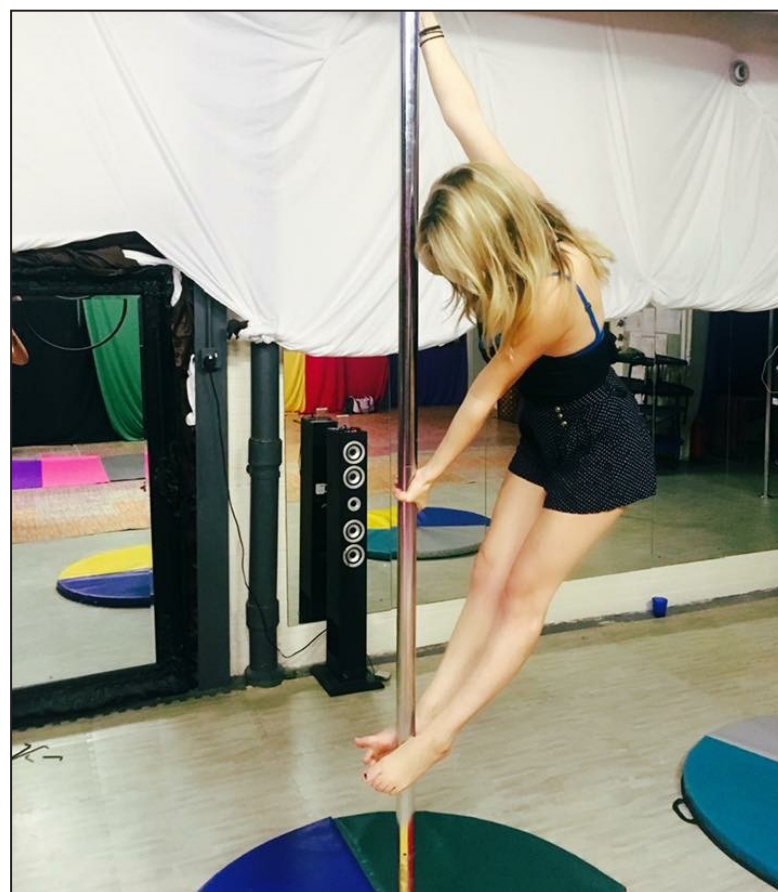




My flexibility and confidence has improved



Some of the moves are simple but great weight-bearing exercise

Pole position for fitness

DRAGGING my weary self to the gym five evenings a week following a full day in the office is not something I signed up for when pining for a healthier body.

Television and magazines are fit to burst with flawless images of the 'perfect' figure, carefully airbrushed to erase the lumps and bumps that most of us see to be normal.

I must admit, feeling self-conscious about being out of breath, gangly and generally unfit in public is one of the things that fills me with dread every time I head to the gym.

After a bit of research I decided to try out pole-fitness. Despite the unfortunate stigma surrounding the sport or 'that's not a sport' as one of my friends told me, this is one of the only forms of exercise that has ever stuck with me.

But surely making a public display of myself was exactly what I was trying to avoid you could argue? Yes, this is the case, and as I very gingerly crossed the threshold on the first day I was made to feel, along with the other mums, students and workaholics in the class, comfortable and at home.

I regularly started attending Body Couture Wellbeing Centre in Congleton, in the 6pm Tuesday class for beginners and parents with young children who can amuse themselves in the designated play area.

Starting with a few simple moves in the first couple of weeks, my teacher, Claire, helped me to move on to more difficult positions as my strength and balance improved.

I found I could turn up after a stressful day, with my hair standing on end and my nails bitten down to the bone, but the minute I felt my

Exercise regime improves strength and balance and takes away the stress of a busy life



The classes promote positive body image

progress on the pole, it all slipped away.

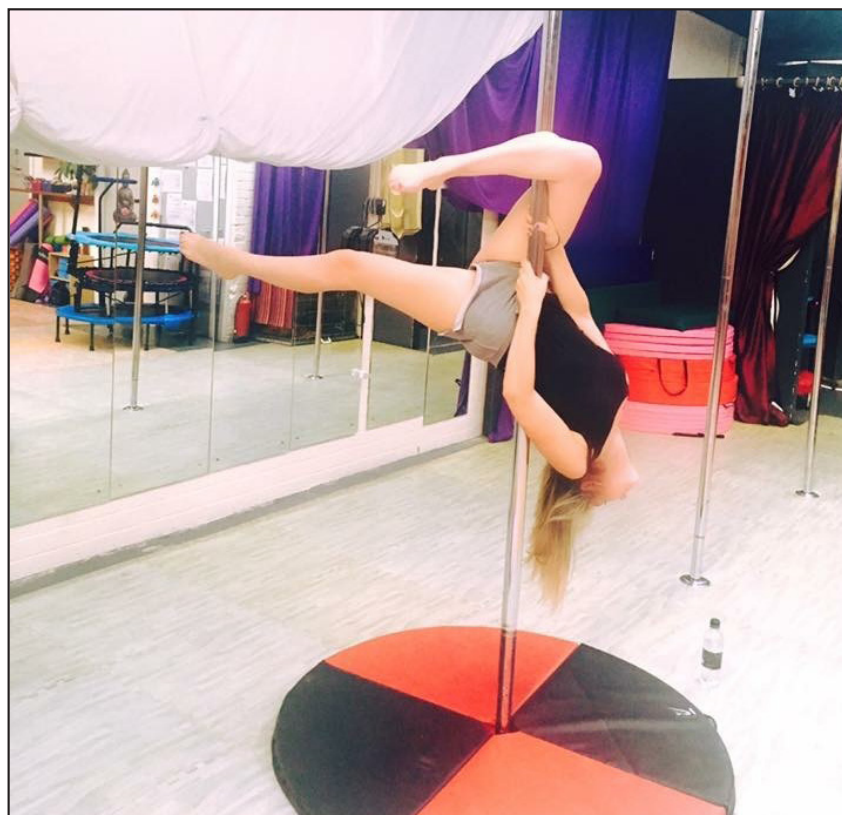
I spend a lot of time conversing with people, but when I go to pole-fitness I have finally learned how to focus solely on myself.

Pole-fitness draws attention to yourself in such a way that you celebrate your flaws and use them as a benchmark for improvement and all in the company of like-minded, everyday people.

I feel more aware of my own strengths and my limitations, and more in-tune with my body than when I was counting calories and grinding my knees pounding away on the treadmill.

There's no competitiveness, no resentment, just men and women helping each other improve their self-confidence in a space dedicated to just that.

Becky Hampson, owner of Body



I understand more about what I can do, and accept my limitations

Couture and pole-fitness teacher, revealed that she had got into pole-fitness after suffering from post-natal depression.

Her aim is now to build other people's confidence and provide them with the chance to get fit and strong and be aware of their own bodies and how to get the most out of them.

"This is my getaway," she said. "I get stick, people might say to me

'get a normal job', but this keeps me sane.

"It's hard to keep it running but people bring gifts to thank me for how I helped them. That's a feeling you don't get anywhere else."

For more information about classes and Body Couture, visit bodycouturepolefitness.co.uk or call Becky on 07720395723.

RACHEL HOWARTH