

THE WEEK

NOVEMBER 2020

# SMART *life*

LIVE HEALTHY, STAY FIT



## Trends

### FOOD

Cured fish dishes

### FITNESS

What to do when on the move

### CORPORATE

Workplace ergonomics

## Travel

Grand cityscape of Stockholm

Benefits of hypnobirthing

One on one with Chef Suresh Pillai

**MIRA ERDA**  
**QUEEN OF SPEED**





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## Letter from the Editor

*Dear Reader,*

**Brazilian novelist Paulo Coelho once said**, “What hurts us is what heals us.” It definitely makes pain sound like a good thing. But not everything has to be painful, does it? Especially not something like childbirth. Although there are several modes of painless birthing, the one that is trending is hypnobirthing. It is known to be a positive and empowering way of natural childbirth that uses special breathing techniques, relaxation and visualisation methods and meditative practices. Read all about the how, what and why in the article ‘Birth like a boss’.

In Food Trend we have listed out some of the best raw or cured fish preparations as more and more people have started to try out some bold flavours. From the Japanese sashimi, ceviche from Peru, crudo from Spain to gravadlax from Scandinavia, we have got it all covered. Also, don't miss out on our One-Shot section with chef Suresh Pillai, who wowed judges in BBC's Masterchef 2017. We also share six of his signature recipes, including his famous fish nirvana.

In this issue, we have our cover girl Mira Erda talking about how she is breaking stereotypes in racing. After being the first Indian woman racer to compete in Formula 4 SEA Championship, Mira is now planning on upgrading to Formula 3 before the end of next year. “The green lights go off and then it is all about you, your vehicle and the track. I just get lost when I am driving. There is always this small fear that I might lose control but I have learnt to believe in my car. The car does not know the gender and so, it does not treat me like a female racer; just a racer,” she says. According to her, every driver gets nervous before a race but she has a calming mechanism that helps her relax. “I talk to my car; I keep letting out positive affirmations. I also have an idol of my goddess near the steering wheel; minutes before the race starts, I touch the idol, relax and imagine good things,” she says.

Sadly, this will be the last issue of Smart Life. Our team would like to thank our readers for all the love and support they have been showering on us for the last eight years. We have enjoyed bringing you the latest in health, wellness, fitness, entertainment and more. But then, the time has come to say goodbye.

Stay strong, stay happy and enjoy this issue of *Smart Life*.

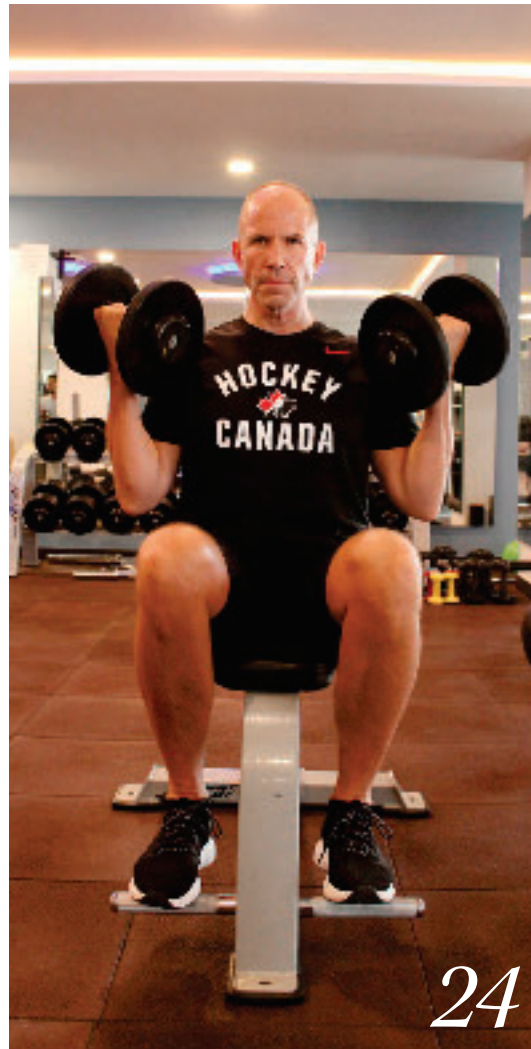


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## NOVEMBER 2020



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PHOTO HENRIK TRYGG

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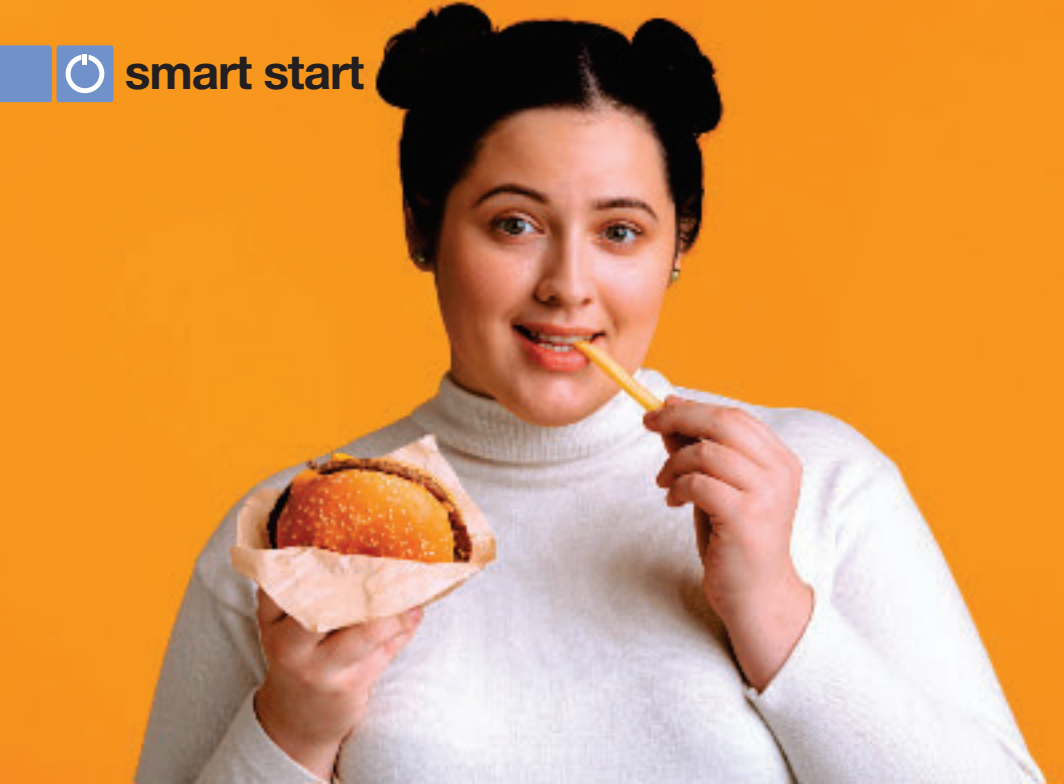
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# Bitter sweet

## Connection between type 2 diabetes and obesity

BY DR APARNA GOVIL BHASKER

**D**iabetes and obesity are chronic progressive diseases that are on the rise all over the world. India has the dubious distinction of being the diabetes capital of the world with more than 50 million people who suffer from diabetes. In the 1970s, the term 'diabesity' was coined to address the twin diseases.

In the last 30 years, India has experienced an unprecedented economic growth. There has been a surge in consumption of high-calorie convenience and junk food as well as an increasing tendency to be sedentary. Today we eat a lot more and exercise a lot less. Additionally, we are genetically prone to have a higher body fat percentage as compared to the western population.

Indians typically have greater fat deposition around their bellies (visceral fat) which makes them more prone to developing diabetes even at lower weight and body mass index.

Both obesity and type 2 diabetes are linked to insulin resistance. Type 2 diabetes results as a combination of less insulin production from the pancreas and increased insulin resistance. Individuals who have more visceral fat (fat around the belly area) tend to be more insulin resistant. With rapidly rising rates of obesity in India, it is predicted that the number of patients suffering from diabetes will rise to 87 million by the end of 2030. Diabetes further leads to micro and macro vascular complications. Longstanding diabetes

leads to side effects on eyes (retinopathy), nerves (neuropathy), kidneys (nephropathy) and leads to increased risk of heart disease eventually.

Living with diabetes is not easy. It is an existence of a lifetime of pills, jabs and dietary restrictions. Yet the disease is ruthless and continues to increase in severity and complications over a period of years. Weight management is an integral part of management of type 2 diabetes. Patients who suffer from type 2 diabetes tend to lose weight slower than those who do not have diabetes. Unfortunately, losing weight can be a frustrating exercise and most patients tend to get demotivated after multiple unsuccessful attempts.

Weight management

must be done as per the grade of obesity to be effective. While diet and lifestyle modification are the cornerstone for all weight loss programmes, they work best for patients who are over-weight (BMI= 23.5 – 27.5) or suffer from grade 1 obesity (BMI= 27.5 – 32.5). For patients who suffer from grade 2 or 3 obesity (BMI= 32.5) along with type 2 diabetes, bariatric/metabolic surgery is an effective weight loss option. Bariatric or metabolic surgery not only leads to weight loss but also results in remission of type 2 diabetes in many patients. The level of improvement in blood sugar control after bariatric or metabolic surgery depends on the duration of diabetes, age of the patient, body mass index, pancreatic function and whether the patient is on insulin. Generally, it is seen that patients with lesser duration of diabetes and good pancreatic function achieve blood sugar control within days or months of surgery. The need for intake of diabetic medications also goes down drastically after bariatric or metabolic surgery. The onset of diabetes related micro and macro vascular complications is also delayed, thus adding more healthy years to a patient's life. Bariatric surgery was included as a part of the treatment algorithm of type 2 diabetes by the American Diabetes Association (ADA) in 2009.

In conclusion, obesity and type 2 diabetes are closely related. Weight management is an important part of curbing diabetes. Bariatric or metabolic surgery has emerged as an effective treatment option for type 2 diabetes in patients suffering from grade 2 and 3 obesity.

**Bhasker is a bariatric and laparoscopic surgeon at Dr Aparna's Laparoscopy & Bariatric Surgery Centre, Mumbai.**

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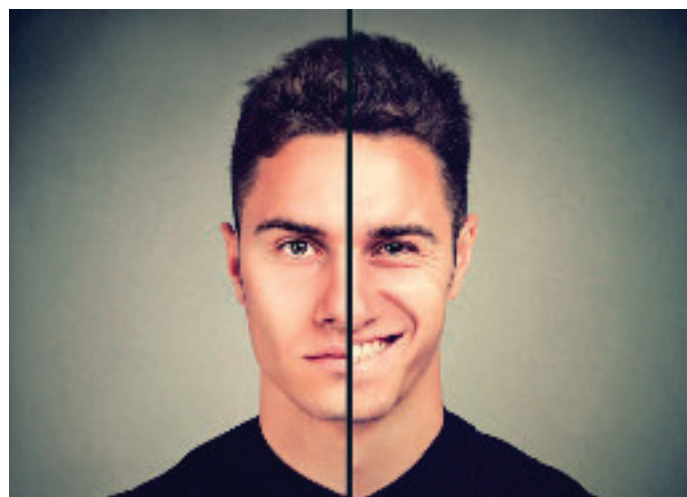
## Are you narcissistic?

Most people think narcissism is a symptom of bipolar disorder. However, that is not true; most people with bipolar disorder do not have narcissistic personality disorder. Interestingly, the two health issues share some common symptoms. When a person with bipolar disorder experiences mania, they may display some behaviours that help characterise narcissistic personality disorder. Some of the symptoms include high levels of confidence, feelings of self-importance, elevated energy levels and grandiose self-perception. Due to this overlap in symptoms, a manic episode of bipolar disorder and narcissistic personality disorder can appear similar. People with narcissistic personality disorder may seem disinterested or insensitive to the needs of others, which may be based on a fear of inadequacy. They, too, may be prone to depression, which can manifest as high self-confidence.



## Not bipolar

Cyclothymia is a mental disorder that involves numerous periods of symptoms of depression and hypomania. These symptoms, however, are not sufficient to be a major depressive episode or a hypomanic episode. Cyclothymia is similar to both bipolar I and bipolar II disorder. However, with cyclothymia, a person experiences less intense fluctuations in mood. Cyclothymia is a type of bipolar mood disorder. These conditions cause periods of depressive symptoms that alternate with periods of mania, in which a person experiences increased excitement, euphoria, or overactivity, as well as agitation. Initial or less intense symptoms of cyclothymia includes an increased sense of self-esteem, happiness, talkativeness and restlessness. More intense symptoms include a lack of energy, a loss of interest in previously enjoyable activities, feelings of worthlessness, irritability and changes in eating habits.



## Hearing voices

Psychosis involves a loss of contact with reality and can feature hallucinations and delusions. It is a symptom of schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, but there are many other causes. Psychosis affects how one thinks. The patient's senses may seem to detect things that do not exist, and they may find it difficult to determine what is real and true. People with psychosis may hear voices, see people or items that are not there and smell odours that other people cannot detect. They may also believe that they are in trouble, someone is chasing them, or they are very important when these situations are not the case. A person may not be aware that they have psychosis because the delusions feel real to them. Psychosis can be overwhelming and confusing. Sometimes, the symptoms can cause the person to harm themselves. In rare cases, they may hurt another person.

## super FOOD of the month



### Bottle gourd

- ✿ Cooked bottle gourd is excellent for digestion. It is cooling, calming and is anti-bilious (reduces bile and stops indigestion).
- ✿ Those suffering from reproductive issues such as PMS, PCOS, water retention, hypo or hyper thyroid and infertility problems are recommended to consume the vegetable and the flower of the plant.
- ✿ Bottle gourd supports the kidneys and the urinary system of our body by reducing burning sensation from high acidic urination. It also reduces the chances of urinary infection because it is alkalizing and has a diuretic effect. Consume if you have high creatine and uric acid.
- ✿ It is extremely popular for weight loss. Especially bottle gourd or juice, when taken at noon. It is known to combat excessive thirst in diabetic patients.



## Stress mess

Both men and women experience traumatic events, but women tend to develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) more often than men. Researchers don't know exactly why more women develop PTSD, but it could have something to do with the types of assaults and traumatic events women may be exposed to, such as sexual abuse as a child or adult. Men and women tend to experience different symptoms related to PTSD. This is not always the case, but the symptoms for women are more often related to avoiding anything or any situation that may trigger uncomfortable feelings or thoughts. Women can be jumpier and have more difficulty dealing with the emotions that the triggers or memories evoke. On the other hand, men often become angrier and may turn to alcohol or drugs to help them cope with their feelings.



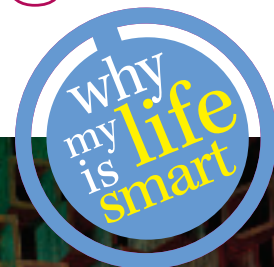
“Stop holding your truth; speak your truth. Be yourself. It is the healthiest way.”  
— TIFFANY HADDISH





# Emotions, my strength

Actor **Naina Singh** says it is important to be true to oneself



## Your journey

It has never been an easy ride for me. I always had to work hard to get whatever I achieved. People often wonder how I am always doing some or the other project. However, whatever I achieved has not happened overnight. It took a lot of hard work and, yes, there were setbacks. But I am someone who has a lot of patience and faith.

Honestly, i never even asked myself whether I want to be part of the entertainment industry or not. It was my mother who made me think about it more seriously; she was the one who pushed me for Miss India training as well. In the pageant, most girls were all groomed and decked up, and then there was me—an under-confident person who came straight from the hostel instead of a salon. My mother has always been there for me. After the pageant, when I came to Mumbai, I realised that things were not very easy. So, I went back to pursue my higher education. But later, I realised that I cannot study and I came back again. I started off my job as a casting director. I got the job when I went for an acting audition. Although the director loved my acting, the character was not the right fit. So, I was asked to work with them while auditioning at the same time.

## Memorable Times

*Splitsvilla* is still fresh in my memory because the time that I spent there with my new set of friends was truly amazing and I always feel like going back.

## Greatest Challenge

One of the greatest challenges I faced was during the reality show, *India's Next Superstar*. The competition was not with anybody but myself. I was suffering from a cervical(neck) spasm. In between the show, I was told by my doctor that I can-



not participate further and that I had to back out. But I fought and reached the finale. I was really proud of myself at that point.

## Strengths

Akash Choudhary and Anmol Choudhary. I feel like most of my friendships start with a hate relationship. When I was in *Splitsvilla* with Akash, we were not really friends but today, he is very important to me; I can't imagine my life without him. I know that I have a shoulder to cry on. And the best part is that I don't need a boyfriend because he is somebody who pampers me and takes care of me.

## Weaknesses

I don't have any weaknesses as such. But I am always emotional. Not an emotional fool though. So, I don't consider my emotions a weakness, but it is a strength to me. Nobody can manipulate me or make a fool out of me.

## What do you binge-watch?

I love watching shows that have magic, supernatural elements and I tend to watch most shows under the fantasy genre.

## Lessons learnt

Although there are a lot of things, one of the most important things that I have learned in my life is that one has to be true to oneself. And nothing else matters. If people try to put dirt on you, well, it is the dirt that is coming out of their mouth. That is not your problem.

## Fitness Regime

Eat whatever you want to eat until you have a project coming. Once the project is signed, I think ten days are enough for me to get back in shape. Jokes apart, I am a workout freak. I don't miss my workout sessions and even if my work finishes at midnight, you can see me in the gym an hour after I get back.

## Diet Mantra

I think more than my diet, I have cheat days. To eat those cheat day meals, I have to diet very religiously throughout the week. So, I stick to a lot of proteins like fish and egg whites.



## Typical Day

My typical day involves spending a lot of time with my dogs. I don't believe in taking offs because I have chosen a line of work where I don't want any breaks. All I want is to work every day like a crazy woman.

## Ways to unwind

I just switch off my phone and relax.

## Dreams for the future

I am not someone who sits and dreams. If I think of something, I follow it and just do it. Dreaming is for people who sleep. I am someone who loves to be in reality.

## Making a mark internationally

That is my next move. That is one thing I really want to do.

## What are your future projects?

I will soon be seen in a reality TV show. So, stay tuned for that.

## Why do you think your life is smart?

Everybody is hardworking but there is always a way to do 'smart' work. What I have understood through my struggle is that hard work may not always pay off but smart moves are powerful.

As told to Oshin Grace Daniell



# Mood food

Diet and fitness regime that can improve mental health

BY MINAL SHAH



**D**iet plays an important role in improving physical and mental health. Diet and its bioactive components have been recognised as modifiable risk factors that influence pathogenesis of mental health disorders like depression, anxiety, cognitive and sleep disorder. If the brain is not provided with good nutrition, the free radicals in the brain will trigger an inflammatory response which can damage the brain tissue. Nutrition is responsible for all the functions of the body, including boosting immunity and generating neurotransmitters that send the signals between brain and various parts of the body.

Gut neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, have been shown to exert both pro-inflammatory and anti-inflammatory functions, thus playing a role in the modulation of immune and inflammatory responses. It is a natural mood stabiliser. When within the normal range, it makes one feel stable, calm, focused and happy. Serotonin is synthesised from tryptophan (an amino acid) which is found in high-protein food like egg, cheese, salmon, nuts, turkey and soy protein. Combining protein with some complex carbohydrates like wheat and oats help in achieving a serotonin boost. Also, brain is dependent on glucose as its main fuel. If there isn't enough

glucose in the brain, neurotransmitters (the brain's chemical messengers) are not produced and communication between neurons breaks down. Exercise also helps release the tryptophan in the blood. Any good aerobic exercise that gets the heart rate high like walking, jogging, cycling, swimming or dancing does the trick.

