



‘My new diet’s transformed my health!’

Committing to a healthier diet usually entails downsized portions and sacrificing treats – but what happens when you give your diet a more extreme overhaul? We talk to three women who’ve done just that and are reaping the benefits

WORDS: Antonia Kanczula. PHOTOGRAPHY: Ian Hooton

'Macrobiotic eating has made my skin glow!'



Tara's daily diet

- ◆ **Breakfast:** Miso soup with seasonal vegetables.
- ◆ **Snack:** A handful of Brazil nuts.
- ◆ **Lunch:** Homemade vegetable soup with brown rice noodles.
- ◆ **Snack:** Seasonal fruit.
- ◆ **Dinner:** Sautéed vegetables with fresh herbs and seaweed, brown rice and perhaps some grilled white fish.

I didn't bruise so easily. In time, I started to feel fuller, more satisfied, energised and nourished.

I integrate unusual grains, lots of fresh produce and pulses into all my meals. I eat white meat occasionally and some white or oily fish, including haddock and sea bass. Breakfast is normally miso soup with vegetables or millet porridge. My main meals include Japanese-inspired sautéed vegetables, including fresh seaweed, daikon (a vegetable in the radish family) and brown rice udon noodles. Macrobiotics isn't the preserve of super-rich celebs – it's easy to find everything I need on the high street or web and, because I'm eating seasonally and avoiding processed foods, it's quite cheap.

'Best of all, I'm losing weight without trying – half a stone so far. It's a gradual process but I'm doing it the right way this time. I've turned a corner – it's not a "diet" but a way of life. I think carefully about every single thing I eat. I don't feel restricted because I'm relishing eating this way.'

Verdict

'This is a great approach to eating if you love food and are interested not just in how it tastes, but the process of selecting, preparing and cooking. The whole journey!'

My diet tips

- ◆ 'Do your research – there's far more to macrobiotics than first meets the eye. Be prepared to try lots of new foods.'
 - ◆ 'Eat grains as a staple with seasonal, local vegetables.'
 - ◆ 'Avoid processed or refined foods and most animal products.'
 - ◆ 'Chew your food well and take time to prepare and eat meals.'
- To find out more about macrobiotic eating, visit macrobiotics.org.uk.

including polenta and barley, plus seasonal, local fruits and vegetables. Out go processed and most animal foods, including dairy. How you eat is just as important as what you eat – you only eat when you're hungry and chew your food well. It might sound daunting, but I find it simple and liberating.

I saw the macrobiotic way as a chance to install some permanent and meaningful changes in my diet. As I read more about it, my interest snowballed. I've always loved cooking but changing to a macrobiotic diet has expanded my boundaries. Although I've cut certain foods out, it's made me more adventurous.

I had a few teething troubles at the start – cutting down on meat and upping my intake of grains, in particular – but as I started to notice some changes, I gained enthusiasm. My digestion improved, my skin started to look radiant, my hair and nails became glossier and stronger. I also noticed

Name: Tara Jackson, 28

Diet: Macrobiotic

Goal: To improve her diet for good

'My weight has fluctuated for most of my adult life and I was dissatisfied with my eating patterns. After a series of ultimately unsuccessful diets, from fruit detoxes to low-carb plans, I met Anna Freedman, a qualified macrobiotic cook and coach (wholefoodharmony.com), earlier this year through my part-time nutrition studies. I didn't know anything about macrobiotic eating before, but speaking to Anna was inspiring – she lives and breathes it.

'Macrobiotics is about eating a natural diet that'll enhance your health – one that's based on eating a wide range of grains,

Renée has designed to replicate regular dishes. My favourites include raw sushi, made with cauliflower rather than rice, 'pasta' made with courgette, fresh houmous, raw cheesecake, and raw chocolate truffles. I love baking but now I incorporate raw ingredients, including vegetables, into my cakes.

'I've struggled with my weight since uni, but in the past year I've lost one and a half stone. More importantly, my new lifestyle has helped me get a handle on my health. I've suffered with acne since a very young age but my skin is definitely clearer. By eliminating sugar, I've got candida (a digestive fungal infection) under control and I no longer get energy slumps, mental fog or cravings. Plus my new lifestyle is also the fastest cellulite buster ever! The raw food approach doesn't restrict or rule my life but it has certainly changed it.'

Verdict

'A raw-food diet isn't for everyone – you have to be willing to put in time and effort. But I recommend it if you've got unsolved niggling health problems.'

My diet tips

- ◆ 'You don't need to go 100 per cent raw to make a significant difference to your diet and health. Start with 25 per cent then 50 per cent and, if you want, 75 per cent. I wouldn't recommend going raw immediately as this is likely to shock your body and release lots of toxins.'
- ◆ 'Get some support! It's not a plan you can launch yourself into unprepared. My team of Janey, Caroline and Renée has been amazing.'
- ◆ 'Take a day course. They aren't expensive and open your eyes to all your options.'

