

ABOVE: This is Leanne's 14th year as a presenter on SABC2's Morning Live. ABOVE RIGHT: Leanne with husband Marc Menelaou and kids Gabriella and Alexandro.

I gave birth to my daughter and I put it all back on again. So I've yo-yoed and I've been through this all on live TV," she says.

Being in the celebrity world she's surrounded by people who are obsessed with their looks, but Leanne never fretted too much about her weight – even when she was creeping up towards 90kg.

"Looking back I think I should've taken my weight a little more seriously," she says. "But I'm glad I didn't get obsessed."

Then last year when she saw an acquaintance who'd lost a lot of weight and was looking amazing, something clicked. If this woman could do it, she thought, she too could find the willpower to do it.

Inspired by the success of her friend she consulted Beate Schulte-Brader of the South African BodyTalk Association, which advocates a holistic approach to dieting and uses a technique similar to kinesiology to balance the body. Even though Leanne was sceptical at first she was willing to give it a go.

"I didn't necessarily believe in the body-balancing thing, but it worked. They also see what your issues are and look at your relationship with food."

Since August, Leanne has been on an eating plan devised by Paula Galvão of the Eden Life Wellness Clinic in Sandton, which is responsible for the dieting success stories of other celebs such as actors Tumisho Masha and Robert Whitehead.

These days it's all healthy, natural eating for Leanne. This means lots of proteins, low carbs, no refined sugar, no sugary fizzy drinks and no alcohol – even at lavish celebrity events.

"It wasn't easy in the beginning," she says. "It meant being disciplined and cutting out all the stuff I used to love eating."

She credits the body balancing for changing her attitude towards food and giving her the ability to resist cravings.

"It was the most incredible journey I'd been on because it changed the way I see food and it's been that way ever since."

It also helped that her husband, businessman Marc Menelaou, and their children, Alexandro (8) and Gabriella (5), were so supportive. Leanne says she was amazed that her kids were willing to join her in eating some of her healthy meals.

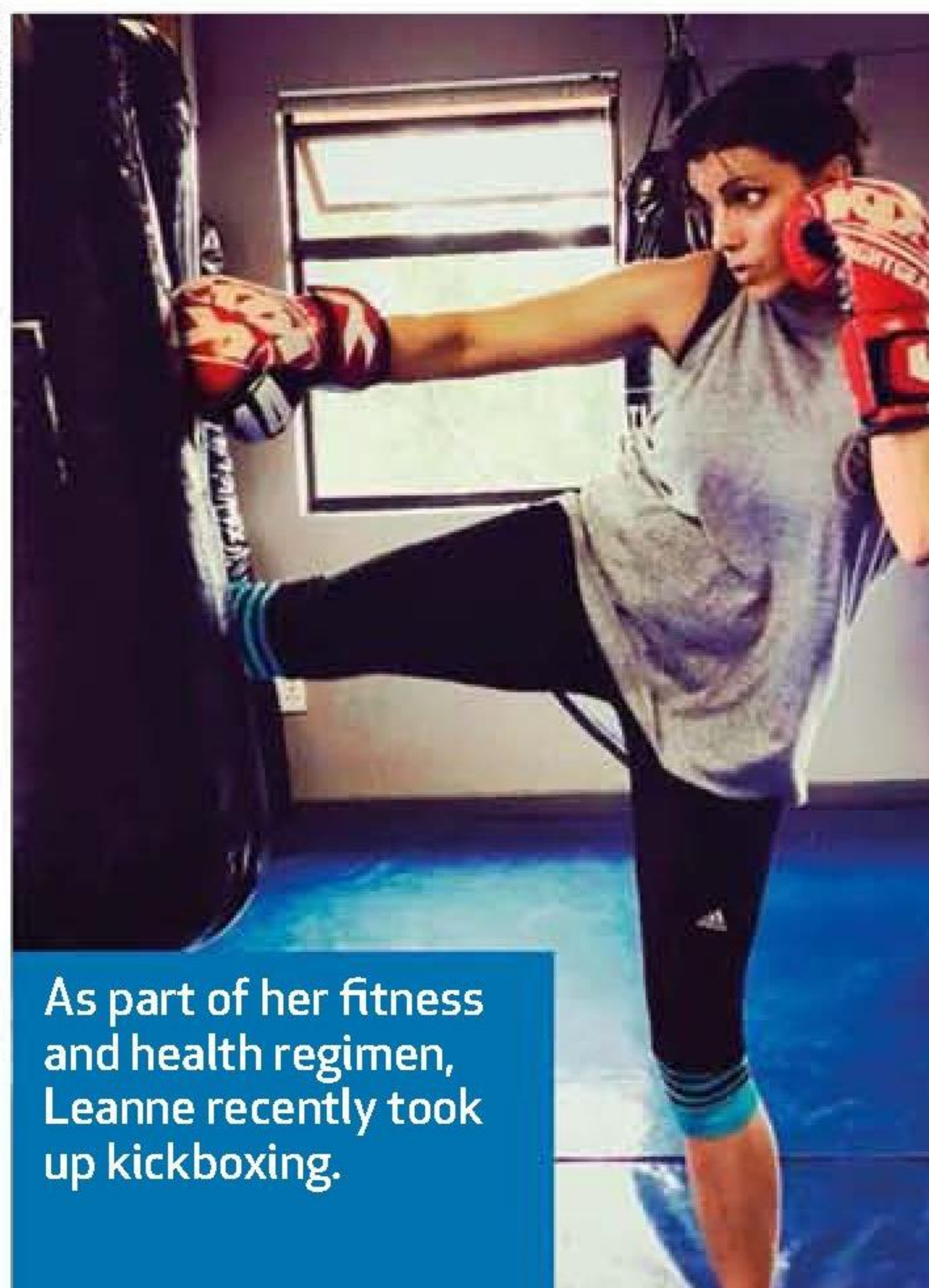
"It's not as difficult as people make it out to be. The kids want to eat what I'm eating, except when they see things like broccoli and cauliflower – then it's, 'No, no, no, I'm not eating that'," Leanne says.