The gut is lined with millions of neurons that produce serotonin. Improving gut health by increasing the good bacteria also helps. Good bacteria protects the lining of the intestine from bad bacteria, toxins and inflammation; it improves absorption of nutrients and activates

neural pathways that travel between gut and the brain. Supplementing the diet with pre-biotic fibre and pro-biotic food like curd, yoghurt, fermented food and kefir will increase the good bacteria that help improve mental health. A diet rich in complex carbohydrates which has high fibre content includes whole fruits, whole grains, legumes and vegetables. Fibre is not digestible by human amylase (carbohydrate-digesting enzymes) but is broken down by the gut bacteria leading to the release of Short-Chain Fatty Acids (SCFAs). These molecules have anti-inflammatory effects that can also be transmitted to the brain

via pathways, involving direct central nervous system signalling and the immune system activation.

In case of minerals, manganese, zinc and copper participate in enzymatic mechanisms that protects the body from oxidative stress. Zinc can be easily found in beans, legumes and whole grains. Soaking, germination or fermentation can be helpful in reducing anti-nutrients such as phytate and also improve the bio-availability of zinc. Oysters, lobsters, cashew and almonds are also good sources of zinc. Iron plays a role in oxygenation, energy production and neurotransmitter and myelin synthesis in the cerebral parenchyma. Plant-based iron sources have lower bioavailability than animal-based iron sources. Combining iron-rich sources like sesame seeds, garden cress seeds, black raisins and dates with a vitamin C and beta-carotene (vitamin A) will enhance its bio-availability.

Calcium, potassium, and magnesium modulate sleep through proper functioning of ion channels. Milk and dairy products are rich in calcium. Potassium can be obtained from coconut water, green leafy vegetables and fruits like muskmelon and sweet lime. Magnesium deficiency causes headaches. In an evidence-based guideline update, the American Academy of Neurology and the American Headache Society concluded that magnesium therapy is 'probably effective' for migraine prevention. Food sources of magnesium include dark green leafy vegetables—like spinach—nuts, soy and whole grains. Low-fat milk and curd are also good. Similarly, Monounsaturated Fatty Acids (MUFA) from extra virgin olive oil, nuts, avocado and certain Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids (PUFA) such as omega-3 from fish, walnuts, chia seeds, flax seeds exert anti-inflammatory effects, which, in turn, improve cognitive function. At the opposite end, food rich in calories, added sugars, hydrogenated fats, and preservatives may worsen both inflammatory state and cogni-

tive function. Similarly, consumption of high glycemic load meals and processed meat products have been associated with the production of inflammatory biomarkers.

Stress can lead to disturbed sleep, loss of appetite and sweating due to the stress hormone. Cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline raise our blood pressure, increase our heart rate and the rate at which we perspire, which in turn prepares our body for an emergency response. They can also reduce blood flow to our skin and can reduce our stomach activity; cortisol releases fat and sugar into the system to boost our energy. Exercise helps improve mental health by reducing anxiety, depression and negative thoughts by improving self-esteem and cognitive function. Physical activity has the ability to improve our wellbeing and the quality of life.

Research indicates that low-intensity aerobic exercise for 30-35 minutes, three to five days a week increases positive moods. Start slow and increase the intensity or duration of the exercise to avoid burnout. If working out at a gym, it is important to know what you are doing, get help from a professional trainer if required for beginners and once trained one can increase the intensity or repetitions as per one's own targets. Although more evidence is required, health benefits from regular exercise should be reinforced by every mental health professional to their patients.

If we evaluate the nutrient sources and the role of key nutrients in the body, a diet with good amount of fibre and antioxidants—whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, good quality protein from lean meat like fish and poultry, lentils, low-fat milk and dairy products, moderate amount of nuts and oil seeds with healthy oils—result in good physical and mental health. Diet and fitness work better together and the combination results in better physical and mental wellbeing.

Shah is a senior nutrition therapist, Fortis Hospital, Mulund.



# Breathe easy

With India being one of the worst affected countries from tobacco addiction, it is important to promote less harmful alternatives

BY DR VIKAS JAIN

India is one of the worst affected countries from tobacco addiction. With more than 27 crore active tobacco users and around 13.5 lakh annual deaths, the country is in the throes of a tobacco epidemic. The government and non-profit organisations have been striving to control and reduce the prevalence of tobacco use; however, their efforts have met with little to no success. Government reports based on limited public surveys show marginal

decline in the problem, however the growing sale volumes and revenues of the tobacco companies contradict the claim.

It is common knowledge that tobacco causes cancer and other health issues such as hypertension, Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), bronchiolitis, asthma, ischemic heart disease and atherosclerosis. Despite being aware of this fact, thousands of people especially youth take up tobacco use every year.

Experimental phases of life, peer pressure, stress and curiosity are some of the reasons why people use tobacco. Many people who try tobacco once get addicted to it. In a country like India, where tobacco addiction is neither seen as a medical condition nor as a social stigma, most people who want to quit rely solely on their willpower. It is estimated that only five per cent of such people have success. Considering this fact, it is imperative to have a support system to assist tobacco users to

achieve their target of quitting.

So far, India has employed tobacco control methods like higher taxes on tobacco products, pictorial warnings, ban on advertising and public smoking and penalties for underage selling. However, the growing number of users and tobacco-related deaths indicate that these methods have been inadequate. Other legislative methods to control tobacco usage like counseling, nicotine replacement therapies and drugs have also had very limited

success and the menace of tobacco use is steadily growing. Many of these therapies are expensive, and thus not affordable for most tobacco users in the country.

Several countries worldwide have done excellent work in tobacco control. Apart from well-funded and dedicated tobacco control programmes, the common element in the success of countries like the UK, Sweden and Japan is the availability and popularity of safer and harm-reduced alterna-

tives. India must also embrace harm reduction if it sincerely wants to see reduced tobacco related deaths.

Harm reduction is a well-accepted practice in all walks of life. All of us look for and use harm reduction methods and equipment in our lives on a daily basis. Helmets, seat belts, condoms, sanitisers and masks are used to minimise risk in our daily life. Sugar-free sweeteners reduce our sugar intake. Sunflower and rice bran oil let us consume our favourite dishes with less chance of heart disease. Even for tobacco consumption, the concept of harm reduction is available in the form of nicotine replacement therapies (NRT). However, such therapies are not well received in the public as it is expensive or perceived as medicines.

The need is for affordable and enjoyable safer alternatives which the user might willingly adopt, without any persuasion or prescription. In a country like India where tobacco is consumed in many different forms like bidi, cigarette, gutkha and paan, the government should promote safer alternatives rather than banning it.

There are different types of safer alternatives available for tobacco users, however last year India enforced a regressive ban on all such products. These alternatives to smoking include nicotine patches, nicotine gums, smokeless tobacco such as snus, vaporised nicotine delivery systems such as electronic cigarettes and heated no-burn tobacco devices. Varenicline is a drug which acts on the nicotinic receptors of the brain and helps stop nicotine cravings. Nicotine gums and patches use pure nicotine either added to a gum base which is to be intermittently chewed, or added to an adhesive patch, which is stuck to the skin and delivers nicotine over an extended period. Several studies in Sweden and the United States have found that snus is about 98 per cent safer than smoking or chewing tobacco. The US FDA recently approved snus as a reduced risk tobacco product.

Almost all nicotine replacement

PHOTO PTI





should be the way forward. The Indian government needs to be progressive in its vision and not just be a blind follower of others. It is imperative to protect the youth from taking up tobacco. In the long run, this is the best way to reduce, or maybe end, tobacco consumption. However, it is equally important to provide viable alternatives to existing users and encourage use of safer alternatives. The government should look at ways to allow RRP's to adults while restricting their access to youth. At the same time, stricter measures are also needed to reduce the access of traditional tobacco products to our youth. Regulating not banning safer alternatives (vaping devices) is the right approach if the government is truly sincere about controlling the tobacco epidemic in the country.

Tobacco control programmes and the banning of e-cigarettes are two legislations contradictory to each other. The government of India banned the sale of e cigarettes on 18th September 2019, putting at risk the health of ex-smokers, who had transitioned to a safer alternative. Bans give birth to black markets and increase the chances of spurious and illicit trade. Liquor bans in Gujrat and Bihar do not appear to work on the ground. Ban is not and never will be the silver bullet to tobacco control. Tobacco control is much easier said than done. Tobacco control reforms in India have traditionally faced opposition due to three major concerns—industry, employment and tax revenue. Transitioning users from harmful forms of tobacco to Reduced Risk Products (RRPs) can be done while addressing these concerns. RRP's contain either processed tobacco or purified nicotine, so tobacco farmers will not be affected. Workers in the traditional tobacco industry can be re-skilled to produce RRP's. Companies making harmful products can be encouraged to develop and market less harmful ones and the government can still earn taxes.

Jain is a paediatrician and a founding member of Association for Harm Reduction Education and Research (AHRER)

therapies and reduced-risk-products remove Tobacco Specific Nitrosamines (TSNAs). TSNAs are the toxic carcinogens in cigarettes and its removal reduces cancer risk significantly. One needs to understand that nicotine by itself is not carcinogenic and should not be demonised.

Electronic cigarettes gained popularity as a safer alternative to smoking when they were introduced roughly 15 years back. An electronic cigarette uses a coil to heat up a liquid which contains vegetable glycerine, propylene glycol and flavouring. It may or may not contain nicotine. Electronic cigarettes or vaping is the closest to smoking psychologically and has been deemed 95 per cent safer than smoking by the NHS of the UK. Vegetable glycerine, propylene glycol and the flavouring used have all been cleared by the FDA as safe for human consumption.

Vaping came into controversy in July 2019, when several lung related problems and deaths occurred in the

United States. This condition was designated the term EVALI—E-cigarette or Vaping product user Associated Lung Injury—and it created a major misconception all over the world, leading to unethical bans. The ongoing study by the US CDC has confirmed beyond doubt that EVALI was caused when illicit cannabis oil which was mixed with Vitamin E acetate was being used to vape. Cases of EVALI have been declining steadily since this observation came to light. Other countries which have regulated vaping and other reduced risk products did not see this unfortunate event. This points that reduced risk products must be regulated, and not banned for them to work. Smoking rates across Europe are now controlled thanks to people shifting to reduced risk products.

The government needs to reassess the actual world data on reduced risk products and bring in a change in the policy for safer alternatives to tobacco consumption. Regulation and not ban

# ▶ inhale

ABREAST OF LATEST TRENDS, DEVELOPMENTS

Did you know that you can unclog your drain with coffee grounds? Whether your kitchen sink is holding water or your tub won't drain after another at-home haircut, there is an easy solution to these plumbing woes that does not involve the hassle of a trip to the store. Just mix coffee grounds with dish soap, add the mixture into your drain and follow it up with a lengthy pour of boiling water. The combination will break up whatever is clogging your pipes. And if you have some leftover coffee grounds, use it to tackle that ring around your bathing tub. Rinse off the mixture with warm water afterward. Say hello to a squeaky-clean tub.





# Keep it raw

There is a whole lot more to raw fish dishes than plain old Japanese sashimi. Here are a host of interesting and exotic preparations from as far as Peru to the Philippines

BY RAUL DIAS

**I**t is safe to say that most of the world's love affair with raw fish is rather recent. And one that is in its embryonic stages as far the average Indian diner is concerned. Once looked upon as freakishly alien and best left to where it belonged, the raw fish wonder that is Japanese sashimi has ensnared the entire world with its fresh, clean taste and healthy diet appeal.

Today, sushi bars are a ubiquitous sight the world over, with patrons hungry for a piece of that freshly sliced amberjack or for a portion of those gossamer thin slivers of yellowfin tuna—all anointed with a dab of wasabi and a splash of shoyu (soy sauce). And while smoked salmon, too, has made its way around the world via Scandinavia in the form of gravlax and New York (where it is known as lox), our notion of raw fish preparations is still woefully confined to the aforementioned two. Not anymore!

Digging a little deeper into the vast sphere of world cuisine shows us the existence of a whole smorgasbord (pun intended!) of raw fish iterations from a diverse number of places that have been enjoyed for centuries in various forms and styles.

Here are a few such raw revelations:

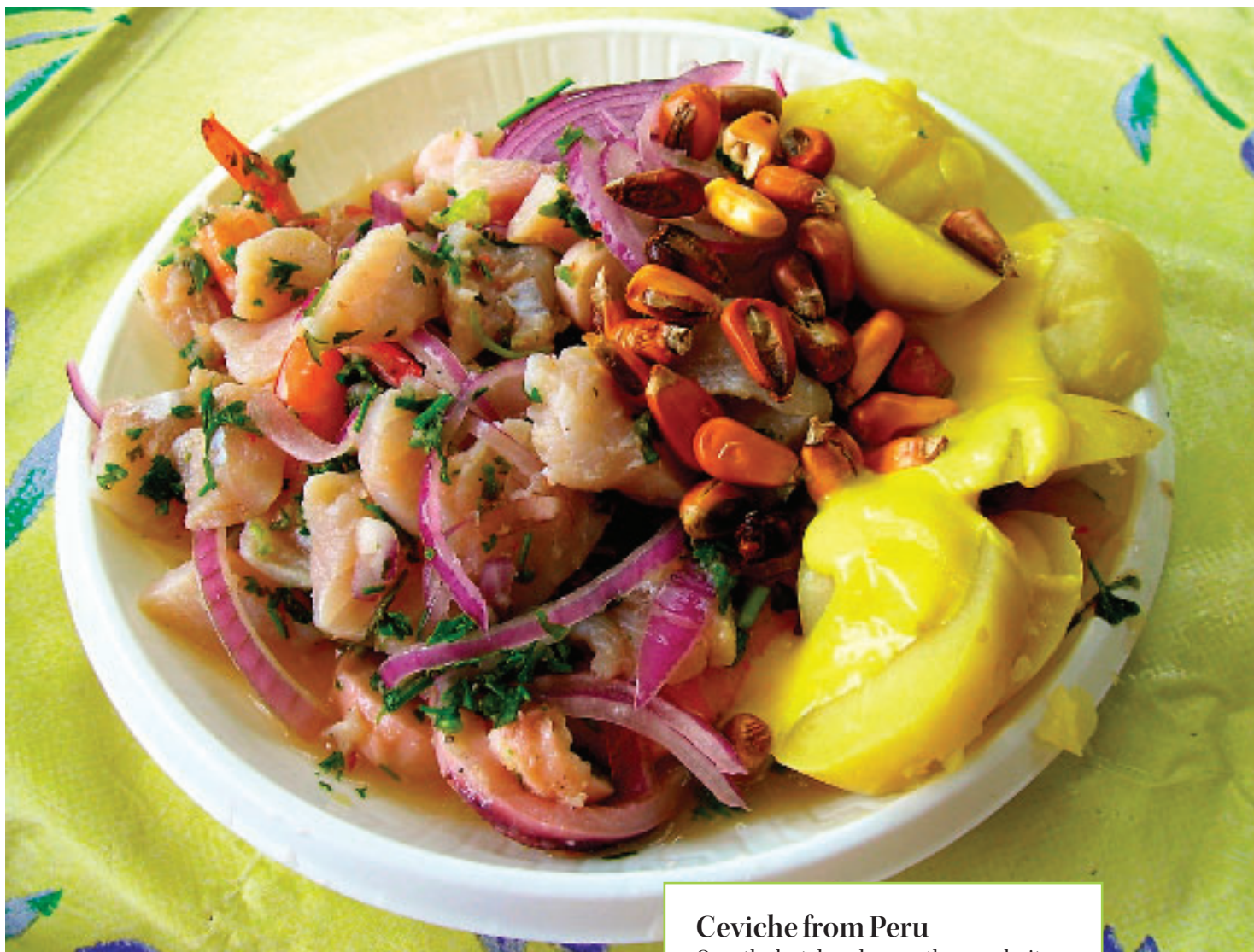
## Poké from Hawaii

Pronounced poh-kay and meaning to “cut crosswise into pieces” this supremely healthy and tasty one bowl Hawaiian origin dish is a very simple preparation that sees short grain sushi rice that has been pre-vinegared as the base. This rice is then topped with diced raw fish and other seafood that can range from salmon and tuna to octopus and sea urchin. A splash of soy, a squirt of Japanese mayonnaise, a dusting of the Japanese spice blend called furikake, sesame seeds and dried flakes of nori (seaweed) finish off this dish that is criminally addictive and clean tasting. Interestingly, very similar to poké is the Korean dish called hoedeopbap that consists of marinated raw tuna served over rice.



PHOTO COURTESY KUNAL CHANDRA



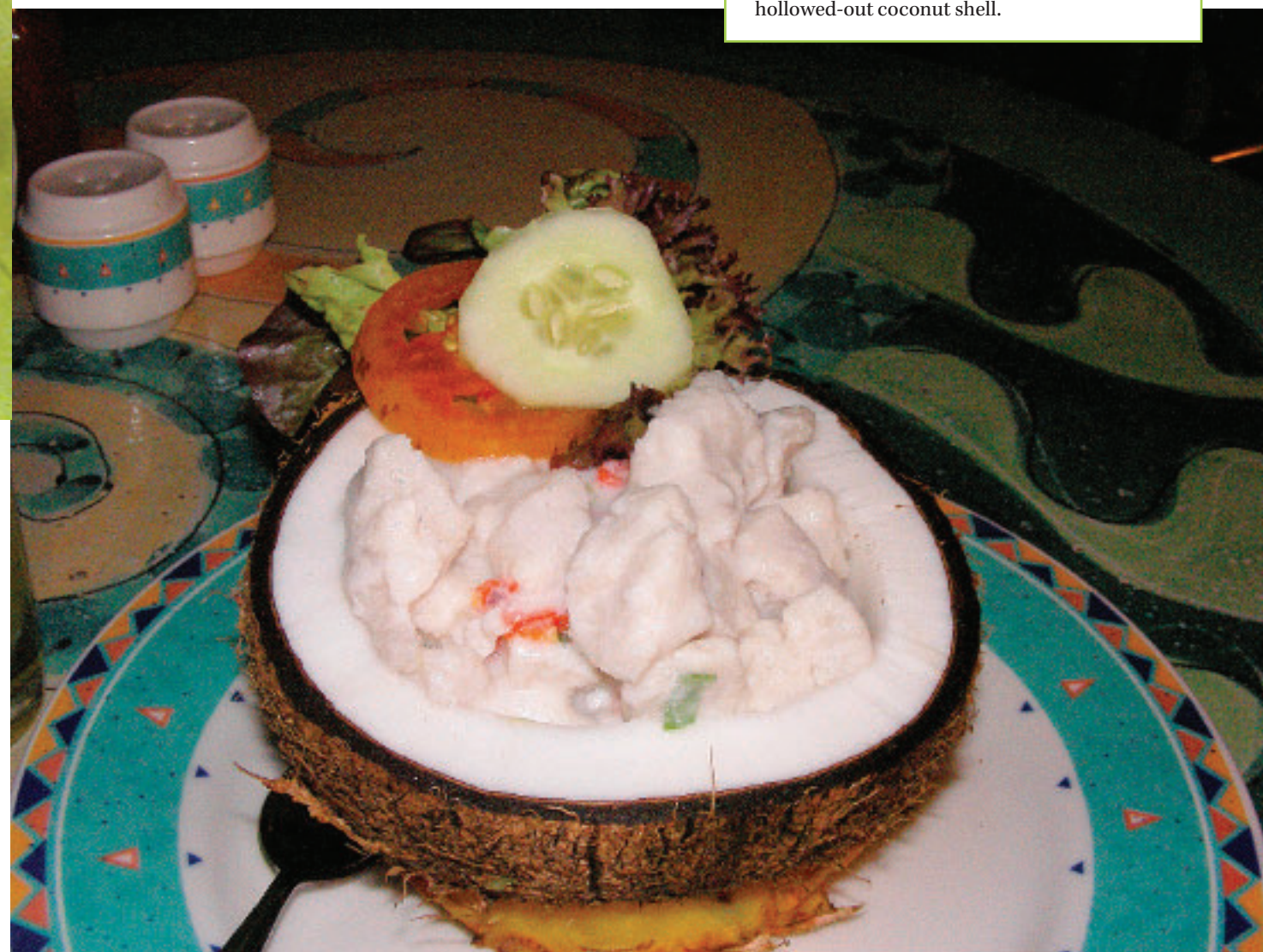


### Ceviche from Peru

Over the last decade or so the popularity of this paradoxically raw, yet ‘cooked’ fish dish from Peru has reached dizzying heights. This seemingly simple dish is a complex preparation made from fresh raw fish cured in citrus juices, such as lemon or lime, and spiced with ají chillies and other seasonings including chopped onions, salt, and coriander. It is the all-important citrus that cooks the fish, turning its translucent flesh into a milky opaque. Ceviche is usually accompanied by side dishes that complement its flavours such as sweet potato, lettuce, roasted corn kernels called cancha and the current hipster chic craze—avocado!

