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→ They used to be a rare sighting. But now, enter pretty much any apartment building (or indeed, walk through a compound of villas) and you'll see them everywhere, as early as 5am and as late as 11am: Cooler bags stuffed with an entire day's worth of healthy meals. Once kept hidden, hastily shoved into your apartment lest your friends or colleagues saw that you either were so desperately trying to "get healthy", or that you were so badly failing at actually properly being an adult that prepares your own meals, that you had to turn to a professional, these cooler bags are no longer hidden in shame. Not in the slightest, in fact.

Instead, they are now proudly flashed across homes and desks all over the GCC, some even delivered straight to your office, almost like a badge of honour, saying: I am healthy. I choose to treat my body with only the best when it comes to nourishment, and I earn enough of a good living financially that I can afford to pay someone else to do the painstaking hard work of healthy meal preparation for me. And it makes sense: No more complicated grocery lists (many that would see you use only some ingredients and have to chuck away the rest), hunting through endless speciality stores to find that one item that would take your healthy meal to the next level. No more dirty dishes, pots

For The Love Of Good Food

Once just the go-to for the super-dedicated, strict eater, people under rigorous training programmes or prepping for competitions, or those seeking weight loss with little to no knowledge of how to prepare their own suitable meals at home, healthy meal delivery services are now ubiquitous. We sit down with one Dubai's best to find out what goes on behind-the-scenes of your kitchen's new BFF.

By Yi-Hwa Hanna

and pans, or indeed needing to spend all of that time doing the chopping, peeling and so on. And best of all, you'll never get bored: Each plan comes with so many delicious options that consuming your next healthy meal becomes a delight you look forward to. In short, they take all of the hard work out of eating well, and that's exactly what the motivation was behind Stuart Walton, Executive Chef and Co-Owner of Love Food's thinking when he founded his company.

A Food-Lover's Approach

"Two chefs and a foodie is how it all started, at a dinner together!" he says, continuing: "When we started Elements Catering together in 2014, we felt that the market for home delivered food plans needed something different. Although the concept was well represented here in Dubai, one thing that was missing was food that is good for you, tastes great, and a menu that delivers variety. The first step was actually not to be completely focused on calorie restriction and multiple meal plans with lots of menu options. Instead, we focused on our key principles, and took an approach that we felt would be a natural fit for the lifestyle and needs of the meal plan consumer in Dubai." At Love Food, all of their meal plans are completely derived from natural ingredients and made from scratch. There are no processed



“We consider ourselves the *alternative to counting calories—we take a holistic approach that aims to make you feel amazing*” /

ingredients, GMOs, additives or preservatives used in any of their food, and one thing they will never compromise on is taste. “As we aim to use fresh, organic produce locally, it was difficult to find a supplier who offered the verity we are looking for. Luckily, over time, we established a

great relationship with a local supplier. We consider ourselves the alternative to counting calories—although we will provide the calorie information if requested—and we take a holistic approach that aims to make you feel amazing whilst losing weight or managing your weight, or getting sufficient nutrition so you can train as an athlete or bodybuilder.” Clearly, it's working: The company has been running for just over a year now, and it's already grown considerably. One of their concerns was that customers wouldn't be used to the variety of dishes they offer—one of their breakfasts, for instance, is a quinoa porridge, while their other dishes involve everything from beetroot to chard—but they were surprised to discover that they actually received

messages from a number of them, thanking them for opening up their tastes to new and different types of cuisine. Notably, among the menu options offered in their plans, one is composed of entirely Paleo dishes. With all of their plans designed to provide people with unprocessed, organic and nourishing meals with a massive nutritional punch, providing a paleo option seemed to be a perfect fit. “The thing about Paleo is that it's not really a new diet. It's a lifestyle, and should actually be incredibly simple to incorporate into daily busy life. The core principles of Paleo are to eat unprocessed and nutritious food provided by nature. The most basic simple rule is that if it comes from a packet, don't consume it. Unfortunately, in modern society, our main source of



PHOTOGRAPHY: SHUTTERSTOCK, SUPPLIED.



calories consumed comes from processed, “fake” Frankenfoods. Which, in turn, is leading us very quickly down the road to an unhealthy lifestyle and disease,” Stuart explains. It’s this philosophy that means the other plans they offer are more relaxed, but equally as wholesome. Their vitality plan, for instance, is designed for people looking for a healthy approach to losing weight, mapped out by their in-house dietician, and uses brown rice in place of white, whole wheat instead of white flour, and so on. All of their meal plans are also complemented by their flavoured waters, which vary day by day and come infused with everything from fruit to chia seeds. “Healthy eating should be complimented with hydration. People often confuse thirst for hunger, and the key here is to ensure that our clients don’t snack on inappropriate, easy to



reach, unhealthy products. The infused waters with our snacks will significantly reduce that. Also, a lot of our clients don’t realise the importance of staying hydrated in this climate. In particular, one of our clients who suffered from migraines discovered that staying hydrated with the aid of our infused waters has made a huge difference in her working life. We’ve never had any negative feedback on the

waters—yes, some of them are unique in flavour, but we aim to actually pair them with each meal,” Stuart says. Indeed, they’ve received nothing but great feedback from clients so far, and that’s exactly the goal of their game here. “We love receiving feedback from our clients where we have helped change their understanding of food, improved their health, and achieved their goals,” Stuart says, sharing some of his favourite

success stories: “[One] client has reduced his blood pressure medication, and is close to no longer needing it since being on the plan for over a year and changing his diet. [Then there’s] the couple who shed the weight prior to their wedding and surpassed their goal, [and] wives who have gone home for the summer with the kids and put their husbands on the plan whilst they were away, knowing [they] were not left to resort to junk food and takeaways.”

Giving people the flexibility to choose how they wish to plan their day and night is a key to their success, as is the fact that they try and teach people about how to, in essence, love yourself through good food. “Our aim is to teach our clients that there is an abundance of great quality produce out there that can be a healthier alternative to the potato. It’s also about how these ingredients complement each other,” Stuart says. ■