



Helen is offering all *Crumbs* readers 20% off their first appointment if booked in January

simple methods for checking if this is the right way to proceed.

### **For those of us who like to eat rich foods and, perhaps, drink a bit too much, what advice do you have?**

Some are lucky and get away with eating rich foods without problems. Unfortunately, this ability tends to lessen with age, and this way of eating tends to catch up with people. One plea: don't get into the habit of popping antacids on a regular basis. You can run into a lot of health problems by doing this in later life.

With alcohol, again it's good to focus on the quality rather than the quantity. Red wine *does* bring some health benefits, but it's not exactly a health food! Worst case scenario: if you drink on a daily basis, try to give yourself at least two consecutive alcohol-free days a week – ideally more, of course. Drinking a glass of water in between each alcoholic drink can counteract the dehydrating effects of alcohol.

### **What's your advice for those of us who want to get healthy in January?**

It's an incredibly busy time of year for me! If you're one of the lucky ones, the additional weight gained during the festivities should drop off pretty quickly when you start eating more healthily and

exercising more. It's much easier to lose recently gained weight, so it's good to try and tackle things sooner rather than later if you've put on weight over Christmas. Detox diets, restricting carbohydrates and the 5:2 fasting diet – recently featured on the *Horizon* TV programme; do a Google search – can be effective, but ideally they need to be individually tailored by a nutritional therapist, especially if people have health problems. I'm therefore offering all *Crumbs* readers 20% off appointments booked in January!

### **Tell us about Soul Food Company. What is your approach to nutrition?**

First and foremost – and as you will have probably already grasped – I believe food and cooking for family and friends to be one of life's soul pleasures. If a person's health problem warrants a slightly stricter regime, I make sure I work with people to ensure that this is achievable – and not too punishing to apply! Where possible, I prefer people to get the nutrients they need from their food.

A surprising number of people, however, are deficient in certain vitamins and minerals, so therapeutic supplementation can be helpful in the short term. Many people waste their money by taking poor quality supplements, or the wrong kind. Functional tests – such as gastric function, metabolic and hormone profiles – can be useful to help confirm deficiencies, imbalances and to target supplement recommendations. A metabolic imbalance can create difficulty in losing weight.

As well as advice about nutrition I can offer advice about stress management, and also recommend other complementary health approaches that may be beneficial. Many illnesses have a stress component, and it's important to address this at the same time. If people are stressed, it's less easy to make good food choices.

### **Some people might think visiting a nutritionist could mean the end to**

### **all their guilty culinary pleasures, and so be put off, so tell us about the 80:20 approach...**

Happily, that's not the case at all! My aim is to get people healthy enough to be able to *enjoy* their culinary pleasures. Depending on a person's situation, I frequently advocate an 80:20 approach, which basically suggests you're as mindful as possible about your food choices for 80% of the week, which enables them you relax more for the other 20%.

Generally, I find that when people understand more about which foods help them thrive, they tend to make healthier choices anyway. Some people simply don't know how to cook healthy foods. In that case I recommend they seek out the support of Jane Sen, who can be found on the Secret Guru website.

Jane is an award-winning chef, and author of two healthy eating cookbooks. She aims to make eating exciting, inspirational – and fun!

### **Finally, what happens when people come to see you for a consultation?**

First I send them a fairly lengthy health questionnaire, and ask them to complete it before we meet so we can spend time talking, rather than form-filling, during our time together. My aim is to be a person's 'health detective', trying to get to the root cause of the problem rather than address the symptoms alone.

My nursing background helps me to understand the health concerns that people bring, and all my recommendations safely complement any medical care a person may be receiving; they leave with practical and affordable individualised recommendations.

The last thing I want is for people to get stressed if they need to make changes to their diets. I very much agree with a phrase used by Michael Pollan in his inspired book, *In Defence of Food*: "Worrying too much about food is not good for your health." You can probably now see why I'm such a fan of *Crumbs*! ■

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