

THOUGHT CRAFT

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Not another new diet

Every week, in some magazine or the other, there are enthusiastic pieces on some new miracle diet promising to transform us into our dream figures in a matter of weeks, or days even! There are dramatic pictures of 'before and after' and promises of a gorgeous new shape if we eat only bananas, or green peas, or whatever the latest studies claim will have said magical results.

In our never-ending quest for the body that fashion magazines tell us we should have, both men and women try all sorts of things — sugar-free, carb-free, meat-free; the list goes on. What's truly frustrating is the moment you turn the page, colourful pictures of delectable desserts adorn the article right after the pages of advice on how to lose unwanted ounces!

I do not want to turn this into a tale of gloom and doom, but as most people already know, unplanned dieting can be harmful for the human body. From what I have observed, carb-free diets can lead to digestive problems and clogged systems which then need to be cleared with laxatives.

Someone who tried the Atkins diet said it was effective, but hard. So hard in fact, that at one stage, when she saw an orange, her desire to eat it was so overwhelming that she had to leave the room. As she spoke, I could almost picture the glowing orange floating in the air above me.

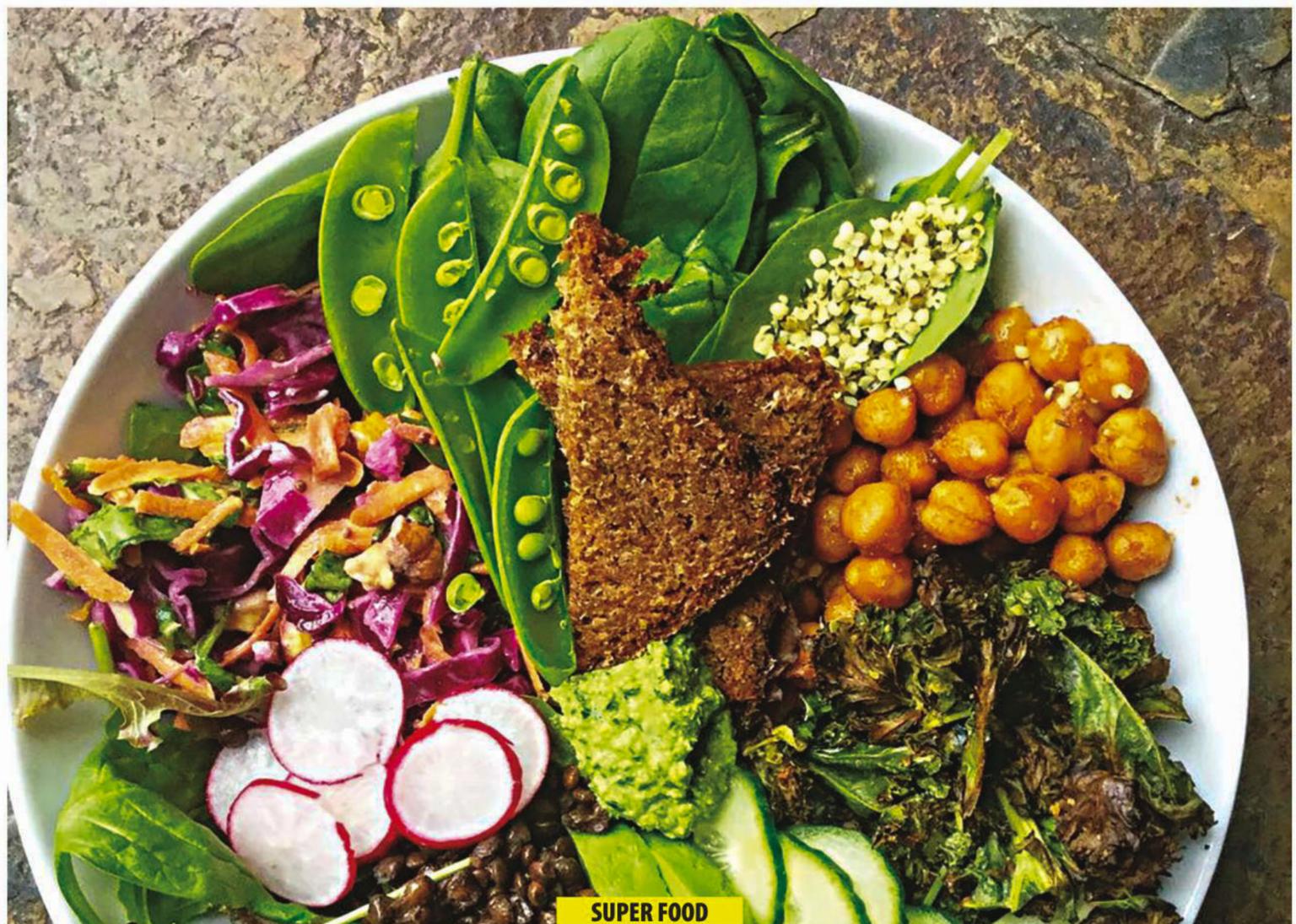
Every day we are offered, or are tempted by, bowls of nuts or sweets, plates of sandwiches, trays of pastries, and a myriad other gastronomic delights. There is a certain indescribable joy in a big dish of rum raisin ice cream while watching a movie, or paratha and aloo bhaji (stir fry potatoes) on a Friday morning, or bakarkhani and Dhaka cheese with guava jelly at tea time.

