

# F45 Challenge review: how I lost 7% body fat in 8 weeks And fell in love with exercise



COSMOPOLITAN/JAMES PURVIS

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If you keep one eye on the latest fitness crazes sweeping the nation then there's a chance you will have heard about [F45](#).

First popular in Australia, 'Functional 45' promises its members chiselled abs in just two months of training. And due to the success stories the training regime delivered there, the F45 epidemic spread like wildfire, all the way over to our fine shores.

Using circuit and HIIT techniques, the trainers at F45 gyms run a range of cardio and strength-and-resistance-based classes (all 45-minutes-long) to burn fat, tone and build muscle.

A few times a year, members can take part in the F45 Challenge, which consists of attending as many F45 classes you can fit into a week, alongside a strict diet plan.

As a self-proclaimed 'gym shy' bunny, who last stepped foot in one to reach the spa on the other side about a year ago, I was intrigued to see what kind of transformation I could achieve in just eight weeks and so signed up for the challenge.

About me

I've always been fairly happy with my body; I'm not overweight, I eat well, but I have always controlled how I look with my diet, never with exercise. Before the challenge I was a size 10, but wanted to tone up and drastically improve my fitness levels.

With my wedding approaching in June, I wanted to do something that would set me up to maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle, rather than a crash diet or craze.

### **So what exactly is the F45 Challenge?**

Alongside the F45 classes, participants can download the Challenge app which outlines all the meals for the week, along with a handy shopping list, so you can prepare for the week ahead.

During the eight weeks, alcohol is to be avoided completely, and every morning should start with a cup of hot water and lemon. The diet changes as the weeks go on, from an alkaline diet in the first two-weeks to detox the body, to a four-week high protein plan, and two weeks eating high fat, low carb meals at the end.

Facing eight weeks of no alcohol, drastically cutting down on calories and upping my physical activity from zero workouts a week to three-four - I was afraid, very afraid.

Thankfully, the F45 training studio in Tottenham Court Road is a friendly, inviting place where newbies are brought into the fold with open arms. That is largely down to the two owners, Amy and Mike, who are there every day to lead classes, offer support and generally keep you motivated and on track.

There's also a Facebook group for everyone at the studio to share pics of their latest meal plan successes (or failures) and to arrange extra curricular social activities such as Sunday runs and brunch clubs.

#### Pre-Challenge scan

Before the Challenge began, Amy and Mike asked me to hop onto their Body Scanner to see what the state of my health was like. I also had to take some before pictures in my pants. Here's what that all looked like:

**Weight:** 61.6kg

**Body Fat:** 16.9kg / 27.4%

**Muscle Mass:** 42.5kg

**Body Water:** 53.7%

**Visceral Fat Rating:** 2



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### **The Challenge: week one and two**

Phase one, 'Spring Training', was all about removing water retention, detoxing the body and preparing it to burn as much fat as possible. Alcohol is a no-no (for the entirety of the Challenge) and caffeine and sugar are kicked to the curb, too. The majority of the food on the meal plan is lean meat like turkey and chicken, eggs, fish and LOTS of greens.

## Here is a sample menu:

**Breakfast:** Warm Paleo turkey salad with hard boiled eggs

**Snack:** Mixed nuts and seeds

**Lunch:** Mustard salmon with garden greens

**Snack:** Protein shake

**Dinner:** Grilled fish with veggie mash.



My breakfast on day one of the challenge: turkey and kale salad with hard-boiled eggs. Yum.

## How I got on

Using the app, I arranged an online delivery of everything I would need that week. The bill came to £70, which is a lot more than I'm used to spending on groceries! I had to remind myself that this would be all my meals for every day of the week - no nipping to Pret for a lunchtime sandwich - and so was worth the money, but it was still hard to spend.

This was without doubt the hardest week I had on the challenge; falling asleep at my desk, headaches, hunger pains, the works. I managed three of the classes a week and it was so new for my body to be forced into exerting itself, I *really* felt it. It hurt to lift my arms up and wash my face in the shower, that's how bad it was.

However, I weirdly enjoyed some kind of distraction from my hunger, and by the end of week two I already felt a difference in my energy levels. The cardio classes are definitely a killer - you sweat buckets during the 45 minutes inside the studio - but doing as many of these in a week as possible will set you up for the best fat-burning results.

This was, however, the only week that I strictly followed the meal plan to a T.

The reasons for this were varied:

1. I didn't really have the time to spend prepping three meals a day plus snacks, especially on nights when I was also attending an F45 class.
2. I couldn't eat some of the meals at the office - have you ever tried microwaving fish in an office full of people? It doesn't go down well.
3. I didn't like all the meals. I'm not big into meat so found myself sometimes switching from the main meal plan to the veggie option.
4. I couldn't give up booze.

Over the course of the rest of the challenge, I tried to follow the principles of each phase of the meal plan without copying it directly, and cut out all processed foods, snacks, cakes etc. It was hard going (especially for a Lifestyle Editor in the lead-up to Christmas) but I found the plan much easier to navigate when I was in charge of my meals.

### **The Challenge: week three and four**

Weeks three to six are called 'Regular Season' and concentrate on building muscle mass through a high-protein diet which aids healthy fat loss and muscle repair. Red meat is re-introduced at this stage and meal plans include cheese and even low-carb bread!