### Kokoda from Fiji

Coming to us straight from the swaying coconut trees and cool waters of the lush Fijian islands, this raw fish dish celebrates two of the island’s greatest resources—coconuts and its abundant seafood. Pronounced ko-kon-da, kokoda is a refreshing salad-appetizer that’s perfect after a day swimming the cerulean ocean. Just like a ceviche, cubed white fish like snapper, walu or mahi mahi is first marinated in a citrus mixture so that it cures and cooks and then a splash of cooling coconut cream is added to give the dish its creamy consistency. Diced tomatoes and a few fronds of coriander finish off this dish that is always served in a hollowed-out coconut shell.







PHOTOS COURTESY WIKICOMMONS

### Crudo and Carpaccio from Italy

Literally meaning 'crude' or 'raw' in Italian, crudo is a super popular and versatile raw fish dish from Italy that can be anything from slices of raw fish drizzled over with olive oil and seasoning, to a chopped version just like a steak tartare that's always topped with an egg yolk. Similarly, fish carpaccio is the pescatarian version of the thinly sliced raw beef dish of the same name that was invented in 1950 by Giuseppe Cipriani, founder of Harry's Bar in Venice. It was named in honour of Vittore Carpaccio, the Venetian painter known for his characteristic red and white tones.

### Yusheng from China

Literally meaning "raw fish" the dish is basically a Cantonese-style raw fish salad consisting of strips of raw fish mixed with shredded vegetables and a variety of sauces and condiments, among other ingredients. Also known as the "prosperity toss", yusheng has been a Cantonese favourite for decades with the most common form being the qicai yusheng (seven-coloured raw fish salad) served in local restaurants during the Chinese New Year period. And although versions of it are thought to have existed in ancient China, the contemporary version was created and popularised in the 1960s.



PHOTOS COURTESY WIKICOMMONS



### Kinilaw from the Philippines

An interesting raw fish dish that is closely related to not one but two dishes on this list, kinilaw from the Philippines borrows elements from both a ceviche and a kokoda. Hailing from the Visayan region of the archipelago, the name kinilaw is derived from the word, "kilaw", which means raw or uncooked. Just like a ceviche, the seafood is 'cooked' without the application of heat but is rather cured in vinegar. Additional souring agents like the native calamansi (a lime-orange like fruit), tamarind, or green mangoes are added to enhance its tartness. To complete the dish, black pepper, onions, ginger, seaweed and sliced chilies are also added. And in some parts of the country, just like a kokoda, a dash of coconut milk or cream is added to give the dish a creamy, sweetish send-off! □



# Fitness agenda

Despite frequent work-related travel, these business heads follow their health routine to a T

BY RAJIV DOGRA

For head honchos of any company, fitness is a pivotal part of their daily routine. It takes a lot of energy to frequently travel, conduct meetings, sometimes back to back, and run a business like a well-oiled machine. It won't be surprising to know that most of India Inc's business heads are into some form of fitness regimen. Running, squash, swimming, gym workouts, yoga or martial arts, to list a few, they go all out to meet their personal fitness goals.

These time-pressed individuals have devised their own mechanism to fit a routine into their daily schedule.

Take for instance Paul Dupuis, managing director and CEO, Randstad India. For him travelling nationally or internationally is an integral part of work. "I start the week in Bengaluru on Monday and set the tone for the teams across the country. Come Tuesday, I am off visiting one or two of the 23 cities in India across the four corners of the country, meeting with my leaders and teams before I return home to Bengaluru for the weekend," says Dupuis.

As a senior leader of a global organisation with its headquarters in the Netherlands, Dupuis travels there at least four to five times a year. "I also make trips to Singapore and Malaysia as part of the APAC leadership team," he says.

Beginning the day right is important, points out Dupuis. "My day starts as early as 5am. I begin the



Paul Dupuis



Dr Muffazal Lakdawala

day with exercise. I prefer a brisk walk, often at Cubbon Park in Bengaluru, to get the heart rate going and to clear my head. I also use this time to reflect on how the previous day went and more importantly, to plan the day ahead," he says.

Weekends for him are a 'refresh-and-recharge' time at the gym, which actually means more exercise. "My personal trainer is actually a physiotherapist and a functional fitness expert. That makes it a unique combination and he designs custom-made programmes for me to maintain my flexibility, balance, stamina and overall conditioning. The variety and challenge of these workouts help me keep my edge," says Dupuis adding that he travels with his family to Japan every year as his wife hails from there and his children were born there, too. "I also travel to Canada for family time. And yes, I visit different places on vacations and play ice hockey whenever I can. I also do an annual winter trip to Ladakh to coach, play hockey and volunteer," he says.

Similarly, as country manager for Kronos in India, Mumbai-based Sumeet Doshi is responsible for the vision and execution of the company's long-term strategy and growth in the Indian market. On average, he is required to travel two to three days a week. To beat work-related stress, he plays squash. "For me, it has been a great stress-buster given the pace and intensity of the game. In

fact, my squash playing is so contagious that my daughter picked up the game at a quite young age and is now a regular player in the under-15 tournaments," says Doshi. Besides, he tries to remain as active as possible and squeezes in a workout schedule wherever possible by walking a lot. "It is not uncommon to find me walking down the corridors of our office taking calls instead of sitting behind a desk," he says.

For Dr Akhil Shahani, managing director, The Shahani Group, fitness remains holistic and goes beyond just focusing on losing weight or gaining muscle. "I practice intermittent fasting two-three times a week. I go for regular walks in the morning and evening no matter where I am. I also do cardio in the gym or whichever hotel I'm staying in. I also enjoy swimming," says Shahani who travels within India every couple of weeks and has to go abroad every two months. The Shahani Group is a chain of franchised colleges and schools in India under the brand name Smart Institute and has an edtech platform called ask.CAREERS. The group has partnered with universities in the UK for its courses and has investors from the UK, UAE and Singapore.

## No excuses

Bengaluru-based Sid Naidu runs two businesses, yet when it comes to fitness, he believes





Sid Naidu

## On the move

*Prosenjit Biswas, fitness manager, Skulpt, chalks out a fitness routine for those who live out of a suitcase*

Usually, people who keep fit on the move often work out in hotel gyms. However, using one's own body-weight for resistance training allows one to exercise at any place without equipment or any hassles, including one's hotel room.

It is important to keep a workout routine that is simple yet effective, to avoid spending much time on elaborate schedules.

People who need to work out in between work trips must focus on exercising their entire body instead of targeting isolated muscle groups. Metabolic conditioning is a practice where one performs a high intensity full body workout to burn the maximum amount of calories and keep them burning for the next 48 hours, by conditioning their body metabolism to stay high even after the workout has ended.

Some workouts that focus on all major body parts include pushups, lunges, squats and other such simple bodyweight exercises.

Working out in tempo (going down slow, getting up fast, during exercises like squats and pushups) during the eccentric phase, which is when one is slowly lowering the dumbbell back to the starting position, is a great way to burn more calories.

in no compromise. He is the CEO and founder of advertising agency Sid Productions along with a wedding planning firm, Banana Leaf. His work schedule sees him travelling 10 days, either on national or international trips, scattered across a month. "I spend two to three hours in the gym focusing on strength, stamina and muscle gain because, who doesn't want

to look good and stay healthy?" asks Naidu. Despite his erratic working schedule, he tries to get seven hours of sleep and includes enough nutrients in his meals. "I break my meals into five parts to help even out the blood sugar levels, keeping the energy steady throughout the day. I also believe in changing the specifics of my diet every month to keep it interesting. I carry my

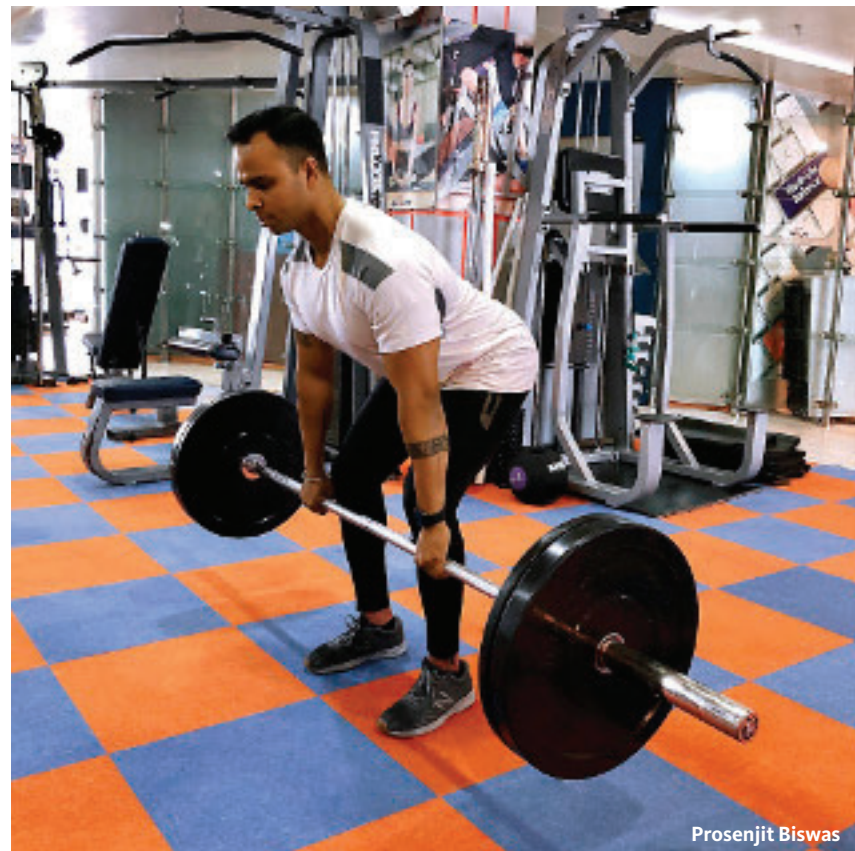
health supplements along and try to hit the gym at the destination; thankfully I have that luxury for the most part," he says.

Mumbai-based Dr Muffazal Lakdawala, founder and chief surgeon, Digestive Health Institute by Dr Muffi, has clinics not only in India but also in Dubai. He travels there on a monthly basis. "I also travel for bariatric



Sumeet Doshi

workshops across the world, where I impart my knowledge and experience of 20-plus years to young surgeons who are training to become bariatric specialists," says Lakdawala. Being a laparoscopic, bariatric and gastrointestinal surgeon, he spends most of his days either in the hospital's operation theatre or at his medical centre. "After a day of surgery, consulting patients and helping them with their fitness goals, I usually take out time in the evening to exercise. I try to follow a schedule of working out for a minimum of 45 minutes to an hour for at least five days every week. At my centre in Mumbai, we have a fully-equipped fitness centre where I exercise with my personal trainer. If I don't get time to work out at my centre, I usually cycle with my son in and around my residential area. I also make sure that I eat right as proper nutrition is also key to keeping fit," he says. When he is travelling, he tries to exercise in the hotel gym where he is put up. "If there



Prosenjit Biswas

is a good running track or promenade in the city, I usually go for a 40-45 minute jog. I make sure I carry my protein supplement with me as well so that I don't compromise on my daily protein intake," says Dr Lakdawala.

## Expert's take

While it can be challenging to keep up with a regular fitness schedule when one has a travelling job and a busy work life, it is rather important to do so especially when one has such an active lifestyle, points out Kolkata-based Prosenjit Biswas, fitness manager, Skulpt. For company heads and CEOs, who often have to travel for much of their time, the best forms of exercise are those that can be performed anywhere, he advises.

Other methods of working out within a tight schedule are time restriction exercises and high intensity movements, says Biswas. "Additionally, prioritising and setting time apart for workouts is an important move

towards keeping fit while travelling for work. Outdoor activities such as running, jogging, cycling and swimming are also effective ways to stay fit and healthy and keep one's metabolism up. Yoga and breathing exercises help in increasing flexibility and improving mental health. The right form of physical activity is essential to complement one's active life," he says.

In terms of diet, a fast lifestyle often leads to fast food choices and convenient eating, which might have adverse effects on health and fitness. Biswas, who believes in holistic fitness, advises that one should add yogurt and protein-rich foods to their daily diet and maintain high levels of water consumption. "People who travel a lot should opt for healthy meal preparations instead of fast food. When one is ordering food on their trip, one must ensure that their meal is balanced with carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats, in a 3:2:1 ratio," he says. □



# Hangover alert

Overdid it? Don't curse or crawl back into bed. Here are some tips that can pull you through the morning after and help you prepare for it the night before

BY GITA HARI

**Y**ou had a wonderful time at the party last night—probably a lot more than just wonderful. The morning came fast, and now you have no choice but to appear and behave like a normal person, even though you feel more like some swamp creature.

A spell of heavy alcohol consumption culminates in unpleasant experiences like dizziness, confused state of mind, headache and thirst—typical symptoms of a hangover. It is generally felt more in the morning after a night of considerable drinking.

## Find the cause

Alcohol is a thin, clear liquid with harsh burning taste, consumed generally for its intoxicating effects. Alcohol supplies 7kcal energy per gram but is a harmful drug to the body rather than a source of energy. Different alcoholic beverages are made from different sources of starch (cereals) or sugar (fruits). Nutritionist and lifestyle educator Karishma Chawla says, "Alcohol acts as a relaxant and is highly addictive with several effects on the body. It leads to elevated moods due to stimulation of dopamine and serotonin, decreased anxiety activity, increased self-confidence, and impaired judgment and movements."





Alcohol is a diuretic and therefore causes the body to get rid of more fluid than it takes in, causing dehydration, dry-mouth and headaches. Nutrients the body usually counts on to function well are also lost in the process of metabolising alcohol. Proteins, minerals like magnesium, calcium, and potassium and vitamin-B complex are also depleted. It is also an irritant, so

when excessive amounts hit the stomach, it protests. Finally, the metabolites of alcohol, a toxin, are not welcomed by the body.

### After-effects

Dr Abhishek Subhash, MBBS, DNB (internal medicine), Bhatia Hospital, Mumbai, says, “The signs of a classic hangover are a severe headache and

nausea. You may feel listless, irritable and dull throughout the next day. Hyperacidity is another after effect. While these are short-term signs, in the long run, too, much drinking can cause acute inflammation and irritation of organs like pancreas, stomach or liver. Alcohol can also disrupt your sleep pattern as it can interfere with the chemical processes needed for sound sleep.”

### Be prepared

Next time (yes, there usually is a next time), you can be armed with the requisite provisions. The first step is to understand what causes a hangover.

Alcohol is not the only element in liquor that your system must contend with, and some of these extra ingredients increase the likelihood of a hangover. Congeners, for instance, add

flavour, aroma, colour, and preservatives, but they also tend to intensify a hangover.

“The blood alcohol concentration (BAC) rises, and the feeling of drunkenness occurs, when alcohol is drunk faster than the liver can break it down. However, BAC does not correlate exactly with symptoms of drunkenness and different people have different symptoms even after drinking the same amount of alcohol,” says Zamrud Patel, dietician, Global Hospital, Parel.

### Looking alive

Many social drinkers wake up looking worse than they feel. Puffy eyes, sags and creases on the face. Dermatologist Dr Bharti Magoo suggests, “To avoid puffy eyes, don’t sleep on your stomach. Cold-water compresses are better than astringents which can be incredibly drying to the skin. Keep blinking, because that is a sort of massage.”

Exhaustion accompanying a hangover isn’t merely a product of too little sleep; the loss of nutrients has a fatiguing effect on muscles and organs. Include a supply of potassium-rich breakfast foods, such as bananas, oranges, prunes and milk. “Drinking alcohol causes dehydration resulting in dry skin. The consumption of water



### Drink smart

The effects are less damaging when the amount of alcohol consumed is low as absorption is slow when consumed slowly or along with food

A few pointers from nutritionist Karishma Chawla on how to drink smart:

- › Be aware of the effects of alcohol and your own body’s response to it along with well balanced meals taken during the day with some form of exercise. Remember, the more conscious you are about your body and health, the more mindful you are while consuming alcohol.
- › Ensure a wholesome breakfast and lunch comprising of whole carbs and protein along with fibre, like buckwheat upma with veggies plus eggs or moong dal chilla with paneer sliced on top. Avoid fruits that day. Consume more fibre in terms of vegetables and salads and healthy nuts like walnuts and almonds. Evening filler can comprise of a serving of soup and protein like egg or paneer salads before you leave for the party.
- › Drink plenty of water during the day, since the negative effects are worse in a dehydrated state.
- › It is imperative not to drink on an empty stomach.
- › Avoid fried or high-sugar foods during the day and at the time of drinking.





gets lesser during consumption of alcohol leading to water retention resulting in swollen face and puffy eyes. Stomach disturbances can cause bloating and gas worsening the way you look or feel!” says Chawla.

### Home-brewed hangover cures

Metabolism is inescapable, but some of its effects can be mitigated. Coat the stomach lining with milk products and bulky foods before drinking and consume lots of water while you drink, before you go to bed, and the next day.

Cut down on carbonated beverages and sleep with the windows open for humidity and fresh air.

Homemade brews include drinking limewater with pink salt, kefir, vegetable juices with chia or flax seeds and green or chamomile tea. “Another effective method is to consume a cup of warm water with honey and lemon juice. Chew two to three small pieces of ginger or sip a cup of ginger tea to lend fast relief,” says Subhash.

According to health coach Nipa Asharam, “Couple of hours after wak-

ing up, simple yoga steps like a cat-cow pose, a simple and gentle movement with deep breaths [can help]. Each cycle feels as if you are getting a little spinal flush. Move on to dog pose for the blood circulation and get oxygen flowing and blood pumping to help relieve stress.”

Go outdoor and sweat. It is possible to feel negative and gloomy. A hangover may not bring out the best emotions after a fun night. Get some fresh air, go for a walk to get those endorphins (feel-good hormone) and

release cortisol (stress hormone) by sweating a little.