Although her diet plan is rather strict, she's allowed the occasional cheat day.

"At Easter I must've had four Easter eggs, and I'm not talking about the baby ones – they were the mother of all eggs," she gloats. "I didn't care."

Leanne believes this is one of the main reasons she's stuck with the diet.

"In the past I'd sort of deprive myself of everything and then fall off the wagon. Then I'd say I can't do this anymore and I'd eat and eat and put the weight back



As part of her fitness and health regimen, Leanne recently took up kickboxing.

on. Now it's fine – I'll have a bad day but go back to eating normally the next day."

**F**OR some celebs, hitting their forties can be a depressing prospect, but Leanne has started taking mixed martial arts-style kickboxing lessons and is embracing this new phase of her life with gusto.

"I like 43, it's got a nice ring to it. Even though kids humble you and they'll ask you questions like, 'Mom, in the old days when you were young, did they have cars?'" she says, giggling.

After 14 years in the hot seat of SABC2's flagship breakfast show she remembers her first day on the job as if it were yesterday – it was nerve-racking, daunting and something she didn't really want to do because she wasn't a morning person.

She says it remains a daily challenge to get up at 4 am so she can head to the studio to get her hair and make-up done.

"I'm always late. I'm really a disaster in the morning, but switch that red light on and go live, and I'm perfect," she says. "Then suddenly I'm wide awake."

It's her focus and dedication that have made her one of the most loved and respected faces on national TV.

"The reason I've managed to last this long is because people have enjoyed me and accepted me into their lives and into their bedrooms," she says. "There isn't a more intimate space to be in."

Now she's in a phase of her career where she's looking to give back. After being appointed as an ambassador for the United Nations Refugee Agency's LuQuLuQu campaign last year, she recently spent an eye-opening week at a refugee camp in Kenya.

"It threw me over the edge," she says. "I saw things I never thought I'd see. It just makes you realise how devastating human beings can be to one another, and also how inspiring and uplifting the human spirit can be when you have nothing left except hope."

It's what she's good at – getting people to sit up and notice what's going on around them. For years it's been her dream to have her own show, and now it seems that ambition may become a reality in the future.

"It would be an in-depth show where I can find heroes in the most unassuming people," she says. "I can show South Africans a side of people they didn't know existed. That's what I'd love to do." ■