

# 'TIS GOOD TO BE THE queen

BY LAUREN PAIGE KENNEDY

WHEN QUEEN LATIFAH enters the room, heads turn. Even when she's dog-tired. In sweats. Hair slicked under a trucker's cap.

She has arrived at the Hollywood photo studio not-so-fresh from a red-eye flight from New York, hours after attending the funeral of her friend Heavy D, the rapper.

Still, someone cranks up the jams, and the actress, singer and occasional MC gets down to business: She flashes an infectious smile and transforms herself from Everyday Dana Owens into a perfectly coiffed, platform-heel-strutting diva shaking her booty to Jay-Z as cameras click. Her skinny jeans work every angle.

Still, both incarnations command attention. Her skin glows; she could give J. Lo a run for her money. And while the stilettos heighten the lady's already tall presence — she's 5-foot-10 without them — it's her unassailable comfort in her own skin that radiates a magnetic energy.

"I accept that I'm me," says Latifah, who co-stars with Dolly Parton in the new movie *Joyful Noise*, opening next Friday.

Latifah, 41, unwittingly shares what she believes is the secret for her success. "I am me. I don't have a choice! From the time I

And things are good for Queen Latifah: "From the time I really accepted myself ... everything got brighter."



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really accepted myself, everything got brighter. People were attracted to me for *me*."

We wanted to know more about exactly how a girl from Newark, N.J., stays Queen Latifah, the heading-turning film star, Cover Girl and future talk show host (set for 2013). Latifah, or "La" as friends call her, is the first to acknowledge how *literal* her makeover can be as she is made up. "You look in the mirror and go, 'I look *fly*!' I start walking differently and feel differently. When I put my heels on, it turns on."

Always a "plus-size" — a term she hates — Latifah didn't begin her career with the label of being model-beautiful. "There were no cover girls who looked like me when I was growing up, other than on *Essence* magazine," she muses. Exploding onto the hip-hop scene before she turned 20, she was celebrated first for her rhymes, not her curves. Then her acting career took off, with TV hits such as *Living Single* and an Oscar nomination for playing Matron Mama Morton in *Chicago*.

Suddenly her fuller figure and photogenic face were redefining American beauty. Along the way, she picked up tips from stylists, fashionistas and fitness gurus on how to maximize her assets.

Her daily routine? Latifah says she usually starts around 8 a.m. when roused out of bed by her two beloved Weimaraner dogs.

"The first thing [I do] is to get on the treadmill for a mile," says Latifah, who has used a personal trainer for years. "Then it could be circuit training. Sometimes we'll walk 3 or 4 miles outside,

Latifah stars with Dolly Parton in the new comedy movie *Joyful Noise*.

come in and do strength training. Sometimes it's just yoga. Yoga's great for calming your mind, loosening up, stretching and strengthening. And allowing you to feel pain and move through it. All things you need in life."

Her weight has famously fluctuated over the years — and she's OK with that. The former Jenny Craig spokeswoman says: "I know what to eat and what not to eat. But I just like doing what I want, you know? I'm rebellious like that!" (Her fave foible: mac and cheese.)

She lets out her big laugh, then adds her formula for having a healthy body: "It's really simple: You do cardio. You eat smaller portions. You drink a lot of water. You try not to eat three hours before you go to bed.

"And you work out a lot. I'm not a dieter. I'm also not trying to be a size 2."

It's one reason she launched her own line of clothes of knitwear

up to size 24. Says Latifah: "I don't care if you're a slimmer girl or a bigger girl. You have to do what works perfectly for you."

For Latifah, that also meant breast reduction surgery in 2003 to alleviate back pain. Still, she's not a fan of plastic surgery. "What do you need to Botox your face for at age 25? *Really*? If you're doing that at 25, what are you going to do at 50?"

In her new movie, *Joyful Noise*, Latifah's character even takes some hilarious potshots on the subject of plastic surgery toward

co-star Parton, who has never been shy about flaunting nips and tucks. "I was fine with it," Parton laughs. "I'm a good sport!"

Latifah, who calls Parton "a hero of mine," says the country music singer/songwriter "made me some nice chicken and dumplings. C'mon, how can I deny myself homemade chicken and dumplings? She makes 'em so good!"

"I'm not trying to be a size 2."



## Queenly tips for living the good life

**Break bad habits:** Latifah started smoking at 14 and has "fought against it my whole life." She has quit "several times," sometimes for years, only to light up again. Her mantra? "Be honest. Be aware. And absolutely try again. Don't beat yourself up."

**Attract love:** "You have to not seek it. You have to *be* it. Love yourself first. It will come to you naturally. You don't have to fake it. You don't have to be needy. Be open. And don't judge the package it comes in."

**Do what you love:** "If you're passionate about it and it's realistic, then you have to do it. Why wait? As long you as you're breathing, you've got a chance to do something different."

**Embrace your age:** Getting older is "a blessing. It means you're still alive."

**Be realistic:** "You gotta be honest with yourself, No. 1. If you like to eat sweets at night, then you've got to prepare for it. You have to plan. Instead of eating the whole thing, just eat *some* of it."

**Give back:** "So many people need help. Sponsor a child instead of giving a gift, or donate to an organization on someone's behalf. Or take your [old] clothes to the Goodwill or Salvation Army. When you give, you can't imagine how it's going to come back to you. It always does." — L. P. K.