

The 26-year-old Woodward is known for creating delicious meals with simple, natural ingredients

“To change the way we eat on a more global scale and not alienate people, it’s got to be about celebrating seasonal, humble food”

**ELLA WOODWARD**  
FOUNDER,  
DELICIOUSLY ELLA

As a second-year student at St Andrews University in Scotland, Ella Woodward awoke one morning with a stomach so bloated that all she could wear was her father’s clothes. After being rushed to the hospital, doctors determined she had an exceedingly rare condition called Postural Tachycardia Syndrome, a bleak disease that made a beeline for her autonomic nervous system, afflicting her with dizziness, weakness and exhaustion.

She quickly retreated to a reclusive life and took a cavalcade of unsuccessful meds before stumbling upon a book by American cancer survivor Kris Carr, who outlined the virtues of a plant-based diet. “Before that, I made a lot of mushy vegetables with pasta,” admits the former gummy bear addict. Countless kitchen experiments later, she felt infinitely better.

Woodward now presides over a food empire consisting of a million-plus Instagram followers, a YouTube channel, a trio of café-delis in London, and *Deliciously Ella*, a stylish and

**Food for thought**

“Don’t make extreme statements like ‘I’m never doing this again’. Try adding in instead of cutting out. Start by including bananas in your cereal, guacamole with your lunch, and roasted sweet potatoes with your dinner. Do that every day for a week and you have 21 extra portions of fruits and vegetables.”

exuberant ode to her herbivorous life, adding three new recipes a week. Her own squeaky-clean diet steers clear of meat, fish, dairy, eggs, gluten, refined sugars and processed foods. But her meals, which feature kaleidoscopic dishes that elevate everyday ingredients like chickpeas and carrots—“It’s my belief that you shouldn’t have to spend tons of money in a niche health-food store,” she says—are far from grim. “If we want to change the way we eat on a more global scale and not alienate people, it’s got to be about celebrating seasonal, humble food.” >



SPOTLIGHT

# Survival of the fittest

Our bodies are capable of truly amazing things. From the joys of the confidence molecule to adopting a herbivorous lifestyle—three extraordinary women tell us how they overcame massive health setbacks by adopting sustainable food and fitness habits. By AARTI VIRANI

TOMMY CLARKE/LICKERISH



“I had to re-learn to eat but healed myself completely through food and positivity”

**Food for thought**

“Eliminate sugar. No bottled sauces or packaged foods for me! Sugar is the culprit and the reason why Type 2 diabetes has become one of the top killer diseases.”

The Pune-based food consultant endorses a seasonal-meets-local diet plan

**NATASHA DIDDEE**  
FOOD CONSULTANT & CHEF

It's been five years since surgeons extracted Natasha Didee's tumor, leaving the classically-trained chef with virtually no stomach. “It was the biggest irony,” says Didee, who earned her kitchen cred at the Institute of Hotel Management in Mumbai, in addition to a clutch of the city's swankiest restaurants, before the life-altering procedure. But even the absence of an abdomen couldn't thwart the go-getting gourmand from her culinary ambitions. “We all live shallow lives until something drastic happens; I decided I will die one day but I'll be damned if I let this take me,” she adds.

Today, Didee's a sought-after food stylist, health food advocate and recipe developer best known for her cheeky Instagram presence as @thegutlessfoodie with nearly 50,000 followers. She follows a strictly seasonal-meets-local style—“certain vegetables pop up in the market during certain times, because that's when our bodies can best digest them.” She consumes eight to 10 monitored mini meals a day, and now takes no medication, with the exception of a monthly Vitamin B shot. “I had to re-learn to eat but healed myself completely through food and positivity,” she adds.

**SHAGUN KHANNA**  
WELLNESS BLOGGER

From her boarding school days in the Himalayan foothills, where she concocted all-natural zit-zappers from multani clay and sandalwood, Shagun Khanna has always nurtured a passion for skincare. But it wasn't until she was diagnosed with polycystic ovary syndrome, a hormonal imbalance that wreaks havoc on everything from fertility to the metabolic system, that she deliberately revisited her wellness philosophy. “I was always working from the outside in, not really focusing on my health and fitness but more on how I looked,” Khanna shares candidly. “Now, it's about how I feel more than anything, and believe me, it's changed my life.”

She goes on to recap a long trial-and-error journey that featured a smattering of fad diets (“I even skipped main meals—a disaster!” she reveals) before landing on a more holistic and sustainable solution. Khanna now prioritises foods teeming with Vitamin B6, integral for the production of serotonin—sometimes dubbed The Confidence Molecule, for its positive effects on self-esteem—and swears by a fierce, five-day-a-week exercise habit. The prolific health blogger, whose eponymous website offers hundreds of practical wellness nuggets, including a foolproof pre-workout skincare routine and a probiotics decoder, has garnered a following of over 30,000.

They're all drawn to her warm, wholesome universe, a place devoid of rigid and regimented prescriptions, with room for the occasional indulgent detour. Khanna herself admits to a harbouring a particularly persistent sweet tooth—“Dark chocolate is my kryptonite, though I can't get carried away, as sugar plays around with my insulin”—and a fondness for red wine. “Once we know how to strike the perfect balance between desire and requirement, we can begin to live a life we truly love,” she asserts. ■

**Food for thought**

“In your diet, integrate organic super green powders—wheatgrass, spirulina, a type of blue-green algae or a blend like The Super Elixir by WelleCo. They're dense in nutrients and super healthy.”

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Khanna's wellness philosophy focuses on a simple motto—“stay real, stay you!”



HAIR AND MAKE UP: TANVI CHEMBURKAR; PHOTO: NEVILLE SUKHIA