For an upset stomach take an antacid; for headache, an analgesic. Eat easily digestible complex carbohydrates, such as cereals, fruits or toast upon waking. Eggs are too hard to digest. Caffeine—coffee, colas—only dehydrate you more, says Patel.

Here are a few experiential cures from drinkers: The negative ions emitted by a waterfall are healing and energising. Sit near a water fountain or walk briskly around it—this really

helps, says tippler Rakesh Asthana. Take mild laxatives just so that the toxins are eliminated faster, feels Rohan Shah. For Bhasker Shetty apple juice and oatmeal with a little skimmed milk sometimes does the trick, as does standing under the shower.

### When to see a doctor

Asharam suggests, “When you feel chronic constipation due to regular drinking, symptoms of fatty liver, which means liver damage, and constant lung

infections are possible because the body’s immunity has dropped.” Usually hangovers subside within 24 hours. However, see a doctor if difficulty in focusing continues beyond this period or if vomiting persists; shallow breathing, unconsciousness and pale skin are other causes to see a doctor.

“It is also important to seek medical help if you are severely dehydrated, or you have tremors, blackouts, or blood in your vomit. These are serious symptoms that require medical attention,” says Subash. □



# Right shot

Footballer Robin Singh says adrenaline rush and excitement is what drew him to the sport. He also shares his fitness and sports mantra

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO

Strength doesn't come from what you can do. It comes from overcoming the things you once thought you couldn't"—reads a tweet from Robin Singh. This is something that the striker, who most recently played for Real Kashmir FC, on loan from Hyderabad FC, has practiced in life. It has seen him rise to be who he is.

## Flash back

Robin's early days of schooling was at Somerville School Noida where he passionately participated in most of the sports events that the school offered and later moved to St Stephens School, Chandigarh, where he got selected to go to the Chandigarh Football Academy run by the Union territory's sports department. "I started playing at the age of nine. I began my sporting career playing both cricket and football, but, ultimately ended up in football. Sport has always been my calling. During my school days I have earnestly participated in all the major sports activities," he says. However, it was football that always fascinated him. "The adrenaline rush and the excitement were the reasons I was attracted to football. Sports has always been a part of my family since the very beginning with my grandfather also being a footballer and



being the organiser of the Durand cup and the Subroto cup till his last breath," Robin says.

## Football matters

For someone who was good at both cricket and football, Robin made the choice of football early, which he believes has been his first achievement. "My second achievement was when I began my club career in 2009 with East Bengal of the I-League and helped them in winning small trophies like the Jubilee Cup. I may not have performed well in every match that I played but I have definitely learned a lot from each one. There is still so much more to achieve and I guess I am striving hard for it." The 30-year-old has played both in the I-League and the Indian Super League (ISL). "Playing in the ISL is a great honour as it is the highest club-level football our country has to offer. Also, with the inclusion of foreign recruits in each team, it is a great opportunity to put yourself to the test against them day in and day out be it at training or matches. It is a great feeling to get such tremendous exposure in the country itself," he says.

## Fit and fine

Playing at a professional level has several fitness demands and he admits that each day of training varies from the previous one. "Apart from my fitness schedule, I also prefer extra training under the guidance of the coaches where I focus on my shooting drills and re-modelling my movements in and around the box. After which I spend some time with the strength and conditioning coach working on my flexibility," he says. He also ensures he follows a good diet that usually consists of lots of greens, minimal to zero milk and meat. "I avoid eating anything oily or fried and prefer eating lots of fibre and protein. I try maintaining the balance between the amount of calories consumed and the calories burnt," Robin says. Like with any sportsperson, injuries are inevitable but he admits that with proper strength training, recovery, hydration and diet, you can shorten your time out injured. "Whenever there is an injury, I try avoiding practice sessions if recommended by the doctor and I also get back to task only when fully recovered," he says.

## Personality matters

Robin has faced a lot of challenges both mental and physical, but believes that as an athlete you have to stay focused and be ready for any hurdle.



"For example in the match against Sri Lanka during SAFF Championship 2015, I scored twice and helped the team to win the title, but on the other hand in the 2016 Indian Super League season, I played for FC Goa and made 10 appearances, scoring just once. So there are ups and downs but you have to have faith and believe in your abilities and in your skills and what you bring to the game." Naturally, his advice to aspiring footballers is to believe in themselves and their abilities no matter what and always dream big. "Never ever stop dreaming or give up even when it seems impossible. Set your goals and work hard to achieve them," he says. In his free time, he likes to listen to music and is also into DJing and mixing music. "I also enjoy watching my wife paint custom-made denim jackets; it is more just a hobby for her. It makes her super happy and I love to see her happy. When I am not playing, my wife and I go for a drive and try to find little nooks in cities that I'm based in and grab a cup of coffee or a meal. If the place is pet friendly then it is even better as we both are dog lovers. We always keep a box of biscuits in our car and whenever we see a hungry dog, we feed it," he says. □





# Savour more of life

Mindful eating is not a diet, but a way of using all your senses to choose food that is both satisfying and nourishing

BY HEMANTH SREEKUMAR

**W**ith a plethora of complex functions and astounding features big and small, the human body is a heavy affair. Like every other machine on earth, it needs sufficient energy to function. The ingenuity of its design and placement is such that it effortlessly carries itself forward without any scarcity of fuel to run it. Just a handful of raisins is enough energy for hours to function. But human beings don't really appreciate the wide variety of options that they are provided with. Every morsel of food is undervalued. A large part of it is wasted, and its essence, totally forgotten.

With the miracle organ tongue having thousands of taste buds, and an even larger number of receptors to identify and absorb the varied sensations of taste, eating for humans is a joyful experience too. Here again, they don't really feel it. They don't really appreciate the natural provisions because there is no need to fight or hunt for it anymore. Don't you agree?

## Chew, chew, chew!

Two decades ago, my distant relative, a happy octogenarian, came to stay with my family for a few days. While having dinner together, I was fascinated by the way he was eating. Five minutes into the process and the old man had only started. Ten minutes, and he was not even halfway through his platter. Every

time I observed him, he was either busy chewing his food or kept his mum like he was dwelling on his next bite. I was just a boy then, and when he realised that I was keenly observing him, the Gandalf in him smiled blissfully at my curiosity and continued eating for another 10 minutes before I got bored and left the table. The boy in me didn't see the luxury that the old man saw in his food.

## Mindfulness

Gym, airport, home or office - we are either engrossed in work or busy doing something else—there is always this rush. When there is a lack of time, we multitask. It has become a habit so naturally ingrained in our system that we don't really need a reason to multitask anymore. We are generally enslaved by our thoughts, and food at times becomes just an afterthought.

How many of you have had that blissful experience, where your eyes automatically closed on its own while tripping on the taste or quality of food? There will be stories to recount for sure, but a rarity when the experience can be every day and every time you eat your food. The real delight of taste and health can be found in every meal and every bite. Learning to eat mindfully can bring that difference in your lives.

Mindful eating is forging that deep connection with everything you eat. It is about contemplating the origin

and purpose of the food. It is about paying close attention to the fascinating varieties of taste and flavour that usually goes into oblivion. If you can shut down your thoughts, and pay full attention to just eating, you will be surprised to know the changes it can bring into your lives.

This is unlike those high-intensity workouts and fat-burning regimes while dieting. It isn't a mode of treatment or therapy. It is not something that should be forced from within or a prescribed solution to cure your diseases either. Mindful eating is to imbibe the essence of eating, from a totally new experiential point of view.

## A handbook to start

**Don't just chew for the sake of it:** Time should be given for every bite to be properly chewed and crushed into tiny fragments before it blends with the saliva and slips down into your system. It is only logical to break the food into smaller particles, for better digestion and metabolism.

**Patience is the key:** Every human activity is kind of run by a habitual pattern that subconsciously oversees its execution. When we are hungry and there is food in front of us, there is no way we can wait. If you pay close attention to such situations, you'd notice and feel this burning sensation from within your body. That is the urge. The solu-





D’Souza, nutritionist, and co-founder of Fitness centre ‘Cone Fit’.

**Change of lifestyle:** Being mindful is not just restricted to the case of food alone. It is a practice in Zen Buddhism where you are aware of every moment that passes by. You participate and feel, rather than just be a vacant spectator. If you are someone who wants to take part in meditative exercises and improve your focus, then mindful eating is a natural and easy gateway to it. Colin is sure that it can play a big role in changing people’s lifestyles. “From breathing and eating to actions taken and decisions made, if we are aware of everything that we do, the quality of life will surely get better.”

**The health factor:** By now you would have realised, eating mindfully can turn your life into a healthy affair if you are not in for the junk all the time. Mindful eating can curb binge and stress eating, too. While stress eating can be blamed on the hormones, it should also be known that it is just a coping mechanism by the body. Colin says even if the rate of metabolism differs with each individual, change is certain. “We actually eat a lot more than we should because of the food options around us. Even if you can’t stop yourself, the quantity and quality of food can be taken care of at least.”

Being mindful can also help in developing that intrinsic skill that’s necessary to deal with chronic pain, disease, depression, anxiety, and sleeping problems. The slow realisation is part of a chain reaction.

Know what you are eating. Touch it, feel it. Observe the colour and texture. Let every bite be a treat. Eat when you are physically hungry, and even if you are happy eating, put your mind into it. Mindful eating can be your precursor to a new way of living, which, if properly observed, can elevate the mind to a higher level of consciousness and understanding about life that’s stronger than junk food, bitching, bingeing and gossiping. □

tion is to not react, and slow down the process, even if it means your hands are shivering. The cue for being full is usually mistimed by the brain because it needs time to receive and process the full information of food and energy that goes into the body. And that is the reason why you have this drowsy and drab effect on your mind after a full meal. So, if you can slow down your intake, you will be surprised to get faster cues and know that you need only lesser quantities of what you are having now.

**The energy equation:** For a healthy body equation, the amount of energy taken in should be equal to the energy used. When you realise within yourself that you are drawing more energy from lesser quantities of food, you will no longer deposit unwanted calories to your system.

**Natural regulation and choice of food:** Mindful eating has nothing to do with

the food that you choose to eat. It can be anything and the regulation happens naturally. When you know it within yourself, it is more like the wisdom that drops in with the grey.

**Identifying the wrong cues:** The sudden memory of something scrumptious can trigger a torrent of emotions in you. This will eventually persuade you into ordering food from a nearby restaurant when your body will have no such physical requirements at all. The aroma emanating from your neighbourhood or the mentioning of something delectable can also evoke these cues. It is important here to not fight it out and just let it pass. But it doesn’t mean you should imprison yourself from eating what you like. It is all about a clear understanding of your own requirements. “If a person is conscious of what and how he is eating, along with the quantity and knowledge of its effect on the body, it makes a huge difference in his diet,” says Colin

# || pause

HOLD THAT THOUGHT, INTROSPECT, QUESTION



Small scratches in the finishes of our furniture are inevitable. However, you necessarily don’t have to spend a lot of money to get your couch refinished. Use the humble toothpaste instead to get the marks out. Using a pea-sized amount of non-gel paste, rub the scratch in a circular motion until it buffs out and then clean with a damp towel. Not just that, you can also revive your white shoes with toothpaste. White trainers may seem like a good idea, but a few trips outside will make you think otherwise. If your trainers have white rubber trims that have become discoloured over time, grab some white toothpaste (no colours or gels) and apply directly to the dirty area with a cloth.



# Renal check

Though kidneys aid the removal of waste from the body, control blood pressure and regulate hormones, renal health is often not given enough importance

BY BINDU GOPAL RAO



Just like the heart, liver, pancreas and lungs, renal health is also important. Kidneys, about the size of one's clenched fist, are bean-shaped and reddish-brown in colour. This vital organ is responsible for eradicating waste from the blood and returning clean blood back to one's body. Other notable functions of the kidneys include maintaining body fluid at the correct levels, and making and regulating important hormones in the body that is responsible for controlling blood pressure.

## Holistic health

Kidneys maintain the body's fluid and electrolytes, the pH level of blood and amount of water in the body. They aid in the distribution of nutrients in the cells and removal of waste from it. A balanced electrolyte level is important for nerves, muscles, heart and brain to function properly. Kidneys also help in reabsorption of nutrients such as glucose, amino acids, water, chloride, sodium, magnesium, potassium and ions from the blood and transporting them to various parts of the body. Kidneys are responsible for maintaining the body's internal environment so that it functions optimally. For that reason, they are involved in the secretion of waste products and excretion of excess water. These actions result in the regulation of acid, salt and potassium levels in the body. The kidneys also produce red blood cells (erythropoietin) and hormones that regulate blood pressure (renin-angiotensin). They are also important for bone health (active vitamin D).

## Kidney issues

One of the most common kidney problems is chronic kidney disease where there is a gradual loss of function over time and this can be life-threatening. "Other kidney issues are kidney stones (a hard collection of salt and minerals that are made up of calcium and uric acid which form inside the kidney), polycystic kidney disease (here, clusters of cysts develop within the kidneys, owing to which it can enlarge and lose function), and kidney failure," says Dr Chandan Chaudhari, department of nephrology, Wockhardt Hospital, Mumbai Central. Some of the symptoms to watch out for include reduced amount of urine, swelling around eyes, ankles and feet, frothy urine, unexplained shortness of breath and fatigue or general weakness. Urinary tract infection (UTI), polycystic kidney disease (cyst formation in the kidney) and glomerulonephritis, an inflammation of glomeruli due to infections, drugs and disorders that occur during or shortly after birth are other issues. According to a research report, chronic kidney diseases have become a major cause of global morbidity and mortality. In India, the prevalence of chronic kidney disease is 800 per million population (pmp), and end-stage renal disease (ESRD) is 150-200





### Myths

- ◆ Rock salt is better than iodised salt.
- ◆ Barley water has medicinal value in urinary tract infections.
- ◆ Cranberry juice intake is beneficial in urinary tract infections.
- ◆ Patients with stone disease should avoid vegetables or fruits with seeds.
- ◆ Consumption of high volumes of water (10-12 glasses per day) is essential for kidney health.
- ◆ Avoid calcium in all stone disease.

pmp. Dr Alan Almeida, consultant, nephrology, Hinduja Hospital Khar says, “Kidney diseases related to diabetes and blood pressure are the leading causes of kidney failure. In addition, indiscriminate drug use, environmental toxins, infections including diarrhoeal illnesses, may also contribute to kidney failure. Symptoms pointing

to kidney disease may vary in intensity and may not necessarily point to a kidney ailment.”

### Fitness matters

Staying fit can be beneficial for your kidney health. High blood pressure tends to take a toll on your kidneys, thus it is essential to keep your num-

bers in check. Drink plenty of fluids to keep your kidneys in top shape. Smoking can damage the body’s blood vessels and this can lead to slower blood flow to the kidneys. Dr Kamal Kant, Rama Hospital, says, “Kidneys play a key role in body function, not only by filtering the blood and getting rid of waste products, but also

by balancing the electrolyte level in the body, controlling blood pressure and stimulating the production of red blood cells.”

Says Dr Salil Jain, consultant nephrologist, director and HOD, NephroPlus at Fortis Memorial Research Institute: “Try to take the least amount of salt and sugar. Salt

increases your BP and risk of having stones. Sugar increases your weight which in turn is a risk factor of diabetes. One myth which is very common is that if you drink 2-3 litres of water early in the morning, it helps your kidney health. Maintaining hydration is very important for kidney health, but it has to be maintained throughout the day. So, my suggestion is to take fluid not only in the morning but throughout the day at regular intervals in moderate amounts; 1.5-2litres per day is good enough for a normal person.”

### Food fix

Avoid colas, canned and processed food, packed, instant and pre-made meals. Opt for blueberries, egg whites, buckwheat, olive oil, cabbage, bell peppers and onions to keep your kidneys healthy. According to Dr Manjunath S., consultant nephrologist, BR Life SSNMC Super Specialty Hospital, following a healthy diet plan is of utmost importance in keeping kidneys healthy and preventing various diseases. A kidney-friendly diet not only protects the kidneys, but it also helps stop further progression of the disease in people with existing kidney disease. “A diet plan is usually recommended depending on the type of kidney disease and its severity. An ideal diet plan is to limit intake of sodium, phosphorus and potassium, and consume a healthy amount of protein. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. One may consider including fruits such as apples and pineapples, and vegetables such as cauliflower, cabbage, garlic, onion in the diet. It is imperative to limit intake of food items rich in sodium, phosphorus and potassium, such as bananas, dairy products, processed meats, potatoes, tomatoes, whole-wheat bread and oranges,” he says.

Says Dr Haresh Dodeja, consultant nephrologist, transplant physician and head of renal sciences, Fortis Hospital, Mulund: “A high protein diet is to be avoided, but proteins in normal quantities can be consumed. The most common mistake people make is to

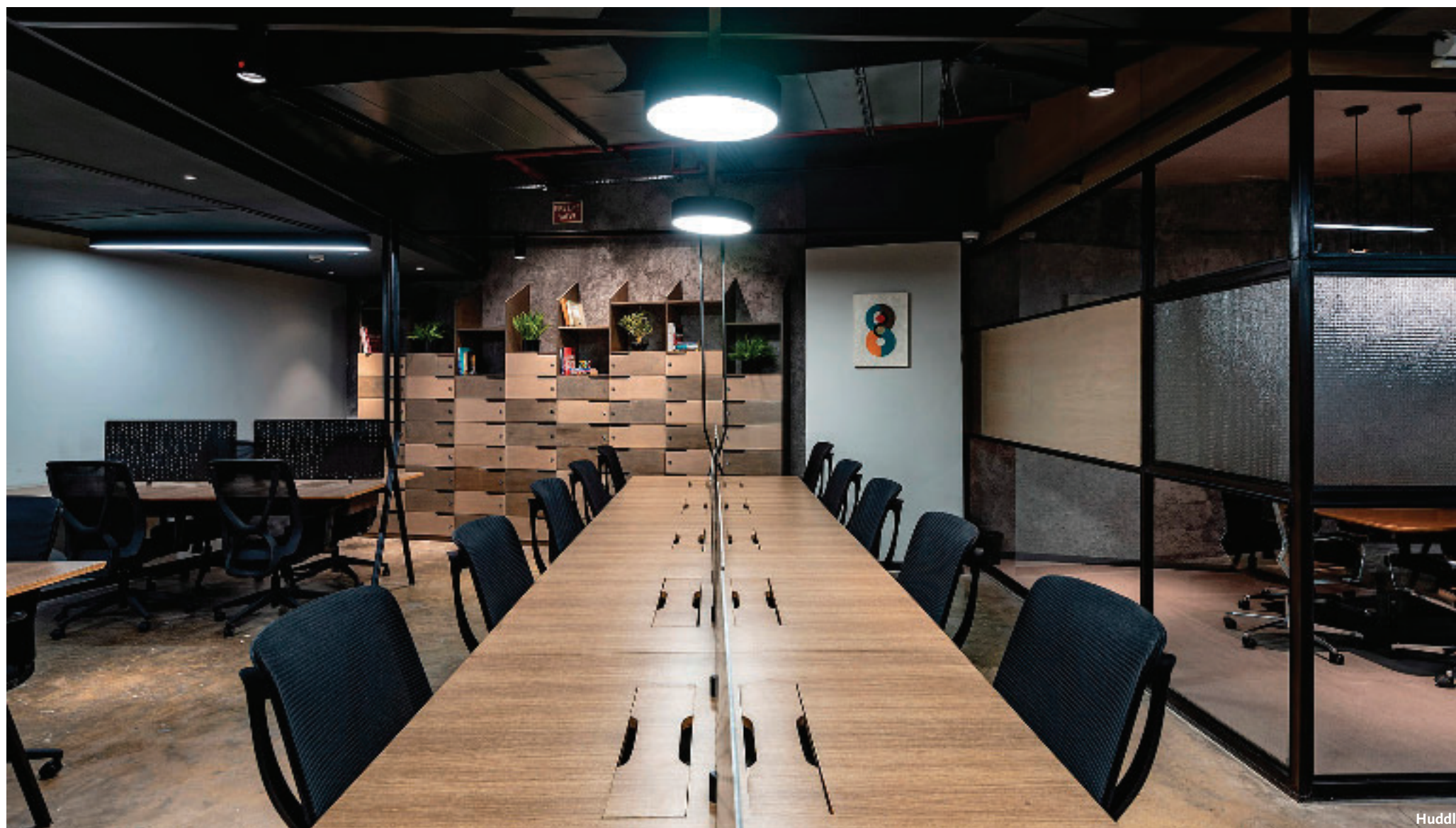
avoid all kinds of proteins. This leads to malnutrition, which harms the patient in the long run.”

