

# ‘HOW I BUILD MY BODY’

**Steph Houghton MBE  
Footballer**

**Credentials:** Captain of the Women's England football team with more than 100 international caps; has helped Arsenal WFC and Manchester City WFC win domestic cup trebles.

**CARDIO**

‘I train five days a week, including playing matches on a Sunday. I have Mondays and Thursdays off to recover. My training sessions start at 8.30am with breakfast, followed by pre-activation exercises to warm up my muscles, a 30- to 40-minute gym session, then 90 minutes on the pitch before recovering with stretching, ice baths, massage and lunch. It's an intense regime.

‘Most of my cardio exercise is done on the pitch, where I'll run around 25-30k in a week. We all wear live GPS to help us hit performance targets. As a defender, I need to be able to accelerate quickly to keep up with the forwards, as well as have the endurance to last the full 90 minutes of a match, so my pitch sessions will often include passing drills, possession work and small-sided games to work on my ability to change direction using short, sharp movements.’

**STRENGTH**

‘We have three gym sessions a week, with the main focus on our quads and hamstrings. On Tuesdays, it's strength-based work to keep niggles at bay; Wednesdays are power-based with squats and power lifts; and on Fridays we work on speed power with jump squats using a bar and hip thrusts, doing them as fast as we can so we're feeling sharp, strong and powerful for the game on Sunday. I also go in early on Saturdays to train my upper body and core.’

**DIET**

‘It's important to have balance, but in terms of match-day preparation, I'm superstitious so I eat the same stuff. I have three meals a day, plus an afternoon snack such as a protein bar or yoghurt. What I eat depends on my training that day – Fridays are the most intense, so I'll often carb up to replace burned energy. I'm very conscious of what I eat and have my nutrition down to a fine art after all these years, but my husband tends to cook and I do the dishes.’

**SUPPORT**

‘Because I'm motivated to be the best in the world, I need to be careful not to overtrain, so I work closely with the sports scientists at Man City and England to hit the right balance. Working less at high quality is definitely more. I get off my feet and watch TV on my days off, and I have a massage at home on Wednesdays.’

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## Why try footy?

- ‘Football works so many fitness systems, from endurance, speed and power, to agility, flexibility and hand-eye co-ordination. Coming off the pitch after going the full distance is an amazing feeling.’
- ‘Mentally, it's such an enjoyable sport. There's no better feeling than being part of a team and trying to succeed in something together, celebrating the wins and knowing you've done something to help yourself and others be happy.’
- ‘There's never been more opportunities to get involved in women's football. With almost three million active females, it's the biggest women's team sport in the UK – find your local club at thefa.com. Try it once at least and give it your best shot!’

## VITAL KIT

‘We do a lot of cardio on Wattbikes at the Man City training ground to keep us fit without overloading our legs, and I have one at home to use on days when I feel a training session hasn't worked me hard enough. It's an unbelievable piece of kit and, whether you're doing a light spin or intense interval-training session, it tracks everything so you can monitor your progress.’