

DON'T TELL ME I CAN'T...

...go from party girl to triathlete

You're more likely to find Helen Croydon in trainers than heels...

Crossing the finish line, I threw my arms in the air, exhausted but exhilarated. I'd just competed in the World Championships and - drenched in sweat, my heart racing - I'd never felt more proud, or more shocked. Deep down, I don't think I believed I'd be able to actually finish it!

Not that long ago my life had looked very different. In my 20s, I'd spend my nights in cocktail bars with friends before stumbling home in the early hours. And exercise? I went to the gym but never pushed myself, preferring to work off my calories on the dance floor.

By my mid-30s I was feeling more and more unfulfilled. I had a good job as a journalist, but the partying was starting to take its toll. Then, aged 36, my partner and I split up, and two of my friends moved across the world.

Suddenly, I felt very alone. So, I made a pact with myself to turn my life around. I found my local running club online, the Victoria Park Harriers, and decided that's where I would start. The most I'd ever done before was a gentle jog if the sun was out, but a week later, in October 2013, I went along to the park.

Everyone was so welcoming, but the minute we started running, I knew it was a bad idea - I'd joined the group running the furthest. They weren't just doing a lap of the park, they were running miles. By the end of the 90-minute session, muscles I didn't know I had were aching.

Still, I found myself going back every week. It was brutal, but I felt stronger and faster after every run. Soon I was competing cross-country, and even finishing in the middle of the group, I felt a huge sense of pride.

My whole life was changing. I'd stopped boozing all the time, and I'd made some great new friends. That August, I entered the London Triathlon.

It was gruelling - a 1,500m swim, 40km bike ride and 10km run - but I loved it.

I kept competing, and even when I had to get picked up during a race I couldn't finish, I refused to be put off. My new goal was the World Championships. So I kept training, battling through rain and hailstones on my bike, getting blisters on my feet when I ran.

But it paid off when, in June 2015, I qualified to represent Great Britain. Half of me was elated. The other half, terrified. In September 2015, after



Run, swim, bike: Helen is now a talented triathlete



Back in the days when 'endurance' meant staying out until the early hours

'I FELT SO MUCH PRIDE'

months of rigorous training, I flew to Chicago for the competition.

I crossed the finish line in two hours 23 minutes. I couldn't believe it - me, the woman who had once loathed the outdoors and regularly knocked back martinis, had just competed in an international sporting event.

These days, I still go to running club, and I've managed to find a good balance between having fun and working hard. Aged 40, I couldn't be happier.

I'm even in a relationship. Tim is ex-military so has no problem with cold or wet weather, and loves a challenge. We spend our weekends outdoors, running and mountain biking.

I'm proof that if you want to make a change - and you set your mind to it - there's nothing you can't achieve.

*** This Girl Ran: Tales of a Party Girl Turned Triathlete, by Helen Croydon (£9.99, Summersdale) is out now.**

Yes, you can BUT REMEMBER...

- * **TAKE IT SLOW:** If you've never taken part in long-distance sports, joining a club is a good starting point.
- * **BE PREPARED:** Endurance sport with the wrong equipment can lead to injury. Investing in good footwear is important, and a sports bra is key, too.
- * **STAY SAFE:** Ensure you talk to your GP if you're planning on dramatically increasing your exercise routine.

ARE YOU PART OF GENERATION Y NOT?

It's a great time to be 40-plus. Generation Y Not are women like you who are grabbing life with both hands. Let us know how you rewrite the rules on Facebook, Twitter or e-mail. For details see page 3.