“The dietary requirements differ with the stage of kidney disease. For example, for a patient on dialysis, a diet low in fluid, salt, potassium and phosphorous content is advocated. Depending on the kidney disorder, diet modifications are advised. High purine diets are to be avoided in patients with uric acid disorders. In patients with stone disease, high fluid volume intake may be recommended,” says Almeida.

### Health check

To keep your kidneys healthy, opt for tests like urinalysis and serum creatinine test. These tests will be carried out by an expert after which a proper line of treatment will be recommended. People with diabetes should be extra cautious as it can affect your kidneys in a negative way. They may suffer from kidney damage and hence must monitor blood sugar levels on a regular basis. Avoid taking over-the-counter medication that can be risky and only opt for the medications prescribed by the doctor. People with risk factors need to do regular health check-ups to monitor their blood sugar and cholesterol levels. Since most kidney diseases at their initial stage do not show any signs or symptoms, it is recommended to undergo certain tests and know your kidney health. “It is conducted to know how well your kidneys function. The GFR (glomerular filtration rate) will determine the stage of kidney disease. Urine tests help to test the amount of albumin and RBC leakage in your urine. A high amount of albumin indicates early sign of kidney damage,” says Manjunath. In an individual with a history of kidney disease in the family, tests are advised to monitor kidney function or to detect kidney disorder early so that corrective steps or steps to retard the deterioration of kidney disease may be adopted ( for instance, in polycystic kidney disease which runs in families). Urinalysis is one such common test used to screen for kidney disease. □





# Ergonomically speaking

Innovative office designs play an important role in shaping an organisation's culture and future

BY RAJIV DOGRA

**W**hen Manhattan Associates India, which is involved in the development and implementation of supply chain solutions, moved to a new office space in Bengaluru in September 2019, its 1,500 strong work-force got to experience more than just a change of address. The 1,70,000sqft facility has been designed 'to promote agility, openness, and collaboration' among various engineering groups.

On the other hand, the swift rise of the startup culture has seen entrepreneurs opting for office spaces

that are designed keeping in mind the ergonomics, thus promoting innovative and interestingly designed workplaces. For instance, when invoice discounting platform KredX moved to a new facility as part of its expansion spree, the core idea was to locate a space that reflects the team's innate entrepreneurial spirit.

From a simple science relating to desk, chair or lighting re-arrangement, ergonomics is beyond this today. It includes space-planning, acoustics, aesthetics and more. In fact, ergonomically and thoughtfully designed office spaces are key per-

formance indicators of any business setup. A well-designed office space is known to have a significant impact on the productivity and well-being of its employees.

## Beyond cubicles

Ideally, employees spend over 50 per cent of their waking hours in an office and that environment greatly influences their performances and mental framework and consequently the key performance indicator of any organisation. Companies have started recognising that promoting collaboration and team spirit is crucial and an office space should essentially highlight this. "Our spirit is 'push possible' and we want our workplace to reflect the same," says Ushasri Tirumala, senior vice president and general manager, Manhattan Associates India. "The new smart facility provides the capacity, capability and a conducive environment needed to drive focused innovation happening across the organisation. Specific infrastructure and workspaces geared towards 24x7 cloud support operations and service delivery were developed for this purpose," says Tirumala.

Further, she says that office spaces must bring in the various elements of workplace experience, aesthetics, and a place where employees feel happy

and can work efficiently. "In addition to sustainability, one must focus on building the capacity for agility and enhanced productivity, through the implementation of smart technologies," she says.

Similarly, Manish Kumar, CEO and co-founder of KredX says that their new office is something that perfectly imbues the work-life balance. "It is a space where employees feel comfortable and look forward to spending their day in office where we have provided multiple collaboration areas, a library, shower facility, a recreation room, window side lounge seating and more with greenery all around. Each corner has been designed in a way that not only mirrors the brand, but at the same time defines the space with the employees being at the core," says Kumar.

While designing its office space, the startup firm thought of having more open and collaborative spaces—'more of teamwork and no silos'. "We wanted to make the look and feel of the office space more alive so that it is all the more fun and inviting to work. Hence, we tried to utilise maximum space for open collaboration. Our furniture is hand-picked by the team and harmonises impressions with positive cues. Keeping in mind our humble beginning, we created a 'journey wall' in the office that depicts





Green Meeting Room,  
Manhattan Associates

our journey—right from the ideation and inception of the company to our growth and future goals,” says Kumar. In addition, an amphitheatre has also been created where people come together to learn, collaborate and have fun together.

Further, he says that every area within the office serves as a multi-functional area. “We have made sure to provide a mix of casual and formal in all the spaces within the office, even if it is just the pantry with regular seating and high tables where people

choose to sit and work at times, ample meeting rooms with furniture that’s a mix of formal and lounge-style sofas,” says Kumar.

### Ergonomic readymade

At times, health positive amenities

such as ergonomic office chairs, standing desks and natural lighting are expensive to implement for small businesses. However, co-working spaces are providing a suitable option for migrating employees to flexible workspaces that already have these

components set up.

According to the report published by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the co-working industry’s market share in the commercial office space leasing industry in India has increased to 12 per cent in 2019.

“Our office spaces are designed keeping people in mind, we ensure that our setup is based on how people work and the environment they feel comfortable in. Our designs include enough natural light, open spaces and community areas where people can meet each other, interact and hold events. We ensure that desks in offices are spaced out well so that each person gets enough space,” says Nakul Mathur, managing director, Avanta India, which operates multiple business centres offering unbranded, flexible office space, virtual offices and meeting rooms.

While going into details, Mathur says that each workstation is ergonomically designed and is flexible enough to be comfortable to different body types. “We ensure that each work desk has 300-400 lux levels which are the right intensity of light for anyone to work without straining their eyes. Chairs are an important part of a workstation and it is very important that it provides lumbar support, should be height adjustable and deep enough for thighs to fit in. It is important to ensure that the backrest is flexible enough and that chair does not topple over if one bends backwards while sitting,” he says.

Similarly, Ishaan Khosla, co-founder and partner, Huddle, which is a startup incubator, says that the approach to design thinking was heavily dependent on the ambience their company wanted to create. “We ensured a heavy focus on colours, a mix of materials and lighting to create a vibrant space. Keeping the co-working persona in mind, we wanted to create a space that would suit a variety of different audiences, so we ensured maintaining a bold yet sophisticated

outlook,” says Khosla.

Understanding the end-user profile and having flexibility in offerings is key to a co-working space, points out Khosla. “We understood that we will be entertaining teams of various sizes, hence ensured we build our space accordingly. At Huddle, we have multiple workstations with different seating capacities—this way each team gets their privacy while enjoying the collaborative environment of a shared workspace,” he says.

### The first move

Essentially, making an ergonomic office space takes a lot of effort in planning right from day one. It is important to have the right architect, the right consultants on board before a company starts the project and it is also quite important to give them the right brief, points out Mathur. “Often people cut corners to save cost which turns out to be more expensive in the long run as they end up with an office which is not comfortable to work—everything from not meeting the fire regulations to complying to basic health and safety standards,” he says.

However, for companies that have gone a step ahead when it comes to innovative and ergonomic workplace while keeping in mind the needs of its employees, the results in terms of overall enthusiasm and productivity remain quite positive. “Our associates are leveraging maximum use of all facilities such as the open thinking spaces, collaboration areas, and green rooms, among others. Teams are able to collaborate better and there is visible difference after we moved to our new campus,” says Tirumala.

Similarly, Kumar remains quite upbeat about the new workspace. “It is great to see the pride with which our employees talk about their new office space and click pictures to share with their friends and families,” he says.

In short, there can be so much more to a swanky new office lobby than meets the eye. As for innovation and ergonomics, it is just the beginning. □



# Birth like a boss

A blend of hypnosis, visualisation, relaxation and deep breathing, hypnobirthing is gaining popularity among young mothers

BY NIVEDITA JAYARAM PAWAR

For most of their lives, women have been besieged with negative stories of birthing experiences. They have been conditioned to believe that pain and fear is synonymous with childbirth. This is problematic, because fear causes muscle tension, which exacerbates the pain in labour. The result is exactly what they feared most—long, painful birthing or unnecessary intervention.

However, for a growing number of women, hypnobirthing is transforming the birth experience. A relatively new technique hypnobirthing involves self-hypnosis, guided imagery and special breathing techniques to combat fear and pain during labour. In the guided sessions, women learn to trust that their bodies know how to bring their babies into the world in the calm and gentle way that nature intended.

A hit among celebrity mummies like Gisele Bündchen, Jessica Alba and Kalki Koechlin, hypnobirthing has now gone mainstream with classes available at various places. Many midwives and doulas (a trained professional who provides physical, emotional and informational support to a mother before, during and shortly after the childbirth) are learning the technique. Angelina Jolie is also said to have tried the technique; even the Duchess of Cambridge Kate Middleton opted this when she delivered Prince George and Princess Charlotte. “There has been a lot of media coverage in the past few years of the increasing number of unnecessary caesarians and interventions by hospitals. This has led to increased awareness among families who now understand that a baby born naturally is the best way to bring a life into the world. A lot of new parents are opting for hypnobirthing and waterbirths due to their ability to help a labouring mother achieve a complete intervention-free delivery,” says Sanam Manchanda a certified doula who helped Koechlin with her birthing. But is the birthing technique, worth a try?

And how does hypnobirthing actually work?

## The basics

Hypnobirthing is not a new phenomenon. The practice is based on the research of British obstetrician Dr Grantley Dick-Reid, who published the book *Childbirth Without Fear* in 1933.



An advocate for natural childbirth, he believed that when a woman is worried or scared during labour, blood and oxygen is diverted away from the uterus, causing tension and pain. But when a woman remains calm and relaxed, the uterine muscles will avoid tension, allowing the body to produce oxytocin and endorphins, which are a natural pain reliever.

Leading US hypnotherapist Marie Mongan later took this theory and created an antenatal education programme based on self-hypnosis, the aim of which was maximum relaxation during labour and delivery. Breathing exercises have long been part of antenatal classes. Hypnobirthing takes this and adds relaxation, visualisation and mindfulness techniques to put the mother in control of what is happening to her body during childbirth.

### All in the mind

Hypnobirthing techniques are learnt along with the birthing partner (spouse, mother or mother-in-law) at special antenatal classes. “It is all about sending suggestions to the mind that everything will be fine. It is a normal process and a healthy baby is going to be born in a natural way. All through the process we also speak to the baby—‘you are in a place of love, you are wanted, you are loved, you are healthy, you are happy and you will come when the time is right.’ It takes around six sessions for the mind to accept it. We go through the entire process of delivery under hypnosis. The mother is also given a recording with the suggestion which can be played at home at night,” explains Dr Maria Vasudevan, clinical hypnotherapist.

Unlike the stereotype, in hypnobirthing, nobody swings a pocket watch back and forth to lull a mother to sleep during labour. It doesn’t involve any chanting or sleeping during labour. “In fact, the mothers stay awake during the process, but train themselves to calm down so that they may appear as if they are sleeping. Some use instrumental music, rhythms

and affirmations. They are encouraged to visualise a relaxed place or a goal like cuddling with their newborn,” says Vasudevan

Pain is the biggest fear for most mothers. “Under hypnosis, we induce physical pain and prepare them for labour. We poke them gently with a sharp object. Under normal circumstances they would flinch and pull back but under hypnosis they don’t feel the pain. We increase the pain gradually to escalate their tolerance. The entire process relaxes the mind and every muscle in the pelvic area. We ask them to imagine that when the spasms come and its time to push the baby out, it is just a gentle wave. When a person listens to these suggestions everyday it goes deep down into their subconsciousness. In the altered state of consciousness, the pain experienced in labour becomes a controlled sensation for the woman. Finally, when the actual birthing takes place, she is completely relaxed,” says Vasudevan.

Hypnobirthing mothers will still be aware of everything going on around them but they will be able to chat and be in good spirits. Self-hypnosis allows them to be fully relaxed and totally in control, able to ‘tune out’ the negative feelings and concerns. Dr Gayathri Kamath, senior consultant, obstetrics and gynecology, Fortis Hospital, Bannerghatta road, says hypnobirthing works because it helps to remove the fear many women feel about childbirth. “Childbirth is a painful experience and hypnobirthing revolves around making this process a nature-driven event with less usage of medications or instrumentation. It also helps the labouring woman to be calm with the help of breathing techniques and face labour as it comes. I do not recommend hypnobirthing to all pregnant women but I strongly suggest it to women who opt for a cesarean section due to the fear of labour,” she says. According to her, many a times, these women come around when they are sensitised about the pain relief options which are available or when they meet women



who have delivered naturally. “There is still a small subset who despite our counseling and stressing the merits of natural birth versus a cesarean section still choose the latter. Such women may immensely benefit from hypnobirthing classes,” she says. Gayathri however cautions that hypnobirthing practitioners should also know the limitations involved and work in tandem with health care providers with professional training in childbirth.

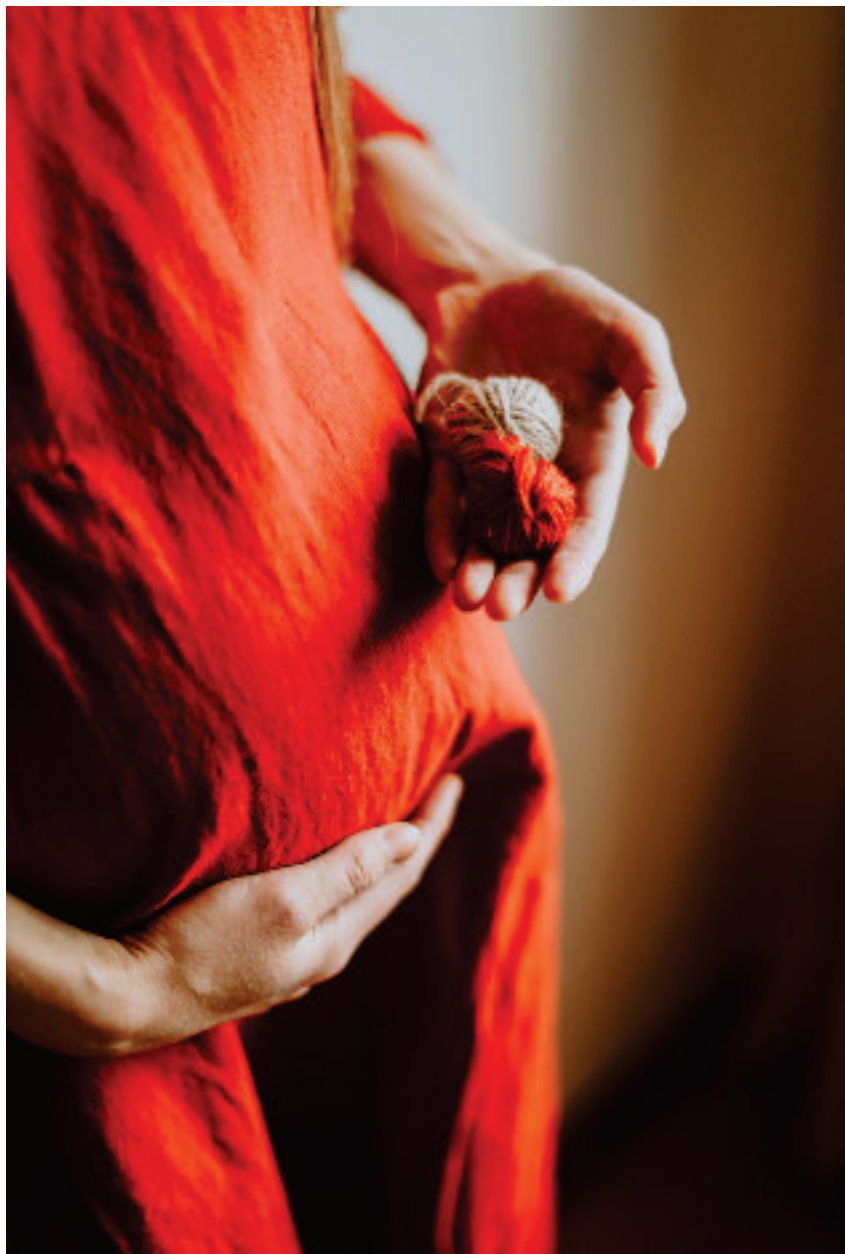
According to Manchanda, the main difference she notes with couples who choose hypnobirthing over other methods is preparedness. “When I watch a to-be-mother during labour, I can actually tell by her body language if she has done a hypnobirthing course. Hypnobirthing mothers have a much higher chance of achieving a natural birth, due to the increased levels of relaxation they manage to achieve during the labour process,”

she says. Hypnobirthing can help the mother manage stress hormones, such as adrenalin, and reduce anxiety, which should lead to a calmer birth. During labour, the body produces a chemical called oxytocin, which helps progress the labour. Stress hormones affect the production of oxytocin and make the labour longer. Managing stress may also help to reduce some of the fear and pain experienced during labour.

### Mothers say it all

Many mothers who have tried hypnobirthing swear by it as a powerful and transformative experience. Hypnotherapy helped Tripti Bhatia Gandhi, founder and CEO of public relations company Detales Brand Communications, keep a positive attitude throughout the pregnancy. “The hypnotherapy sessions teach you to prepare for whatever comes your way. This was extremely helpful for me





mended that we take hypnobirthing classes and also work with a doula as we wanted to go in for water birth. He mentioned that this would make us aware of the whole water birthing process and prepare us for it. Talking to the baby, sending positive affirmations to the baby, breathing techniques, meditation and mental exercises where we visualised the birthing process ensured that I stay calm and focused when I got into labour. The result was absolutely phenomenal. It would have been impossible to achieve the birth I envisioned without hypnobirthing,” she says.

Essentially, hypnobirthing is like meditating while in labour. It combines deep breathing, relaxation, positive thoughts and upbeat language, as well as visualisation techniques to make the mother feel confident and, ultimately, making the birthing process easier.

