come a day when I can’t physically teach anymore, so whilst I can, why would I stop?”

I know you're a big proponent of finding balance in life. Could you share your journey with this side of things?

“I’ve become very intentional over the last few years with looking after my spiritual side, which was a big change for me. I’ve done a lot of work on myself to ensure my life is really balanced across all levels – the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.

The physical side is always good because I teach my group fitness classes, but even that can get out of balance if you’re doing too much of it and just giving, giving, giving, not actually bringing it back to yourself. For many years I had this mindset that I always need to be saying yes to things. But it wasn’t sustainable as that’s where the massive highs and lows came from.

I’d spent my life always putting work first. However, I began to realize that if I always prioritized work, then something else was going to suffer. I asked myself if I continue to do this, how will this impact my relationships with my friends, family, husband... what about my relationship with myself? Because that’s got to be number one – my relationship with myself.

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve realized that life is about wholeness. My husband, Grant, has helped me to lessen the pressure I put on myself to always be going at 100 percent. He always tells me: you can't be ‘on’ all the time. To me, that’s a real-life lesson because if you can master that you’ll be a whole lot better off. I think aging is about health, longevity and sustainability. And not regretting a thing.”

Kylie Gates is Les Mills Creative Director and a regular presenter on [BODYPUMP](#) and [BODYBALANCE](#) releases. She is also the lead trainer for the [LES MILLS+ Stronger Challenge](#). You can [try Kylie's favorite workouts here](#).

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