

20th August 2007

A RADICAL NEW HEALTH PLAN LETS

MY BODY is far from a temple — way too many microwave meals and bottles of wine for that. Although I'm a healthy 9st 8lb, like most women I wouldn't mind dropping a few pounds.

Plus, I've suffered from headaches and low energy regularly for the past few years, and have recently had skin problems. The solution? I decided to take a trip to the Immogenics clinic in Wigmore Street, which I'd heard offers a six-week tailor-made nutrition programme to help resolve my kind of issues.

In the Novo plan even a salad could hinder your diet. They reckon obesity is mainly caused not by over-eating but long-term, low-level inflammation caused by food. Different foods trigger inflammation in different people.

"Bad" foods are not broken down properly and treated as invaders by your body, which responds to the threat by becoming inflamed. This also hits your immune system, causing low energy and weight gain.

The Novo programme focuses on eliminating the "bad" foods from your diet. The food intolerance test identifies the presence of certain antibodies, which are only produced if you're intolerant to a food.

The Immogenics clinic looked reassuringly professional. I had a long chat with a consultant about my diet, and what I was hoping to achieve. I then gave three phials of blood (ouch!), which were taken and tested against 115 food types.

Three weeks later, I'm given a laminated chart of "green" foods (to eat) and "red" foods (to avoid). My red foods include aubergine, apple, cod, prawns, avocados, raspberries, almonds, coffee, brewer's yeast (in beer and wine) and cow's milk.

I also have to avoid caffeine, dairy products and "junk food" — anything with E-numbers, such as sweets and fizzy drinks. The nutritionist explains I've probably reacted to brewer's yeast because of an excess of wine in the past few months. He's got that right.

Week 1

MY FIRST shopping experience Novo-style is excruciatingly slow. I am now one of those people that reads the labels on everything before I buy to make sure none of my red foods are included in the ingredients. Instead of reaching for my usual crisps, chocolate and cheese, I pack my trolley with soya milk, fish, fruit and veg galore, nuts and raisins.

I start my first day with a bowl of bran flakes with soya milk; lunch is hummus on wholemeal bread and some fruit and nuts, and dinner is grilled chicken with wholewheat pasta and some veg. It hasn't been too much of a challenge so far, and, surprisingly, I haven't been craving my usual snacks in between meals. I have developed a hatred for soya milk, though — I hide the taste by putting bananas in

BY RACHEL ROUSE

my bowl along with my morning cereal. Halfway through the week, I sit in agony through a pub lunch, while my friends choose from the menu and drink wine. I eat a boring brown bread chicken sandwich and fruit and drink orange juice, and leave early feeling hard done by. On the up side, my headaches are less frequent and I've lost a couple of pounds.

Week 2

I REALISE that in the absence of junk food, nuts and raisins are the ultimate snack. The detox regulates only what you eat, not how much — I can eat as much of these as I like. I've really got to grips with the detox, making nice, filling, quick dinners such as veggie stir-fries and Bolognese with wholewheat pasta, and eating a wide variety of fruit and veg.

However, Friday proves my partial undoing as I fall off the wagon during a week-end away in Cardiff. After watching some friends play football, I just can't resist a couple of drinks. But I stick to vodka and orange, which the nutritionist told me was the best of the bad stuff, due to its lack of brewer's yeast and E-vil numbers.

Week 3

THE weight is slowly falling off me, and I've lost 4lb since I started the detox. This appears to be an inevitable result of not eating any classically "unhealthy" foods, including chocolate, sweets or fatty crisps. The headaches seem to have stopped completely, and my energy levels have improved.

My skin is still deteriorating, but the nutritionist explained that the detox will work from the inside, out. My body is still eliminating toxins which is why my skin is suffering.

Week 4

I CRACK and drink a glass of Pimm's at a party. I'm a bit sick of being a food fascist.

However, later in the week I meet up with some friends in a bar and leave early as I'm not as upbeat as they are, working their way through the cocktail list. This seems to be a running theme throughout this detox: I try — and fail — to stay fun-loving in the absence of alcohol.

Week 5

I'M MISSING "normal" food quite a lot this week, but manage to stick quite closely to my green list, and have developed a particular love for sweet potato and a variety of stir-fries with vegetables.

My skin still hasn't improved, so I've gone back on some medication.

Week 6

I SET off for a holiday in Israel, so plenty of salad, falafel and hummus — all good as far as the green list goes. I decide to reintroduce the food at the bottom of my red list, which is cow's milk. I start to reintroduce each item from my red list week by week, and assuming I have no reaction, can continue on to other foods on the list.

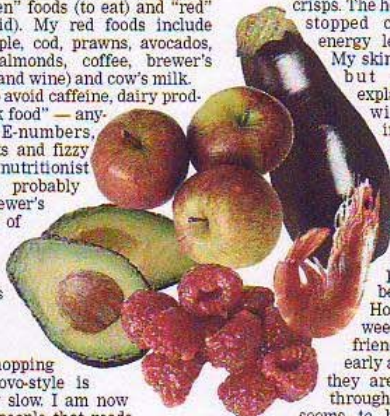
Verdict

DESPITE leaving me grumpy on a couple of nights out, the Novo programme has been a largely positive experience for me. Okay, I've had to overhaul my diet wholesale, but it's really all been worth it. I'm now filled with more energy than I've ever felt in my life. Best of all, my crippling headaches have totally disappeared. This is a life-changing result and I am overjoyed. I have also lost 6lb. I'm planning on keeping off most of the foods on my red list, with the exception of cow's milk — and brewer's yeast. Well, a girl's got to have some fun...

● Price £299; for further information, call 0845 226 5858 or visit novotest.co.uk

YOU TAILOR-MAKE A DIET BASED ON YOUR OWN IMMUNE SYSTEM

Why good food could be bad for you



Forbidden fruit (and veg): some of the foods Rachel shouldn't eat



Dietary hit list: Rachel Rouse gets tested, inset; and a table laden with foods she can eat (above the green tick) and those she is intolerant to (above the red cross)

Lite lunch

MARKS & SPENCER NUTRITIONALLY BALANCED SWEET CHILLI, CHICKEN AND BUTTERNUT SQUASH SALAD, £3.50.

COMING in at 270 calories, the chilli and lime chicken is sprinkled with toasted pumpkin seeds, roasted butternut squash, peppers and baby spinach with optional coconut and sweet chilli sauce. Well-balanced and tasty.



LOW CALORIE ✓ LOW FAT ✓
LOW CARB ✓ LOW GI ✓