### Tips for hypnobirthing

- › Do all your research as early as possible and find the team and birth place that will support you and your needs the best.
- › What we hear and see during this period impacts the birth. Speak to women who have had positive birth experiences. This helps to boost confidence.
- › Start hypnobirthing as early as possible; ideally from 24 weeks or earlier if you are particularly anxious.
- › Practise as often as you can so that the techniques will become automatic during the birth.
- › Listening to positive affirmations and hypnobirthing audio tracks daily will boost your sense of optimism and help you to ignore all the negativity surrounding the birth.
- › Ensure your partner is on board. If not, think about who might support you in your practices and help you feel good throughout the birth.
- › Practising daily in the lead up to birth will reduce anxiety. With time, you can shift from panic and fear to excitement. □

since I had to undergo an emergency cesarean section. Focusing on relaxation while letting go of distracting thoughts is essential when you go through pain post delivery. I could barely feel this pain throughout my pregnancy and before we knew it, I was on my feet the next day after my delivery.” Bhatia would listen to recorded sessions at night before going to bed and practised breathing techniques taught in class. A session with her husband also helped him

prepare for the delivery and maintain a positive attitude throughout.

Women choosing to have a hypnobirth say their experience of childbirth is not only less painful, it is also an empowering event that helps to set a positive mark to the start of motherhood. Hypnobirthing helped Vanika Choudhary, founder, Sequel, one of Mumbai’s most popular organic brand, create a pre-birthing bond with the baby. “My gynaecologist Dr Ameeth Durandhar recom-

# ◀ exhale

CELEBRATE LIFE, CHOICES AND CHALLENGES

Spilled some hot wax on your shaggy carpet? No problem. Just put a paper bag over the wax and lightly go over the area with a steam iron. The steam will help lift the wax from the carpet and cause it to cling to the bag instead. If you ever spill candle wax on a piece of furniture, don't risk ruining its finish by trying to scrape it off. Instead, fill a plastic bag with ice cubes, place it over the wax, and let it sit for a few minutes. Once the wax has sufficiently cooled and hardened, you can pick it up easily without ruining your furniture's finish or fabric.





# RACE ACE

From basic karting to being India's first female Formula 4 racer, **Mira Erda** says she is breaking stereotypes, one lap at a time. Formula 1 is her ultimate goal

BY OSHIN GRACE DANIELL | PHOTOGRAPHS BY SYAM BABU



**T**he first time Mira Erda drove a go-kart, she thudded into a wall and the steering wheel hit her stomach. “The experience shook me,” says the first Indian woman racer to compete

in Formula 4 SEA Championship. Until then, she had only sat on her brother Vrajesh’s lap while he drove the go-kart. “As an eight-year-old I enjoyed the wind in my hair and the whole idea of karting. Soon, I wanted to drive it myself,” she says. That minor accident did not stop her from driving again, though. Soon, she was racing with her brothers.

But the biggest influence was her father, Kirit Erda, who was passionate about motor sports. “My father started a go-karting space in Vadodara because he wanted to do something related to his passion—motor sports. I think the passion flows in the blood,” says the 20-year-old from Gujarat. It was after her father took her to a professional go-karting race in Pune that she decided to take up the sport; she was nine at the time. “There was a serious accident there but, surprisingly, it did not scare me. My major concern was that there weren’t any girls in the race. At that moment, I decided to take up the sport more seriously because I wanted to prove that girls can do anything,” says the girl who qualified for the prestigious W Series in 2019—an all-women single-seater championship in which 18 racers from around the world faced off in F3-spec race cars.

Clad in a pair of denim pants, a white tee and a pink sweatshirt, Mira looks calm despite her flight getting delayed by almost 45 minutes. She quickly gets into narrating her story in the most fascinating manner. “How can a nine-year-old girl say no when her own father asks her if she wants to race professionally?” she asks. “At that point it wasn’t even about competing. I just wanted to have fun.”

Interestingly, her first race came just 25 days after she started training—she competed in the 2010 JK Tyre National Rotax Max Championship in India. Later that year, she also went for her first international race at the Plus Yamaha SL International Challenge in Malaysia. “I was the only girl in the 9-13 category (micromax category). You had to see the look on the faces of the boys there. They were restless and they tried to scare me a bit off track. Everyone there, except me, was super experienced. But I did not let that get to me,” she says.

In 2011, she bagged the award for the Best Improved Driver of the year at the national JK Racing Championship. And in its 2014 edition, she was the youngest Formula IV girl driver at the age of 14. She continued to train and perform consistently and became the Formula IV Rookie Champion of the Year 2016 and was honoured by the Federation of Motor Sports Club of India—the governing body of motorsports in India—with the Outstanding Woman In Motorsports award.

Another feather in her cap came when she became the first Indian woman to race in the Euro JK series, one of the highest classes of Formula racing in India. “People say women can’t drive but I am breaking all stereotypes, one lap at a time,” she says. Mira



WARDROBE: STYLIST'S OWN  
WAIST BAG: STEVE MADDEN  
JEWELLERY (RING): ADORE BY PRIYANKA



### MY FITNESS REGIME

My fitness regime mostly consists of body weight workouts, CrossFit, skipping, kickboxing, Pilates and some weight training. I love trying out different workouts every day. So, I try to find out different ways to focus on my strength and stamina.

I train around two hours every day. It starts off with five to ten minutes of running or cycling. Then I do 500 skips, three to four sets of pull-ups without support. Around four sets of supported pull-ups with different grips. And then I get into the main workout. Towards the end of my regimen, I hit the monkey bars, I do a handstand and a headstand, ring workouts and basic stretches.

WARDROBE MICHELLE EDWARD  
JEWELLERY ADORE BY PRIYANKA

### WHAT IS ON MIRA'S PLATE?

**Early morning:** A glass of water with squeezed lemon/a glass of warm water with turmeric/water with cinnamon powder

**Breakfast:** Celery orange juice with some chia seeds. Berries and nuts. Green smoothie made of apple, spinach and some nuts, or maca pancakes and almond milk with avocados and strawberries

**Mid-morning:** Mixed fruit salad and two eggs. Sometimes, it is sweet potato toast, or just energy bars

**Lunch:** Big bowl of salad with a lot of vegetables. Or, bajra roti and drumstick curry. And sometimes avocado toast and Greek yoghurt.

**Snack:** Coconut water with chia seeds and strawberries

**Dinner:** Spiral vegetable noodles with steamed vegetables in pesto sauce. Sometimes it is sweet potato baked fries with broccoli almond soup



// **WHEN I DRIVE ON OUR ROADS, I DON'T SPEED. I AM SCARED TO EVEN OVERTAKE ANOTHER CAR. ON THE TRACK, EVEN WHEN I AM GOING AT OVER 200KMPH, I FEEL IT IS NOT FAST ENOUGH.**

does not shy away from talking about her defeats as well. "I learn from my defeats. I was not at my best in 2017 and 2018. I had a couple of defeats during the time but the key is to keep learning and not compare. I will never try to become someone else. I just strive to be the best version of myself," she says. She also emphasises on her family's support, and says she wouldn't have made it this far without them. And it is not just her father and brother who cheer her on. Her mother, Nima, was excited when Mira decided to take up racing. "For my first training programme in Kolhapur, the family travelled together in our Wagon R," she says.

It is close to midnight when we reach the hotel where she is put up, and we decide to dine out. "I eat non-vegetarian food but anything vegetarian works for me now. Nothing South Indian, though. I come to Coimbatore quite a lot for my training and races and all we have there is South Indian food. I am tired of all the sambars, dosas and biriyanis," she says. She goes for a cheesy pasta dish and one could tell that

the girl loves her cheese. Time for dessert. Mira tastes a bit of tiramisu, goes for another scoop and gets her dessert packed. "I'll just relax for a bit and have it later in my room. Tomorrow is going to be a long day, right?" she says, referring to the shoot day.

It is an early start on shoot day and, before the action starts, she takes a tour of THE WEEK's office. "I am studying mass media. However, I have not yet decided on what to

specialise in, but I think I have a flair for journalism. Not print media, more of television. In fact, racing and meeting media people inspired me to take up the course. It is great to actually see a media house," she says.

As the pre-shoot arrangements kick in, Mira watches the action like a curious child. She gets her first coat of makeup on and we are set to head to our first shoot site—The Yacht Club in Kochi. On the way, Mira comments on the traffic in the city. "When I drive on our roads, I don't speed. I am scared to even overtake another car," she says. "On the track, even when I am going at over 200kmph, I feel it is not fast enough."

According to Mira, the best part of being a racer is forgetting everything when you put on the helmet. "You are like a lion that wants to get out of the cage and chase its prey. The green lights go off and then it is all about you, your vehicle and the track. I just get lost when I am driving. There is always this small fear that I might lose control but I have learnt to believe in my car.



WARDROBE AYAT BY MARZIE  
NECKPIECE FROZENNATURETOUCH  
RING DAIVIK





**AT A GLANCE**

**A hobby that you once had and not anymore.**  
Reading. I think it is because I don't have the time nowadays and I get sleepy.

**Your first crush.**  
I never really had the time to check out boys. I always race with them and it is a hate and love relationship.

**A show you binge-watched.**  
I watch a lot of thriller movies and series on Netflix.

**Midnight indulgence.**  
Chocolate. Any dessert for that matter, but it should have a lot of chocolate in it.

**Your biggest strength.**  
I think it is the fact that I am focused and I know what I am supposed to do when I am on the race track or any other field for that matter.

**Your biggest nightmare.**  
I think it would be losing a race where I could have done better or I expected to do better.

**If the genie in the lamp granted you three wishes what would they be?**

Number one, that I would get to race in the international-level competitions all through my life; number two, that I would get to eat a lot of food. And three, that I get to drive a lot and enjoy more than I am doing right now.

**Most prized possession.**  
My race car, my helmet and my overalls. I am so connected to my car that I don't really let anybody touch it.

**A lie you told your parents that you distinctly remember.**

I was at the college and my father was outside. I was the only one inside the campus and I told my father that there are many others with me. He caught me eventually though.

**If you had just one day to live, what would you do that entire day?**

Eat and drive. I would go to the race track and take a lot of food along with me. When I take breaks in between driving, I will eat food. These are two things I love doing.

**Suppose your house catches fire, what are the three things that you would take along with you?**

My phone, my charger and my racing gear.

WARDROBE MICHELLE EDWARD  
JEWELLERY DAIVIK





PANTS AYAT BY MARZIE  
TOP STYLIST'S OWN

The car does not know gender; it does not treat me like a female racer, just a racer," says the Red Bull athlete.

The car she drives now is a Formula 4 BMW, which comes under the racing regulations mandating a 1,600cc capacity and capping the maximum power output at 160bhp (119.3kW), which is higher than Formula Ford and lower than Formula Renault. "We don't buy the cars, we usually rent them. The car I race in has pedal shifters, gear on the steering wheel and a 1200cc modified engine. Just like the normal cars, we have the accelerator, brake and clutch, but we use the clutch for neutral and first gears only," she explains. She also has a special rakhi for her car. "I always tie it to my car before any race. I talk to my car; I keep letting out positive affirmations. I also have an idol of my goddess near the steering wheel; minutes before the race starts, I touch the idol, relax and imagine good things. It is my calming mechanism," she says.

According to Mira, most racers experience stress before the race and it is normal. "First of all, we stretch it out. We have a cycle of thoughts most of the time so we try to calm that. If we are under a lot of pressure, we feel pain in our legs and have doubts like 'What if we mess up?' But when the green lights go off, all these thoughts just vapourise," she says. Mira goes on to talk about her plans to upgrade this year. "I want to try Formula 3 this year or the next. If I am experienced enough to try the F3 car I might try to race in F3 Asia, even for one round. I just want to see how I perform and how the car works. But the

**IF WE ARE UNDER A LOT OF PRESSURE, WE FEEL PAIN IN OUR LEGS AND HAVE DOUBTS LIKE 'WHAT IF WE MESS UP?' BUT WHEN THE GREEN LIGHTS GO OFF, ALL THESE THOUGHTS JUST VAPOURISE.**



WARDROBE AYAT BY MARZIE  
RING ADORE BY PRIYANKA





WARDROBE STYLIST'S OWN  
SHOES STEVE MADDEN  
JEWELLERY (RING) ADORE BY PRIYANKA

STYLED BY JOBINA VINCENT  
MAKE UP BY SHIVA KUMAR  
HAIR BY VIJAYALAKSHMI



**RACING IS AN EXPENSIVE SPORT. SO, FOR MY RACING TEAM, I CHARGE ONLY THE BASIC COST. I AM FROM A MIDDLE-CLASS BACKGROUND AND I KNOW HOW DIFFICULT IT IS TO BE A RACER.**



ultimate aim is to get to Formula 1," she says.

As we get into the first leg of the shoot, Mira marches onto the shoot floor in her black outfit with red killer-heel-boots. She hops onto the bar stool, arches her back and without being given any directions, gets into character. After a bit, she begins to complain about the humidity but does not stop posing for the camera. She nods in approval as the photographer gives her a glimpse of some of the shots and rushes to the changing room for the next look.

After another comment on the sunny day, she goes on to talk about her racing wear. "It is very hot inside my racing suit; it is made of thick fire-resistant material. Unlike the boys, I have long hair, so it gets even more hot," she says. The suit costs over a lakh and the shoes, around 20 grand. The inevitable question—how do you wash it? "My father washes it for me. He usually washes it with a mild detergent to take off the oil and grease stains," she says. "Racing is an expensive sport. So, for my racing team, I charge only the basic cost. I am from a middle-class background and I know how difficult it is to be a racer."

After a couple of shots near the pool, the crew gets ready for a speed boat ride for the shoot in the inland. As the boat gets into full throttle, Mira's yellow gown looks

like a dream. She puts her hands up in the air and screams as her curled hair dances in the wind. As the boat gets close to land, Mira longingly looks at the water. The wind has done quite some damage to the heat curls and the makeup artist gets to work. The photographer points to a dry bush as Mira balances in her boots with a three-inch heel. "There must be creepy crawly bugs there. And spiders. I am not a fan of bugs," she says. But despite

the hesitation she strikes a couple of poses near the bush.

The sun shows no pity and keeps on messing with her makeup. But thanks to her good skin texture, regular touch-ups weren't really needed. The crew then creates a makeshift changing room with pool towels and gets her into her next outfit. She seems calmer in the emerald green gown. She grabs the stylist's sunglasses and hops into the speedboat. "There is a picturesque place near the branches," she tells the photographer. As the boat gets close to the place Mira pointed at, a dry tree in the shallow area gets in the way. "Even this tree looks pretty," she exclaims, and gets ready to climb it. With help, she gets on top of the lowest branch. One wrong step, and she would be swimming in the famed Vembanad Lake. But she has it under control. The outdoor shoot over, it is time to head back to the studio.

She zips up her race suit for the final shoot. One can see a sparkle of pride and passion as she walks past the camera lights. Her hair in a high pony, her helmet carefully balanced between her hand and hip and her eyes radiating her love for the sport—the picture spoke a thousand words. The lights fire and the camera captures her story—the story of battles won and demons slayed. □





what  
I ate  
today

## Lucky girl

### Priya Mahajan on her diet and fitness regime

I started my journey in 2018 with a bag full of big dreams. Although people thought I was too young to start at the time, I always knew that I will find my footing. When I shifted from Delhi to Mumbai, I was very nervous. Contrary to what I had thought, the city welcomed me with open arms and I just felt comfortable, almost instantly. I enjoyed every bit of it. But I guess I have just been really lucky because I started getting

work within a week of moving into the city. And somehow that streak of luck has never really faded off because I have always found work even in the toughest times or even when I was not even looking for it.

Balaji will always be very near to my heart and it feels like my very own family. I got an opportunity to be part of *Kasauti Zindagi Ki* for which I am ever grateful. Apart from that, I have worked in some

commercials as well. Every single project has made me learn a different aspect of acting and playing a new role.

A fun fact about me—I was in the basketball team of my school; LeBron James is my all-time favourite.

When it comes to keeping my mind and body in shape, I am someone who sticks to routines. I do have my cheat days which are actually more than the days I work out or eat healthy because, why not? But generally, I do not believe in hardcore exercises. I just prefer following a proper diet routine

#### Priya's Diet

**Early morning:** A glass of warm water with a little ginger in it.

**Breakfast:** Oats with fruits or a sandwich. I try to keep it light in the mornings so that I remain flexible throughout the day.

**Lunch:** Rice and dal or chicken. Rice is my staple go-to food; I can eat it with anything.

**Dinner:** I prefer having a salad with roasted chicken or fish. Nothing too heavy for the last meal of the day. But I like to give equal-opportunity to junk food. I mean I love everything on the junk food list—pizza, fried chicken, fries—you name it, I eat it.

Switch off electronics an hour before bedtime; it is beneficial for good hormone functioning and aids good sleep. Regular meal timings help prevent cravings and unnecessary indulgences.

Karishma Chawla, nutritionist and lifestyle educator.



#### Nutrition advice

- \* Start the day with ginger water as it is great for digestion.
- \* Breakfast can be good carbohydrates like oats or red rice poha, moong dal chilla. Consume whole wheat bread sandwich sparingly as it has a certain amount of sugar. Add a serving of protein to complete the meal—eggs or protein shakes.
- \* Fruits are ideal in the first half of the day. Add a vegetable smoothie to your diet; it is a powerhouse of energy and helps to detoxify the body.
- \* Replace white rice with brown or red. It is high in fibre and helps to prevent insulin spike and keep body fat percentage in check; it also contains phytonutrients. Consume 1-2 cups of fibre in the form of soups or salads.

because that is where it all starts. And being able to control and manage what I am consuming in a day helps my body a lot. But I do try and squeeze in some cardio thrice a week and try yoga at times. And I like to keep switching it up, but my favourite form of exercise is definitely dancing. I try reading before bedtime but mostly close the book ten minutes in and switch to Netflix. I also love sneaking out of my room for some midnight snack. I think midnight Maggi just tastes better than any other time of the day.

As told to Oshin Grace Daniell

smile

INDULGE YOUR SENSES, HAVE FUN



There are few things more frustrating than trying to remove a garbage bag from the bin—like finding it stuck to the bottom of the trash can. Before you squirm in disgust, check out this hack that won't even take five seconds. All you have to do is drill a small hole in the bottom of your trash can to get rid of the vacuum-like seal that often makes the bags stick. Here is another trash can tip. Before you toss another watery mess into your trash bag, put some old newspaper to the bottom first. By adding that layer, you can catch and absorb leaky messes before they drip on you come trash day.





Spinach, spring onion and water chestnut momos at Fabcafe by Fabindia

# Green is the new Black

The unstoppable rise of vegetarianism in India is making chefs and restaurateurs alter their menus and go beyond paneer and 'mock meat' to truly embrace the opportunities offered by plant-based food

BY NIVEDITA JAYARAM PAWAR

An increasing awareness of health and the environment, and compassion for animals are goading many (especially youngsters) to go for the greens. Some see it as a good way to detox. Whether you are helping your waistline or the planet by eating less meat, the fact remains that vegetarians today are much better served than they were before.

## Going green is easier

Turning into a vegetarian has become more appealing and accessible, thanks to the year-round availability of fresh produce, more vegetarian dining options and the growing culinary influence of cultures with largely plant-based diets. "We definitely see the demand for vegetarian food going up in our restaurant. There has been a lot of awareness about plant-based living through healthy lifestyle publications

and documentaries like *The Game Changers* which advocate a plant-based lifestyle for health and environmental reasons," says Rebekah Blank, brand head at Fabcafe by Fabindia. At Yauatcha, the Cantonese dim sum teahouse, the number of vegetarian dishes sold in 2019 as compared with 2018 has gone up by 30 per cent. "A large number of Cantonese people are Buddhist and hence Cantonese cuisine has traditionally used vegetarian ingredients. Since inception, we have been importing a lot of native Asian ingredients like taro root, different variety for mushrooms and lotus root that work very well here, are good meat substitutes and are widely used in Cantonese food," says Abhishek Bindal, vice president of operations at Ka Hospitality, the company that operates Yauatcha, Hakkasan, Nara and CinCin.

