



Interview with Silke Pan

CLINIQUE SUISSE MONTREUX

Silke Pan: Elite sportswoman, Handbike Champion, World Record Holder and Ambassador of the Elle Spirit Open

Who is Silke Pan? Anyone with half an eye on the news in Switzerland will know that this remarkable woman is the world record holder for handbike at marathon distance. They'll also know that she suffered a terrible accident back in 2007 which caused her to become paraplegic. At the time of her fall, while rehearsing a trapeze act, Silke was a highly successful circus performer, and effectively an athlete.

From her wheelchair, Silke discovered the handbike discipline and with a lot of perseverance, became a champion. She says that having objectives in life, especially ones that are just that little bit harder to obtain than the last, are so crucial to keep moving forwards. She has also discovered that endurance sport attenuates the almost constant neuralgic pain that she endures as a result of her injury.

We caught up with Silke this week to ask her some pretty intimate questions, because we are Clinique Suisse and we want to know everything there is to know about women!

CS: We understand that your disability has affected all your internal organs, what does this actually mean?

SP: Indeed, because my injury is at the T10 and T11 vertebrae, this means all the organs in my abdomen are affected: my bladder, my intestines, my genitalia. I don't need to paint you a picture for you to understand what that means, just know that not many people think about these things when they think of paraplegia, they mostly think about how we can't walk, but actually it is so much more than that. The problem is that it is the most intimate parts of our body that are affected and therefore little spoken about. Ultimately, people are still very reserved on these matters.

CS: Osteoporosis is a problem for older women who don't do impact sports. How is it that this could affect you?

SP: Yes, osteoporosis is a serious problem for paraplegics, we lose bone density very rapidly if our bones don't bear weight. I deal with this by using a standing frame regularly, and of course I'm fortunate enough to be involved with EPFL's TWIICE project which means I can even walk with the assistance of a robotic exoskeleton.



CS: How do you help yourself to stay in good health?

SP: I have a very good regimen. I eat healthily, I'm vegetarian for ethical reasons, and I don't eat dairy or eggs because of intolerance. I eat locally and organically grown food as much as possible and I definitely keep away from processed food. I don't drink alcohol and certainly don't smoke. I regularly take probiotics. The cosmetics and other products that I use on my body are as natural as possible, I'll use essential oils when necessary.

CS: What sort of self-care do you practice?

SP: Something that is really important to me is meditation and relaxation. I absolutely have to do this every evening before going to sleep otherwise I'll have so many thoughts running around my head I won't be able to get to sleep. I aim to get at least 6 hours sleep every night. I try and manage stress because there is no doubt that overloading the mind affects the body and makes you sick.

On a more practical level, the skin on my lower body is very fragile and because of my paralysis has poor circulation. I massage my legs with a thick ointment every day to keep the skin supple and make sure I don't get any pressure sores. I can't risk injuring this part of my body as it takes so long to heal compared to my upper body.

CS: How do you think we can help women to take care of themselves better?

SP: I think we really have to look at women from a holistic point of view, women function a lot at an emotional level and thus have a very different outlook from men. They still feel so much shame, they are still being educated that way. They need to feel they can express themselves, and they need to learn more about their bodies so that they can stay in good health.

CS: What does our tagline "Tout pour la femme" mean to you?

SP: To me it means a safe place where women can speak up, are listened to, and understood. A place where the door is open and there is no judgement

CS: Thank you Silke, I think we speak the same language!

You can follow Silke on social media and her website

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