Suzy's daily diet

- ◆ **07.30** Fresh vegetable juice or a green smoothie.
- ◆ **09.30** Slice of rye bread with avocado, rocket and some raw seeds or raw muesli with coconut water.
- ◆ **13.00** Raw courgette spaghetti with basil pesto or raw sushi.
- ◆ **16.30** Two raw truffles.
- ◆ **20.00** Steamed fish or chicken with fresh green salad or steamed vegetables or miso noodle soup with Chinese greens.

'Going raw has boosted my energy levels'

Name: Suzy Aikman, 29

Diet: Raw food

Goal: To conquer chronic health problems

'My old diet wasn't particularly unhealthy but it wasn't particularly balanced either. I had a weakness for bread, anything sweet, including fruit, and a tendency to eat over-sized portions. In the past I've tried every diet going – juicing, GI, you name it – to varying degrees of success. My penchant for sugar was my habitual undoing.

'I moved to London about 18 months ago and decided it was time to change my life; no more faddy diets or unused gym memberships. I joined Fit for a Princess (fitforaprincess.co.uk), an open-air fitness class and, after a difficult time at work, started to see naturopath Dr Caroline Longmore (galennaturopathic.com) to help me tackle stress-related symptoms. Both my

trainer, Janey, and Caroline suggested I follow a raw diet plan as they both suspected that I had exhausted adrenal glands caused, in part, by too much sugar. I dabbled for a few months without properly committing. What spurred me into full action was a chance meeting with raw food coach Renée Maguire of Raw Chi Food (rawchifood.com) at a work event.

'In combination with lots of other healthy changes, a raw food plan has helped me finally achieve some equilibrium in my life. Renée's support has been invaluable. She's shown me there's far, far more to raw food than salads. My diet isn't 100 per cent raw – that would be unsustainable – but I work to ensure it's about 60 per cent raw (higher on good days). This means two out of my three meals and all my snacks are raw but I have enough leeway to enjoy a healthy evening meal with my partner.

'You'd think a raw diet would be restrictive, but far from it. I start the day with a power-packed green veggie smoothie and a salad for breakfast, then tuck into meals that



weeks, I shifted onto a maintenance diet, which meant I could have some fruit and more adventurous veggies.

'I was surprised how quickly I got used to it and saw changes. My energy levels have rocketed, I'm no longer getting afternoon slumps, my skin looks clearer and people have commented how "sparkly" I look. I need less sleep and I'm waking up naturally for the first time ever. My triceps and legs have also become more defined. I'm about three-quarters through my 12-week plan and have lost four per cent body fat and four and a half kilos in weight.

'This plan has made my life easier and, as I buy food in bulk and don't fritter money on expensive lunches or snacks, I'm spending less. Socialising can be tricky, but you get a "cheat meal" every five days during the maintenance plan and this has helped. Plus I'm still allowed caffeine and good-quality red wine. It's been hard to eat minimal fruit and lots of supplements, but it's worth it. I'll stick to the principles once the plan's ended.'

Verdict

'A thumbs-up for people with a sound base of fitness who want to push themselves or are in training for an endurance event – and aren't vegetarian.'

My diet tips

- ◆ 'Get organised! At the beginning of the week, buy what you need for the next few days and prepare things in advance. During the first fortnight of the diet, make sure you don't have any big social events.'
- ◆ 'If you don't consistently get a good night's sleep, you'll store fat around your waist as you're disrupting your hormones.'

'Eating like a cavewoman has helped me lose weight!'

Name: H&F's fitness editor Lucy Miller, 28

Diet: BioSignature Modulation

Goal: Fine-tune body and build muscle definition

'I'm fit, slim and thought my diet was pretty good, but I was frustrated I wasn't looking more toned. I needed a diet that would help tweak rather than transform my body.

I'd heard about a method called BioSignature Modulation, devised by Canadian fitness guru Charles Poliquin (charlespoliquin.com). It sounds high tech, but it's a simple approach to eating based on your hormone profile. It's a low-carb, high-protein, dairy-free plan, rich in wholefoods, with meals six times a day. I needed to get body-fat readings done to flag up potential hormone imbalances which could then be eased with the right diet and supplements, so I saw Niki Rein at BellaCore (bellacore.org), who was trained by Poliquin.

During our first meeting, Niki measured 12 sites on my body with callipers to record fat levels, then she weighed me. The areas of my body I saw as stubborn – my triceps and hamstrings – had highest fat levels and showed, Niki explained, that I'm oestrogen dominant.

'I wasn't given a meal plan, but a list of permissible foods based on where on my body I store fat, plus lots of tailored supplements, and I had weekly visits to get measured and weighed. The first two weeks of the plan were strict. An average day started with a post-gym drink of flaxseeds and a special vitamin mix, followed by a series of small meals based on lean meat or fish, nuts and green vegetables. After two

Lucy's daily diet

- ◆ **Breakfast:** Chicken breast and a handful of Brazil nuts.
- ◆ **Snack:** Quarter of a cucumber and 100g chicken.
- ◆ **Lunch:** Cod fillet and unlimited salad with 50g butternut squash.
- ◆ **Snack:** A bowl of blueberries.
- ◆ **Dinner:** A stuffed pepper with chilli con carne and unlimited green vegetables.
- ◆ **Snack:** A handful of nuts.