A vegetable-rich, meatless diet can be extremely interesting and

flavourful. There are ample meatless dishes in every type of cuisine, so you'll never be left wanting variety. The ease of cooking also plays a major role. Vegetarian meals are generally easy to rustle up. Plus, you can make any of your favourite nonvegetarian dishes by substituting with meat alternatives. At Fabcafe, vegetarians are served a Quinoa Kathal Biryani where the kathal (raw jackfruit) creates a nice vegetarian meaty texture while the quinoa spikes up the protein intake for vegetarians. Momos crafted with jackfruit flour is another hot seller. There are lots of vegetarian cookbooks available as well. "Food taste is simply not animal-protein-dependent. There are herbs, spices, cooking methods, sauces and marinades that contribute towards aroma, taste and flavour. The correct roasting of spices, the addition of herbs at the right time, the cooking of sauces, using vegetable stock or veg-





Beetroot and papad seekh at Ishaara

etable liquor as it is referred to will all aid in creating a delicious vegetarian dish,” says Prashant Issar, co-founder, Ishaara a modern Indian cuisine restaurant in Mumbai.

### Chefs to the rescue

Years ago, being a vegetarian was not all roses. Dining at a restaurant for vegetarians meant eight types of paneer and an equal number of potato dishes or a wilted salad made from discarded lettuce and tomatoes that didn’t look pretty enough to go on a cheese-burger. But in recent years, things have changed drastically.

As an increasing number of people adopt plant-based diets around the world, restaurants and chefs are eager to cater to the growing trend by creating vegetarian menu options. Forget paneer and potatoes. Enter avocado,

### Change ahead

*Recent convert to the green brigade? These simple tips may help*

- ❖ Consider making the change gradually, for example, over a month.
- ❖ Get some tips and recipes from vegetarian websites or a nutritionist.
- ❖ Make a weekly shopping and meal plan.
- ❖ Focus on a variety of meat-free dishes that provide sufficient proteins, so that you do not end up overeating. Vary the diet with whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts and so on.
- ❖ Italian, Greek and Middle Eastern foods offer many meatless options such as pasta primavera, pasta marinara, falafel, couscous, minestrone soup, eggplant dishes, Greek salads and tabbouleh.
- ❖ Most restaurants can make vegetarian modifications to menu items by adding vegetables, tofu, beans or pasta in place of meat.
- ❖ Vegetables high in umami include asparagus, tomatoes, seaweed, peas, corn and onions. Soyfoods, including tofu and edamame and seaweed are also good places to find umami.



Edamame with yuzu at Vice Global Tapas Bar



Paneer dori kebab at Ishaara

zucchini, broccoli, leek, cherry tomato, asparagus, quinoa, chia seeds, exotic cheese and herbs. Vegetarian cooking is enjoying a makeover, prompting meat-eaters to put down their steak knives. “As a chef I started noticing a shift to vegetarianism some years back. It picked up momentum in the last few years,” says partner and chef Rakesh Talwar who takes many inventive leaps with his vegetarian menu at Vice Global Tapas Bar. “Plant-based dishes can be enhanced with umami flavours, sauces like siracha, almond milk and techniques like smoking. At Vice I simply blanch edamame (young soya beans) and sprinkle it with yuzu which gives it a slight citrusy flavour

and enhances the whole eating experience. Paneer tikka gochujang is another of my favorite experiments, where gochujang a Korean fermented chili paste is paired with paneer and cooked in the tandoor. Even the Koreans wouldn’t have thought of this!” says the chef.

Yauatcha, which has an extensive vegetarian menu, is another place that’s pushing the culinary envelope. Their truffle and edamame dim sum combine edamame with the widely used modern-age ingredient—truffle. “The slight addition of truffle oil, enhances the taste of the edamame giving the dim sum a very earthy, nutty, umami flavour which is a big hit at our





Gochujang paneer tikka at The Terrace



restaurant,” says Bindal. Masala Library Mumbai, the culinary laboratory of Zorawar Kalra, does a fabulous take on a deeply comforting Indian staple—dal chawal—with the dal chawal arancini (panko fried dal chawal balls) served with tomato onion salsa. Farzi Café in Gurugram uses strong elements of molecular gastronomy to offer dishes like nimboo achar caviar and makhan wali kaali daal ka shorba. The idea is to not just create an equal choice for the

customers with vegetarian leaning, but also make it exciting.

For chef Keith Lawrence of The Terrace, it's easy to be veg-inspired in these times when the markets and grocery stores are overflowing with gorgeous produce such as purple cabbage, black rice, avocado, black quinoa, habanero and cashew cheese. Vegetarian meals are the perfect way to put it all to delicious use. His dish orange cheddar stuffed tandoori

mushrooms is one of the bestsellers at the restaurant. “Imagine the burst of flavours when the salty cheddar melts in the tandoor and combines with the fiery tandoori masala and meets with the green chutney on the plate?” he asks. At Ishaara, vegetarians are treated to the lavish and extravagantly plated tandoori broccoli served on a bed of creme fraiche a sour cream. “The process takes about 48 hours but the sourness and chill of the creme



Ratatouille provençale at Soufflé Si'l Vous Plaît, Churchgate

fraiche balance the pungency of the chili oil marinated broccoli,” explains Issar. Another tantalising dish the paneer dori kebab (a lamb dori alternative) involves a malai paneer pate grilled on a wooden skewer with a thread running along the length, which is pulled at the table to unzip the dish onto the plate.

Even the humble carrot gets a star treatment at Soufflé S'il Vous Plait a French restaurant and the latest addi-

tion to South Mumbai's gastronomical scene. Simply titled 'Carottes', this entrée features the humble root vegetable done in six ways—carrot biscuit using a dehydrated carrot powder instead of regular flour, carrots cut very thinly and kept on ice and folded with basil pesto, cooked carrots glazed with butter and ginger, a base of carrot and cumin puree and finished with crispy carrot chips seasoned with a carrot vinaigrette.

## Why go green?

Whether you're a part-time vegetarian or someone who treats it as a lifestyle, there are various reasons to be vegetarian, health being primary. Plant-based eating has been linked with all sorts of health benefits, including a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and coronary heart disease.

Traditionally, research into vegetarianism focused mainly on potential nutritional deficiencies, but in recent years, the pendulum has swung the other way, and studies are confirming the health benefits of going meat-free. Nowadays, plant-based eating is recognised as not just a way to reduce the risk for many chronic illnesses but also nutritionally sufficient. According to Anushka Baidur, senior dietitian, Fortis Hospital, Bengaluru, cutting out nonvegetarian food completely from our meals will not affect us much if we substitute the nutrient we get from nonvegetarian food with vegetarian options. “Eating a cereal-pulse combination, for example, rice and dal, is an excellent example of complete protein. The body's iron needs can also be met by including greens, dried fruits and nuts, ragi, rice flakes, pumpkin seeds, whole pulses like rajma and green moong. Including vitamin C rich food in combination with iron-rich food enhances the latter's absorption in our body. Vitamin B12 is present to some extent in dairy products and fortified foods, but if there is a deficiency, it has to be corrected with a supplement.”

So the bad old days of the vegetarian restaurant scene are over. Instead, the city's best restaurants are eager to create something classy and a bit different for those wanting to feast without flesh. In fact, the whole scene might even convert a dedicated carnivore or two. □

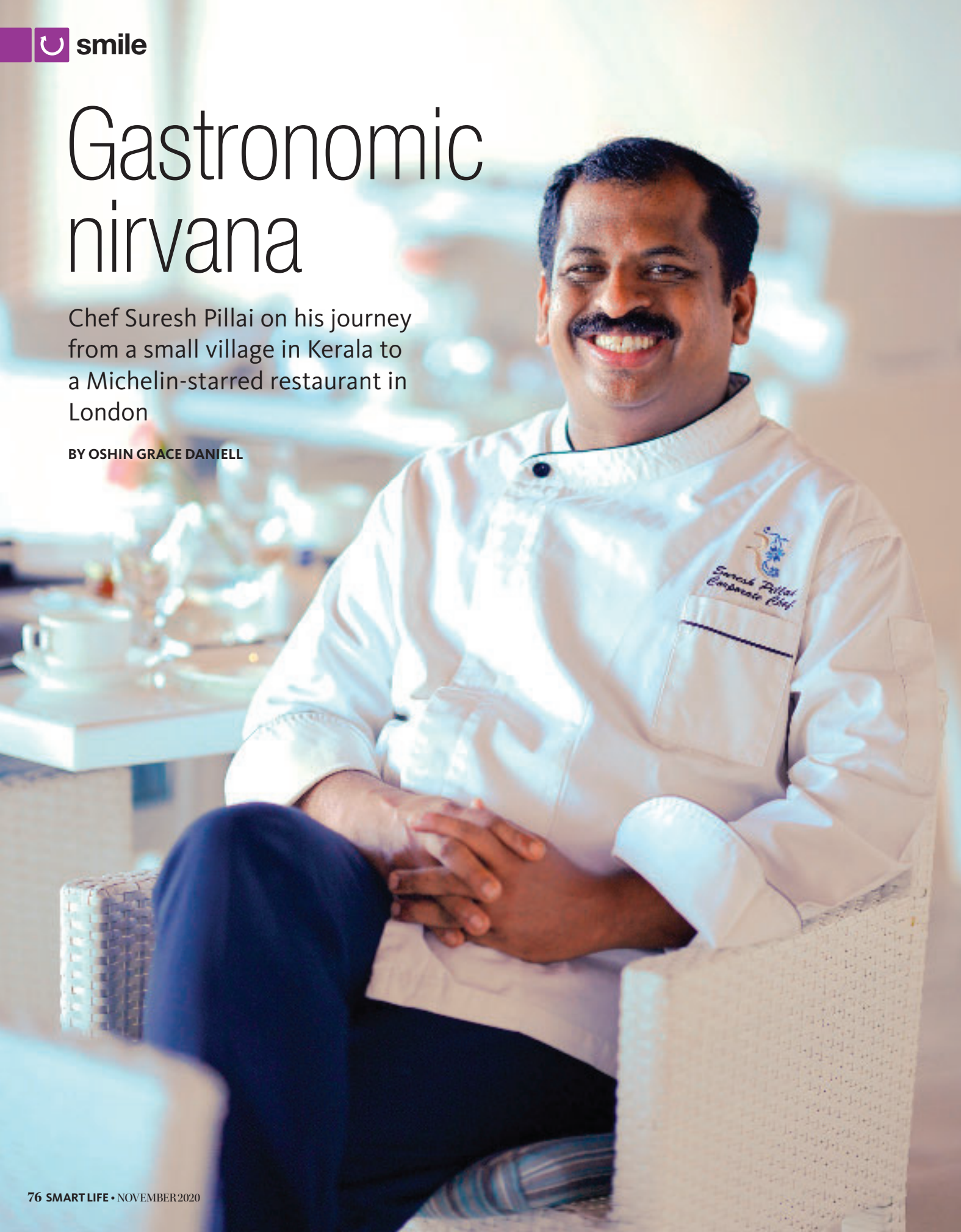




# Gastronomic nirvana

Chef Suresh Pillai on his journey from a small village in Kerala to a Michelin-starred restaurant in London

BY OSHIN GRACE DANIELL



When chef Suresh Pillai got selected on the *MasterChef* stage, all he wanted to do was to make Kerala's traditional fish curry for the judges. "It was a dream come true for me to participate in *MasterChef* and also to be the second Malayalee chef to get selected there," says Suresh. "I used to watch *BBC MasterChef*; it is the best cookery show. I always had dreams of going there to present a dish from my state." And he sure made his people proud as globally-renowned judges were in awe at the burst of flavours in Suresh's plates.

Interestingly, being a chef was never on the cards for him. Although he recalls being interested in helping out his mother in the kitchen, he never thought of cooking as a profession. "My mother used to prepare a lot of seafood as fish is abundant in the place where I live. An island, surrounded by the Ashtamudi lake. Apart from that, Kerala's biggest harbour is just a few minutes away from my house. So, I learnt different preparations of seafood from my home kitchen—everything from cleaning to marinating and cooking it," he recalls. Suresh used to also help his neighbour with her street food joint at night. "It was for the fishermen there. We used to serve them tea, steamed rice cake, different curries and other snacks," he says. "When I think about it now, I actually had a lot of experience with food from a very young age. Even in the school NCC camps, I was always assigned canteen duty where I used to peel eggs and help with washing and chopping vegetables. This was all training for me."

But it was not an easy walk for him. After completing his Class X, he was prompted to take up a part-time job due to tough financial situations at home. "Initially, I went to this ice parlour near my place for a job but, interestingly, the restaurant next to it hired me. I was barely 16-years-old at the time. They had a small interview and appointed me as a waiter there for a monthly salary of ₹460," he says. Although his

job did not include kitchen duties, he developed an interest in understanding how the kitchen works. He used to help the chef by chopping onions, meat and other items in between his waitressing job. "The chef identified my skill and he urged me to pursue it. At the time, I was in no state to go for a formal culinary training. But, I was always a close observer and I learnt most things through that," says the ever-smiling chef. After over a year of observing and working at the restaurant, Suresh decided to take cooking more seriously. "I travelled to the north of Kerala and learnt how to make Malabari food. From there, I went to Coimbatore, in Tamil Nadu, and worked there for a bit. And then I moved to Bengaluru where my career got its big break. For about six years I worked in a restaurant there called Coconut Grove before I was appointed in The Leela Palace," Suresh says. His stint at Leela changed his whole style of working and operating as a chef. "It was a whole new experience for me," he says.

It was not long before he got his international break. "Soon after I got married, I had to return to Kerala for a while but then I got an offer from one of the oldest Indian restaurants in London—Veeraswamy. I worked for about six years there. I also got my British citizenship during this time. And this was when the whole idea of applying for *MasterChef* also came into the picture," says the man who impressed culinary experts like Marcus Wareing and Monica Galetti with his flavoursome dishes.

And getting into *MasterChef* is not a cakewalk. "It was difficult to get in as there are over 1,000 applicants and they choose only 46 participants based on different criteria. Once you apply for the programme, they do a reference check, a telephonic interview followed by an audition where they check your screen presence and confidence. I was lucky to be among the 46 participants selected," Suresh says. "For my signature round, I made fish curry with mackerel and green mangoes, cake

of mashed potato and curry leaves (something similar to the masala dosa stuffing), kate fish with sea salt and pepper crush, and also a pachadi with seaweed and hung yogurt with coriander and olive oil garnish." Suresh's plate looked nothing less than a dream with two shades of yellow (the curry and the potato cake), the fish on top and the garnish. Although the chefs loved the flavours, they suggested that the fish was slightly over-cooked. "London taught me a lot of things. For us Indians, taste matters more than visual appeal. We give a lot of importance to taste and quantity more than presentation. I learnt how to create beautiful plates—everything from the intricate cuts to detailed garnishing. The right way to butcher, fillet, debone and cut fish into uniform sizes, it was all revelatory for me," Suresh says.

After his *MasterChef* milestone, his culinary journey has been interesting, to say the least. It not only got him media attention and fame but also new opportunities. The Bahamas University invited him as a guest faculty to teach the students in its culinary academy. He also got to be a part of a big charity event over there to raise funds for students who wanted to study culinary programmes in Italy. "I was more than honoured. I never got the opportunity to get formal training but I fully advocate the need for proper culinary coaching," he says.

Suresh is big on campaigns as well. He did his bit during the #CookforSyria campaign that was launched across Europe to raise funds to help children affected by civil war in the West Asian country. He was working with Hoppers in London at the time. Little did he know that he was a part of a campaign that went on to become a huge global gastronomic crusade. Replicating the same concept, Suresh brought together chefs, homemakers and several food enthusiasts for the cause of helping flood-affected people in Kerala with #CookforKerala campaign during the 2018 disaster. The 'supper club' model was organised for families and





friends at homes for a specific cost that was contributed to the Chief Minister’s Relief Fund. “Although the idea of ‘super club’ was new for the people here, I got a huge response for the campaign. Not just within the country but also outside,” he says.

The 42-year-old star chef, who is now the culinary director of Raviz group of hotels, is very popular on social media as well. He started out with just posting pictures of his fabulous plating and then, during the lockdown, he began creating short cooking videos which got applause from people across the globe. “I was in London during the lockdown and my family was in Kerala at the time. I had a lot of time in hand and so, I started putting small videos as Instagram stories. From day one, it was a big hit. I learnt to take videos and do the editing by myself. Although, it seemed like a lot of hassle initially, people’s reaction to my videos got me pumped up to make more. Then, it became a daily thing,” he says. According to Suresh, social media is the best platform for chefs to display their food creativity. “There is something new every day in the culinary field. And it is never boring. This is what I would like to tell aspiring chefs as well. There may be a crisis right now due to the pandemic but people are never going to stop eating. Food is an important part of everyone’s lives. So, this is a career where both young and old can shine,” Suresh says.

He also loves experimenting with locally available ingredients. “I firmly believe in sustainable cooking. Not just sustainable but also zero-waste. Take the case of poultry, it is the most consumed non-vegetarian food in the world. But most people in Europe like only the breast of chicken. I make sure that I use all the edible parts of chicken when I am in the kitchen. The neck for making stock for the soup, leg for the kebab and parts like liver to make a special samosa or something else,” he says. “You can always take pieces that are usually thrown away and add value to it with your flavours. Even when it



comes to vegetable and fruits, peeling it right can make a big difference.”

Suresh feels that people are now more sensitised than ever about the food they eat. “Before, nobody really bothered about what is on their plate but now we have the facility to check where our food comes from and how

to prepare it in a sustainable fashion,” he says.

Apart from cooking, the culinary artist loves to play chess. “I have played at national level once and also at the state level. I was a district under-18 champion for chess. The game has helped me plan my career,” says Suresh.

With a lot of new flavours and recipes in his kitty, Suresh is all set to spread a gastronomic treat—both for his customers at Raviz and his social media fan following. His favourite and people’s favourite choice is Suresh’s famous fish nirvana. If you haven’t tried it, he recommends it as a must-try. So now, the big question is, what is cooking on chef Pillai’s Instagram story today? □

## Kollam mutton curry

### Ingredients

- Mutton with bones-1kg

### For marination

- Turmeric powder- 5g
- Green cardamom- 3
- Cloves- 2
- Cinnamon sticks- 2g
- Fennel seeds- 2g
- Black pepper cones- 4
- Star anise-1
- Salt- a pinch
- Curry leaves- a handful
- All spice leaves (sarvasugandhi)- 3g (optional)
- Remove the leaves after the marination just before cooking

### Frying

- Coconut oil- 30ml
- Onions sliced- 2
- Shallots sliced - 200g
- Green chillies slitted-3
- Ginger garlic paste - 30g
- Coriander powder- 30g
- Black pepper powder -10g
- Garam masala powder- 5g
- Salt to taste

### For chilly tempering

- Coconut oil -50g
- Kashmiri chilli powder- 50g

### Method

- Wash the mutton with a pinch of turmeric and strain it.
- Marinate all the ingredients with the meat and keep it aside for one hour.
- Cook the marinated meat with enough water on medium heat.
- In a large pan, heat coconut oil. Add onions and green chillies. Saute till light brown.
- Add ginger garlic paste, saute for 3-4 minutes in medium heat.
- Add coriander powder, black pepper and garam masala and slow roast for few minutes and put the cooked meat, stock and slow cook.
- In a frying pan, heat coconut oil and add Kashmiri chilli powder and slow roast for 4-5 minutes (do not burn) and add to the curry and mix well and cook till meat gets softer and sauce gets smooth and thick consistency.
- Check the seasoning. Serve with rice, Kerala paratha and roti.