Treats make life worth living, and we all feel we deserve to eat the things we love because we work hard, or we are sad, or happy, or just want to eat a big fat beef burger.

In the end, it is all a matter of choice and balance. If we want a reasonable shape, good knees, and a healthy heart after the age of forty, we have to accept the fact that we must exercise and eat sensibly most of the time. Every week though, it is good, or in fact vital, to indulge. There's more to life than sugar-free, fat-free, joy-free eating!

The human body is a miraculous, magnificent machine and it can take us up to the age of ninety if we treat it with respect, and it will absorb our sinful little desserts and junk food as long as we do not flood our engines with too much sugar or grease.

People like to see smiling, contented faces around them. There is nothing sadder than having dinner with glum, gaunt-faced, hollow-eyed folk and to hear their mournful cries of "No Carbs!"



Salad leaves

The best thing about salad leaves or lettuce, is that they are a universal favourite from children to the elderly of the family. And for some children, it is the only way to make them eat greens sans the coercion.

Not only is this a super crunchy and juicy meal, but it is also packed with minerals and nutrients that our bodies need.

NUTRIENT FACTS

Lettuce leaves contain lots of moisture. Other than that it also contains protein, carbohydrates, fats, sugars and a substantial quantity of dietary fibres. Minerals include iron, phosphorous, calcium, magnesium, potassium, zinc and sodium.

Vitamins found in lettuce leaves are thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, foliates vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin B-6, and vitamin K.

Healthy Bowels

Lettuce contain ample amounts of dietary fibre, which help clean the insides of our intestines and speed up the digestion process. Not to mention prevents constipation and bowel related diseases as well.

Consuming dietary fibre makes us feel full, helping us to eat less, hence losing weight in a healthy manner.

Consuming raw salads gives our body a boost of antioxidants that helps keep it safe from free radicals.

Healthier Neuron Cells

Lettuce leaf extracts poses the ability to control neuron cell deaths, which can even contribute to memory loss. This also helps protect our body from

neurodegenerative diseases.

Cuts on cholesterol

Consuming green leaves can protect our heart and the entire cardiovascular system from disease simply by regulating the cholesterol count in our bodies, a process known as lipid peroxidation which is a form of degenerating lipids.

Better sleep

Lettuce has been used in Unani medicine, a form of ancient Greek medicine, as a sleep inducer for many years now. This is because of a chemical found in these leaves, which can decrease the heart rate and can block excitatory signal processes in the muscular and neural tissues. All these help one fall asleep faster, without any side effects. One of the best things about salads is the infinite amount of recipes you could create with them, and play around for fun colourful meals that are enjoyed by children and adults alike.

GRILLED LETTUCE

Ingredients

Fresh and firm lettuce
3 tbsp olive oil
Salt
Black pepper
One medium lemon, cut in half
Fresh parmesan cheese

Method

Make sure grates of grill are clean and turn to medium high. Brush lettuce halves liberally with 1½ tablespoons olive oil, cut side and back side. Then sprinkle each half with some salt. Grill for 3 minutes, cut side down, pressing with your tongs to make sure the lettuce gets a good sear. Flip and grill for one or 2 more minutes. Remove from grill.

Sprinkle with more salt and pepper, drizzle with remaining olive oil. Squeeze fresh lemon juice over each half. Top with a tablespoon of parmesan on each half.

CASHEW CHICKEN LETTUCE CUPS

Ingredients

1 tbsp salted butter
1 tsp olive oil
2 pounds chicken breast, cut into 1-inch pieces
2 tsp minced garlic
¾ cup chicken stock
¼ cup soy sauce
1½ tbsp vinegar
2 tbsp corn starch
Salt and pepper, to taste
¾ cup unsalted cashews
Lettuce cups or butter lettuce
Green onions, for serving (optional)

Method

Heat the butter and the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Once the butter has melted, add in a single layer of chicken. Add salt and pepper to chicken. Allow to cook for 3-minutes or until brown and then flip onto the other side. Let it cook for an additional 3-minutes, or until golden brown. Turn the heat to low and then stir in the garlic and cook. While the chicken is cooking, whisk together the chicken stock, soy sauce, vinegar, and corn starch in a small bowl. Stir into the skillet and cook with chicken over low heat, until the sauce has thickened. Stir in cashews. Serve in lettuce cups or over rice if preferred. Top with chopped green onions if desired.

By Anisha Hassan

Recipes and photo: collected