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Emirati woman gears up for her biggest investment

The 28-year-old investment manager has changed her lifestyle dramatically to prepare for her adventure in subzero temperatures.

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Image Credit: Supplied

Elham Al Qasimi has completed a five-day polar training camp in Minnesota, US, where her expedition guides simulated the type of environment and challenge she would face every day in the North Pole. She has almost double her food intake to 3,024 'good' calories a day by eating five meals a day to build muscle.

Dubai: A career in corporate finance is a far cry from trekking to the North Pole, but Elham Al Qasimi intends to bridge the gap.

The 28-year-old investment manager has changed her lifestyle dramatically to prepare for her adventure in subzero temperatures.

This April, Elham intends to embark on a journey to become the first UAE national woman to set foot in the Arctic region.

"There has been quite a drastic shift in lifestyle and, more importantly, in mental determination and focus. My targets may be different but once the decision is taken, the feeling of adrenaline pumping as you work towards a big goal keeps you going, and I get the same feeling [of pride] in reaching any of my other goals," Elham told Gulf News here.

Elham will start her trek from a Russian polar ice station and will be accompanied by two more adventurers. She will, however, ski up to 200 nautical miles unaccompanied and unassisted, and carry her supplies on a dogsled.

Setting an example

The reason for embarking on such a journey, Elham says, is to set an example and inspire women to reach their goals and realise their ambitions.

"I strongly feel that this accomplishment is one for the entire nation of the UAE rather than just a personal accomplishment."

To prepare for her expedition, Elham is presently focusing on doubling her food intake and increasing her endurance level to withstand the freezing temperatures in the North Pole.

"It is like a whole new life. It is very exhausting but fulfilling at the end of each day as you see the outcome of the hard work materialise. In my previous job I worked at least 100 hours a week, so getting even an hour of gym time was a blessing."

Elham has also had to change her diet. She has to almost double her food intake to 3,024 'good' calories a day by eating five meals a day to build muscle.

"This is not easy as there is only so much meat and green vegetables one would like to eat a day."

As an investment manager, Elham's focus was on maintaining a lean body, which meant consuming a lot of proteins and no carbohydrates. But it is different now.

"I eat a little more as I try to bulk up. I also used to drink a lot of coffee and red tea before, but have switched to mostly drinking green tea."

As most coffee drinkers will attest, this is extremely difficult to do.

"The most interesting [part] of my diet is that once in a while I get to eat whatever I want and as much as I can possibly digest.

"I love those days. And on those days I cannot help but indulge my sweet tooth. Especially because I know when I get back there will be no more weekly cheat days."

Planning: A diet to keep warm

Breakfast: Hearty oatmeal with nuts, dried fruit and brown sugar and a side dish of cheesy fried bagels.

Lunch: Snacking all day long on energy bars, chocolate, cheese and nuts, along with a thermos of hot soup for breaks.

Dinner: It might start off with hot drinks and crackers followed by cheesy garlic bread or noodle soup, and a main course of pasta and vegetables with a cream sauce. Elham Al Qasimi ends her day with a hot drink.

Training schedule

Elham recently came back from a five-day polar training camp in Minnesota, USA, where her expedition guides simulated the type of environment and challenge she will face every day in the North Pole.

She follows a training schedule progressively increasing in intensity and it varies from day to day. By April, Elham expects to be logging in up to five hours a day of training.

The training includes power/speed, endurance (to ensure she withstands eight hours of exercise a day), and functional endurance, in addition to the acclimatisation phase. She also does strength training three times a week to help her pull the dogsled over ice ridges and similar obstacles.