## Kollam special fried chicken

### Ingredients

- Chicken cut in to medium pieces- 2kg
- Turmeric powder- 5g
- Kashmiri chilli powder -15g
- Coriander powder-10g
- Salt- to taste
- Garlic hand crushed with skin- 3 cloves
- Marinate the chicken for 10-20 minutes. In a pot add water and cover and cook the chicken until 60-70 per cent cooking. Cool the chicken in the same broth and keep it aside.

### Marination

- Ginger, garlic and green chilies paste- 30g (add green chilies according to your spice level)
- Egg- 1
- Corn flour- 50g

- Maida -50g
- Coconut milk powder - 20g (optional)
- Kashmiri chilli powder- 30g
- Coriander powder- 15g
- Turmeric powder- 5g
- Black pepper powder -10g
- Garam masala powder-10g
- Chopped curry leaves - few
- Salt to taste
- Lime juice - 1 lime
- In a bowl, mix well all the ingredients with water and make very smooth (loose) batter and add the cooked chicken and keep aside for 10 minutes.
- Coconut oil/ sunflower oil - enough for the frying
- Curry leaves- few
- Green chillies slit - 3

- Garlic cloves sightly crushed - 6

### Method

- Heat a large frying pan, add oil and turn the heat up for frying. Add the marinated chicken in batches depending on the size of the pan, fry it until crispy and add a few curry leaves, green chillies and garlic just before the chicken is cooked and remove from oil and drained.
- Strain the oil and pour the remaining loose batter in oil and fry them as crisp batter scraps and garnish the chicken.
- Temperature is the key for frying chicken, so make sure it does not drop while frying.
- Batter should be loose and do not to coat the chicken pieces like pakodas.



## Crab roast

### Ingredients

- Mud crab/ sea crab (cut and cleaned)- 1kg
- Coconut oil- 50ml
- Cinnamon sticks - 2g
- Shallots sliced - 200g
- Onions sliced - 200g
- Green chillies slit - 3
- Ginger crushed -40g
- Garlic crushed- 50g
- Curry leaves- few
- Turmeric powder- 5g
- Kashmiri chilli powder- 50g
- Coriander powder- 40g
- Black pepper powder- 10g
- Garam masala powder- 5g
- Kokum -1

- Tomato slices - 1
- Coriander leaves - few

### Method

- In a heavy pan, heat coconut oil and add cinnamon, onions, shallots and green chillies.
- Saute in medium heat, add crushed ginger and garlic and cook till slightly brown.
- Add turmeric, chilli powder and coriander powder; slow roast the masala and add tomatoes, salt and kokum. Saute till sauce gets a roast consistency (add little water).
- Add the cleaned crab black pepper powder, garam masala and mix well and cook the crab for 8-10 minutes. In the end add a drop of coconut oil and chopped coriander leaves.







## Grandma's nostalgic chamanthi

### Ingredients

- Whole red chillies -6
- Shallots- 8
- Tamarind - lime size, soaked in warm water
- Coconut oil- 2tbsp
- Salt- to taste

### Method

- Slow roast the shallots in a pan and crush it together.
- In a bowl, mix all ingredients with enough salt and coconut oil



## Beef vindaloo

### Ingredient

#### For marination

- Beef/ pork - 1kg, cut into cubes
- Kashmiri chilli powder- 20g
- Turmeric powder- 5g
- Ginger garlic paste- 20g
- Salt- to taste
- Vindaloo paste (overnight soaking recommended)
- Garlic cloves - 30g
- Ginger crushed- 20g
- Shallots - 6
- Whole Kashmiri chilly- 50g
- Mustard seeds-10g
- Cumin seeds- 10g
- Coriander seeds- 10g

- Cloves- 2g
- Green cardamom-2g
- Cinnamon sticks- 2g
- Black pepper corns- 2g
- White wine vinegar - 150ml (substitute malt vinegar/ palm vinegar or normal vinegar)
- Onion finely chopped - 4
- Plum peeled tomatoes -100g (or fresh red ripen tomatoes) make a puree
- Tomato paste- 20g
- Jaggery/ brown sugar-10g
- Bay leaf- 3
- Mustard oil/ vegetable oil- 50ml

### Method

- Wash the meat and marinate with the spices.

- In a bowl, add all the ingredients together and soak it in lukewarm water. Cover the vessel and keep it aside for 12-18 hours, then grind it to a fine paste.
- In a pressure cooker, add oil and sauté onions.
- Throw in a bay leaf and cook until it is caramelised. Add the marinated meat and sauté for 10 minutes.
- Add the vindaloo paste and cook for few minutes
- Then, add tomato puree, salt and water and cook for a few minutes.
- Cover the cooker and wait until three whistles (cooking time may vary in different cut or meat).
- Once the pressure is off, open the cooker, add jaggery and check seasoning.



## Neymeen nirvana

### Ingredients

- King fish steak - 1

### For marination

- Chilli powder -10g
- Turmeric powder - 5g
- Black pepper powder - 5g
- Salt- to taste
- Lime juice- half a lime

### Method

- Mix all the ingredients together with a little water and marinate the fish. Keep it aside for 20 minutes.

### For nirvana

- Coconut milk (thick)- 100ml
- Ginger, chopped- 20g
- Green chillies slitted - 2
- Curry leaves - few

- Salt to taste
- Black pepper powder- 5g
- Coconut oil- 50ml

### Method

- In a frying pan heat little oil and grill the fish each side for two minutes
- In a Hopper's pan or a round frying pan, add oil and place a banana leaf. Apply some oil, throw in curry leaves and place the grilled fish on top. Add coconut milk on each side and sprinkle salt and pepper on it. Put some chopped ginger, curry leaves and green chillies on top.
- Slow cook the fish till the coconut milk gets a buttery consistency. Then, add a little coconut oil in the end. Serve hot with string hoppers or Malabar porotta.

## Roasted coconut chutney

### Ingredients

- Grated coconut fresh or frozen -150g
- Dried red chillies - 4
- Shallots - 4
- Tamarind dried - gooseberry size
- Salt to taste
- Coconut oil -20ml
- Curry leaves- few

### Method

- In a frying pan, slow roast red chillies, shallots and tamarind till the chilli gets slight smoky black in colour.
- Add 10ml of coconut oil and on a low flame slow roast the coconut till it turns slight brown and then add salt.
- In a blender, make a coarse powder without any water and move it into a bowl. Add curry leaves and coconut oil and mix well. Check seasoning.



# City of Islands

From colourful coastlines to a grand cityscape and simple, rustic beauty, Sweden offers the tourist vastly different experiences during summer and winter

BY RUTH DSOUZA PRABHU





In the beginning of December, the people of Stockholm in Sweden wait eagerly to welcome the first snow and they are quite excited about it. How do I know this? Having just finished a tour of the Swedish Laplands region, I decided to do a solo trip of Stockholm and as I was getting onto the plane from Kiruna (among the northernmost regions of Sweden), my phone buzzed with happy messages of newly made work friends telling me of the first snow. As I flew into Stockholm, the afternoon sky threw a magnificent blanket of warm light over snow-tipped trees, buildings and streets.

As the plane circles Stockholm, you take in the most populous city of Sweden. Made up of 14 islands, connected to each other with around 50 bridges (there are several easy modes of transport across the city) with the Baltic Sea in the background, I couldn't wait to get started with all that I had planned for myself. Personally, I love to travel in a new city or country by public transport and the system in Sweden is so well connected, whether you take buses, subways, trams or ferries. An hour's ride on the airport service Flygbussarna (airport coaches) and I was at my hotel in Brommaplan. A quick half an hour to settle down and I was off on my first adventure.

### Going touristy

Stockholm is like most European cities—it is best explored on foot. Every stop you make, spend some time walking around and you will see the city from a whole new perspective. On my first evening there, I did the most touristy thing possible—I found my way to IKEA in Kungens Kurva, the largest outlet of the brand in the world. There is a free IKEA bus beginning at Vasagatan to take you there. If not, you can always find a mode of transport that is close to your start-



The artworks and decorations at Solna Centrum subway station



## The Royal Palace



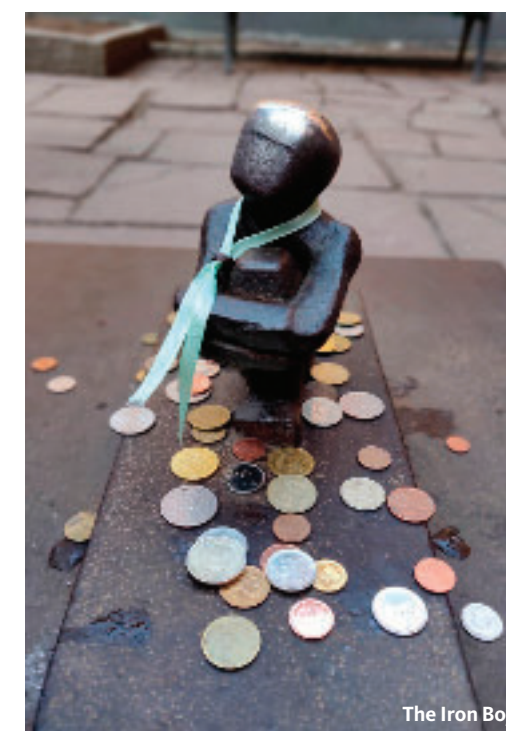
PHOTO HENRIK TRYGG

ing point. Use the app SL Journey Planner to help chart the best routes. Walking around for a good part of 1.5 hours, I headed to the café and got myself the international favourite—IKEA’s meatballs and mash with gravy, a strawberry cheese-cake and some tea. A brilliant end to my first evening in Stockholm.

I began my next day hopping from one metro station to another on an art walk. There are paid as well as free guided tours that you can take, but I preferred to chart out a route on my own based on other places along the route that I wanted to visit. When you are on the Green Line, step out at Kristineberg to take a look at the feline sculptures that line the platform created by Carina Wallert. At Fridhemsplan, the black and white line drawings are simply classy. The walls and floor at Radmangatan come alive with the tile art that is based on the life and work of famous Swedish author August



The Royal Palace



The Iron Boy

PHOTOS RUTH DSOUZA PRABHU

Strindberg. Perhaps the most mesmerising of station art is at Vastra Skogen on the blue line, where three platforms come together to make a massive cave-station that is done up by Sivert Lindblom.

Remember the walking I spoke about? Get to the parliament area from the subway station and make a start from there. You will find yourself crossing bridges from one island to another, each giving you a spectacular view. Mark it on your map and make stops at the spot that marks the landing point of the Vikings. Move to the Gamla Stan (the old town area of Stockholm) and find the narrow staircase that leads to Prästgatan. The walls on either side of this staircase are covered with graffiti and it makes for some great ‘instagrammable’ pictures. Look for the smallest public monument of Stockholm called Järnpojke or





Nobel Museum

Iron Boy, which is only 15cm high. He is nestled in an obscure garden patch, but you will find him thanks to the hordes of people looking to take pictures of him.

If you would rather not walk around, you could also consider taking a boat tour from one of the several companies that line the waterfront area. Time yourself in such a way that you get to see the change of guard at the Royal Palace, before or after you get off the tour boat.

## Museums of Stockholm

The one thing I realised walking around a few of the several museums of Stockholm is that they are not just about the exhibits. There is a lot of interactivity that they offer you. Take for example, the Abba Museum where you get to sing karaoke of your favourite Abba numbers or even dance with their holograms to the tune of 'Dancing Queen' and have a video taken. At the Vasa Museum, which is home to a salvaged ship that is more than 300 years old, you get to walk through exhibits that take you, quite literally, through the process of the making of the ship to how it sank. Step into the Nobel Museum and not only do you read about Nobel laureates and their achievements, through interactive kiosks, but you also get to see personal belongings, like the shawl that Malala wore when receiving her Nobel, besides others



A cafe inside Fotografiska

PHOTO RUTH DSOUZA PRABHU



The Abba Museum

PHOTO RUTH DSOUZA PRABHU

## FACT FILE

**Getting there:** The only non-stop flight to Stockholm is from New Delhi. The most commonly opted for route is via Dubai, which can be done through Mumbai and Bengaluru. The flight to Dubai is approximately 3.5 hours and to Stockholm around 7.5 hours.

**Visa:** You will have to apply for a Schengen Sweden visa which will cost you approximately ₹4,700. Biometrics are needed for this visa and are valid for the next 4 years.

**Accommodation:** Sweden has a range of hotels, homestays and rentals you can choose from based on your budget and your personal requirements. An aspect I noticed was the option for window/windowless rooms as well

as mini and micro rooms, which work really when you are a solo traveller. Keep in mind though that most hostels offer only shared toilets as do many budget hotels.

**When to visit:** Sweden is a country that offers diametrically different experiences in summer and winter and so you may want to visit once during each season. Be ready for all day sunlight and early sunsets based on the time of the year you are there.

**Tips:** Based on your itinerary and travel, research the Stockholm Pass (which gives you free entry to top sights), the Travel Pass (that gives you access to all modes of public transport) and the SL Travel App that helps you chart routes.

on display. The Spirits Museum takes you through the history of Absolut Vodka, encourages you to sing Swedish drinking songs and the hangover room is definitely a space you should challenge yourself to stay in. You can end your visit here with a sampler of Swedish Aquavits, the country's most famous contribution to the world of spirits.

## More than just meatballs

The idea of Swedish food often stops at meatballs. Of course this is something you must try, and there are so many versions beyond the classic beef and pork mix. Opt for some of the game meat versions—venison, reindeer, moose and the like. Meatballs for the People would be a great place to give it a go. If you are good with the idea of experimenting with fish, the several variations of pickled herring, often served even at breakfast buffets is definitely to try. If starting small, the breakfast caviar tubes over some crackers is a great meal. Swedes love their bread and so you will have a large variety of their breads to choose from—hard, soft and everything in between. Street food is not really a thing in Sweden, though you get some very filling versions of hotdogs at vending carts.

Swedish chefs are doing some fabulous work with sustainable, local produce and you must try and squeeze in a meal at Fotografiska. While it is famous as a museum, its café on the top floor is a must-do. Choose from a la carte or their set menus, pair it with a local beer and you are in for a treat. Chef Niklas Ekstedt's eponymous restaurant in Stockholm is definitely one to try and his Christmas special at the old National Archives is something you should aim to try. A more fun brewery experience would be at Sorbon in Brommaplan, a brewery that does some great food and has 19 beers on tap. What is also interesting is that Sweden has quite an Asian influence and you will see a number of ramen and dimsum restaurants around, too.

Now if you are truly a food aficionado, then you may want to consider a culinary tour of the Swedish Lapland region, which has some brilliant things to offer. Club it with a stay at the Ice Hotel and it will be a winter holiday unlike any other. □



# Tooth and nail

Milan Sime Martinic on being his own dentist



The dentist would have asked for x-rays. I didn’t have to. It was my own mouth and I knew what was there. Well, that is a bit flippant. I guessed what was there by the pain meter in my own mouth. In pandemic times, running around to see a dentist is not a casual thing—getting a panoramic x-ray and then sitting in the waiting room perhaps more than once, going round and round like a sadist’s human chain letter, all the time breathing air of unknowable viral load.

The implant came out; it was a bridge implanted over a withering tooth that withered some more while I made sure I washed my hands 20 times a day. Now, it was exposing a nerve. I touched it and nearly hit the stars. This had to go. I could feel it wobbly. I could imagine the pain getting worse. YouTube, I need to know ‘how to extract your own tooth’.

Did you know that there are medical and dental school lessons online for a month? Access to more than 800 videos on basic medical sciences, clinical medicine and dentistry. Yes, “World’s most popular medical lectures. Trusted by 80 per cent of medical, dentistry, nursing and pharmacy students.” I was not going to be in that untrusting 20 per cent, especially in excruciating pandemic pain.

Sparing all the prerequisites, driven by stinging torment and agony that made my stomach run loose, I got the 101s on tooth morphology and tooth nerve anatomy. I learned that virility is not the only thing one needs help with as we age— by my bone density, one could say that I am “old”. Old enough to know things you don’t even know how you know. Subconscious osmosis, I presume. I knew that if I had to, I could make my own tooth implants and that I could finish the implant process if I had to.

I had foreseen all of this in my last

pre-pandemic visit to the dentist doing my implants—I made a mental note of all the powders and mixes his assistant was using. Somehow, I knew that in the depths of the pandemic I would be my own implant dentist. I just did not know how much fun it would be.

When the time came and the pain was on the driver’s seat, I quickly typed in ‘dentist supplies’ online and ordered polyacrylic acids, glass ionomers, zinc cement, and most importantly,



the resins. I never read the instructions, but for some reason, this time I did. “Manicurists can use this resin to lengthen nails,” it said. I have been cutting my own hair for seven months now, how hard could this be? But the pain grew and there was no time for deciding if I should call the manicurist downstairs. I decided to do this in a manly, effortless way—grab the bad tooth, twist it and laugh at the pain.

No charming assistant. No dental forceps. No leaning back and letting it happen. When you are doing it yourself, you cannot even lean back, you have to lean forward, so you can see what you are doing in a mirror. Quickly disinfect the manicure pliers. Grip it, pull it. The tooth

is out! The taste of blood! Better bite on gauze. No! Bite on chewed cloves, my wife said to do that. Mercifully, she is staying safe 6,000 miles away.

Instant relief! This stuff really works, although my voice is now in the Maria-Callas-in-Habanera range. If only you could hear my righteous singing—“You’ve lost that lovin’ feeling, who-oah, that lovin’ feelin’... now it’s gone... gone...” Oh, wait! The natural anesthetic of cloves is wearing off.

Actually, I am really glad it did because a recommendation from my Bolivian shamanic-descendant friend was to take the wire of a coat hanger, heat it red hot and poke into the offending nerve. I don’t know if I had the nerve for that.

The fixture for my implant was already in place. Figuring out how to set that part properly into the bone is a major engineering project in miniature that requires living in a padded room to attempt that on yourself. However, I had to cover the span over the ousted tooth and replace the compromised bridge.

The parts I ordered came in a sterile vial, but it came with the entire implant. I am good at taking things apart. So, I isolated the abutment which, now, had to fit into the implant fixture. I am not good at putting things together. But I am very uptight about keeping things sterile. And even more about missing a tooth.

Wiggling my tongue around my mouth and feeling the rubble around the firm metal, I concluded I was ready to put the tooth on the abutment (well, there is a screw involved and all kinds of structural thoughts which I will skip here but that can be assuaged by looking at your mouth missing a couple of teeth). All the while I was making a resin tooth to replace the broken bridge that attaches to the abutment. Now, I am no dental lab technician, though one does have to summon his inner artist. I do know, however, that the quality of a tooth is in its chewing power. Bite me. But with the pain gone, I am now only interested in the looks. My new tooth is about 1/2mm too long and I don’t have a file or the nerve to do this again. But I am sure there is an apple with my name on it. □

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# THE HUMAN TOUCH WINS BOTH WAYS

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