### **Here is a sample menu:**

**Breakfast:** Banana and peanut butter on toast

**Snack:** Lemon and coconut ball

**Lunch:** Baked ricotta and chicken salad

**Snack:** Protein shake

**Dinner:** Lamb and Halloumi with vegetables

### **How I got on**

I only lasted two weeks off the sauce. While I was easily ignoring trays of brownies and bowls of chocolate, a glass of wine was harder to say no to. I decided to let alcohol be my treat on the weekends for making it through a week of classes and honestly, this was the only way I was going to do the challenge semi-successfully. I didn't allow myself to feel guilty about it.

With the rest of the meal plan, I was struggling. I love fruit and vegetables - and was missing the huge portions I used to enjoy. I also found the protein intake too high for me. Amy and Mike are all about doing what works for you, it has to be sustainable, so after a quick chat with them, I readdressed the balance a bit in favour of veg and slowly tried to build up the protein.





In terms of training, while still struggling to make it through a cardio class without collapsing on the floor at the end, I was finally finding a bit of form with strength and resistance. I'd never lifted weights before this challenge, so tips from the friendly trainers in the studio made this process easier. I also had noticed that I wasn't always giving up before the buzzer told me to - a definite improvement on the first two weeks.

### **Half-way scan**

At the start of week five I hopped on the body scanner again to see how I was progressing. These were the results:

**Weight:** 61.3kg (down 0.3kg)

**Body Fat:** 14.8kg / 24.1% (down 3.3%)

**Muscle Mass:** 44.2kg (up 1.7kg)

**Body Water:** 56.1% (up 2.4%)

**Visceral Fat Rating:** 2 (same)

While my muscle mass was up and my body fat percentage was down, I wasn't really losing any weight. Not the end of the world, Mike assured me, but perhaps I could tweak my calorie intake a little if I wanted to see a change on the scales.

### **The Challenge: week five and six**

After the halfway scan, I re-focused; I felt in the zone when it came to the diet plan and I even upped my class attendance from three a week to four. I actually found myself looking forward to the gym at the end of the day - and wondering what had happened to me! - and felt a real difference in my shape. My clothes became more comfortable and I was way less bloated by the end of the day. Having just one slightly off-plan meal or a lot of alcohol really showed, so I felt motivated to staying on track, despite an increasing amount of social activity.

This was probably the best I felt in the whole challenge.

### **The Challenge: week seven and eight**

Enter phase three, 'World Series', a high fat, low carb nutrition plan to help strip remaining body fat. Also enter: Christmas.

Despite being so close to the finish line, I kinda let it go a bit in the final two weeks. While I still did everything I could to avoid naughty snacks and meals, the odd event did crop up where it wasn't always possible. And those weekend drinks? They became weekday drinks, too.

My training was back down to three classes a week due to more social activities and I even cancelled out of a class because I was too hungover. Not ideal.

### **Post-Challenge Scan**

When it came time to step on the scales for my end of challenge weigh in, I was not expecting great results. Which is why I nearly cried with relief when I saw my final scan:

**Weight:** 58.8kg (down 2.8kg)

**Body Fat:** 12.1kg / 20.6% (down 6.8%)

**Muscle Mass:** 44.3kg (up 1.8kg)

**Body Water:** 58.6% (up 4.9%)

**Visceral Fat Rating:** 1 (down 1)







### **My verdict on the F45 Challenge**

The Challenge is pricey - £235 per month - but if you're stuck in a no-exercise rut and need something to drag you out and into a gym four times a week then F45 could be just the thing. There's something weirdly addictive about the classes - maybe because they are so fast-paced they're over before you know it - and you can't deny they deliver results.

I didn't follow the meal plan that strictly, and still dropped nearly 7% in body fat and lost around 6lbs. Imagine what you could do if you actually quit booze and followed all the meal prep?

My 'transformation' pictures make me so proud of myself every time I look at them. No, I don't have ripped abs, and I'm hardly ready to run a marathon but I've trimmed down, toned and vastly improved my fitness levels to a point where I feel stronger and healthier.



Wearing Freya Active sports bra and Sweaty Betty leggings

Aside from the visual results; I feel happier, I feel more energised and I feel the most confident with my body that I ever have. Post-Christmas and two weeks away from my F45 family, I got the first cold I've had in nine weeks and I'm missing my daily trip to the gym.

Of course, there are some annoying elements of the challenge. The meal plans aren't very varied, which makes prepping easier but means you often eat the same thing for dinner three nights in a row. The classes are so popular it can be difficult to book onto the time that suits you. And, you may find all that meal prep and trips to the gym drastically effects your ability to have any kind of social life.

**BUT** the F45 trainers are there to help you make the Challenge work for your life, and as long as you're honest with them, they can help you along the way.

You will only get out of the Challenge what you put in and if I could go back I would definitely try harder in the last two weeks. That being said, if the workouts and meal plans aren't realistic then it's never going to work, so don't try to do everything to the letter because you will be more likely to buckle.

The next F45 Challenge starts on 29th January, find out all the info you need to get started right here.

***Here are a few things I wish I'd known before I started:***

- *The no booze thing really will effect your results drastically. Choose a time of year to do the challenge when you will be most likely to stay off the sauce, i.e. not just before Christmas.*
- *You can buy loads of veg frozen which is SO much easier (and cheaper) then trekking to the shop every three days to replenish your spinach stocks.*

*- The meal plans can be expensive - all that meat and fish - so alternate between the veggie plan every now and then for a cheaper shopping list.*

*- Ignore the scales. Weight is but a number. It's how you feel in yourself and in your clothes that is the real measure of progress.*