



BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE:
THE BEST BODIES
ARE SCHEDULING VISITS
TO THE PERSONAL
NUTRITIONIST AS WELL AS
THE PERSONAL TRAINER.



journey to oz

When it comes to custom-tailored diets, Oz Garcia is the nutritionist of the moment. Kristina Zimbalist gets fitted.

■ need my Oz fix!"

Publishing diva Judith Regan has just stepped off her eighth plane in three weeks—jet-setting between book-deal signings and shoots for her weekly talk show on *Fox News*. "I'm your typical burned-out New Yorker," says the stunning 40-something. "The level of fatigue, the horrible men, the stresses of modern life and what they do to a woman's hormonal system! When I'm following Oz, it all looks better, feels better, and thinks better. It's heavy-duty caretaking," Regan says. "It's like having a coach."

Madonna has her personal trainer. The Miller sisters have their

personal shoppers. But there's a sophisticated set of New Yorkers who consider these custom amenities paleolithic: Like Regan, they have discovered the personal nutritionist. And what Oz Garcia offers these overachieving perfectionists is the latest and most sophisticated form of couture: a custom-tuned metabolism.

Oz Garcia measures, delves into, and caters to a client's metabolic individuality. I like to think of him as a nutrition couturier. He designs a program of eating, exercising, and supplementation that optimizes your specific metabolism. He had made the cover of *New York* magazine's alternative-medicine issue. His client roster reads like an A-list of hip superstars: Along with Regan, it *beauty* ▶ 380

has included Winona Ryder, Robert De Niro, Donna Karan, Vivienne Tam, and Nicole Miller; restaurant mogul Steven Hanson; social stars Clarissa Bronfman and Nan Swid; models Veronica Webb and Karen Duffy; and Miss Russia '98. His book, *The Balance* (ReganBooks—as in Judith Regan), has hit amazon.com's best-seller list. And while he charges designer prices (programs run twelve weeks or three months at \$4,000), this food couturier runs 24/7: He's been known, for instance, to call a client on a Sunday after the all-night Newport wedding he knew she was attending.

Within hours after I'd agreed to make my own journey to Oz, the New York City lore surrounding him began trickling out of the woodwork. The rumors include:

1. He's a bread Nazi.
2. He's a caffeine Nazi.
3. He's a miracle worker.
4. He's a god.
5. Say ciao to Starbucks lattes: He won't accept any client who refuses to give up coffee; decaf is allowed, but only at first.

Like any creative designer, I reason, Oz simply had become enshrouded in an overblown mythology. Still, I enter his Upper West Side digs expecting a star-worthy taskmaster. What I find is a Zen-like office, a black leather couch, and Oz, stepping out like the wizard behind the big curtain. We agree to meet for seven weeks and schedule an appointment for as many consecutive Mondays as I can conceive.

Week 1

The consultation: Oz asks for extensive details about my eating habits and what I want to work on. "The main draw is managing weight and appearance," Oz explains. "But people are also eager to take advantage of leading-edge nutrition and supplementation in order to slow premature aging." As I sign up for all of the above, he issues a ten-part Comprehensive Health Appraisal in which I am to rate my tendency to do things like: crave sweets (twice a week or less), feel hopeless (could I factor in NASDAQ?), and be clumsy (debatable). This extremely thorough and actually quite serious questionnaire helps Oz pinpoint metabolic irregularities, signs of insulin sensitivity (which he says can affect carbohydrate cravings and fat storage), and shifts in hormone levels, and customize a food philosophy accordingly.

Part two is the hair test, for which I enter the lair of Albert Garcia, Oz's business partner, younger brother, and gentle giant. After I take down my ponytail, Albert hatchets off what would seem an expendable cross section (though Raymond at Bumble and Bumble would later launch into hysterics) and spirits it away to a lab for analysis.

In the taxi afterward, I recall that my J. F. Lazartigue conditioner contains salmon extract and silently wonder if follicularly consumed calories will surface in analysis.

Week 2

Results of hair test: very low in some crucial minerals. "How abnormal am I?" "For a stressed-out New Yorker, you're normal. But if you continue like this, in 20 years you'll be pear-shaped."

Oz obviously knows how to get New York women to listen.

Still, he agrees that I eat pretty healthily. I basically stick to protein and vegetables, with occasional carb moments: a Krispy Kreme doughnut, garlic bread, the odd Magnolia Bakery cupcake. Occasional deviations aren't really it, says Oz. Stress really

matters. It depletes minerals and affects digestion in ways we'll get into in more detail later, he tells me.

Having successfully pricked my ears, he hands me a booklet that translates the hair results into food repercussions and then gives me my customized prescription: Eat protein. Work out three to four times a week. I vow to follow it as I fall asleep that night, visions of amorphous paramecium-women dancing in my head.

Week 3

I hand over my food logs—line after college-ruled line of endless permutations of protein and vegetables: salmon-and-broccoli, chicken-and-broccoli, chicken-and-spinach, chicken Caesar, filet mignon, roasted tomatoes, corn on the cob, dashes of olive oil, occasional bowls of brown rice, protein-shake breakfasts, fruit breakfasts, all with scattered showers of water, Diet Lemon Snapple, and iced decaf.

"Great!" says Oz.

Since bread has always turned me into a narc, I already consider it enemy territory and feel at an unfair advantage with Oz's spartan carb ethic. (Other Oz groupies have not had it so easy: "Bread is my life, my friend," says Judith Regan. "I'm Italian.")

I ask for the lecture anyway. "There's been this extreme swing toward overconsumption of carbohydrates," says Oz. "It contributes to weight gain, cravings, water retention, and, in women, menstrual irregularities and exaggerated PMS. There is absolutely no reason to consume more than about 40 percent of calories as carbs. Anything more for most people is going to get stored as fat." Actually, 40 percent carbs is the going rate among diet gurus of the moment, but Oz's catch is that they be "good" carbs: fruit (occasionally) and vegetables. Next comes the lecture I fear. "Despite what people think, coffee and diet caffeinated beverages contribute to weight gain in the long run," says Oz. As Oz knows by now from my food logs, I'm a Snapple addict. A Diet Lemon user with a

habit of six bottles a day. "Caffeine causes blood-sugar levels to stay low, which initially inhibits appetite. But later the blood sugar takes a more severe drop, which causes overeating, and people end up with deregulated appetites. Caffeine also increases levels of cortisol," Oz says. An ominous new word that Oz has introduced into my lexicon, *cortisol* is a stress hormone that recent studies have found plays some role in water retention and, claims Oz, fat. The issue of cortisol and diet, in fact, seems to be a very complex and controversial topic among mainstream experts. (I mention the cortisol factor to a nutrition professor and a nutritionist M.D., and neither has begun applying those findings to food prescriptions. Is Oz avant-garde?)

"I want you to cut down to one Snapple," says Oz. I shudder but obey and begin hoarding my daily dose like the addict I am. "A Snapple a day . . ." my father cajoles that weekend, catching me stealing a precious sip. My friend Michael asks for a swig during the three hour *Death of a Salesman*, and I nearly say no. I know I have a problem. Is there Snapple methadone?

Week 4

Protein prescription easy to follow. No bread equals no bread cravings. (Could same theory hold true for Fendi handbags?) "It's boring," I say. "What works for most people is a very narrow range of food options," says Oz. "Any food you find not boring—foods you crave and foods that cause cravings—should immediately be a red flag to you that they create an imbalance."

Boring but peaceful. I have an epiphany. Oz is a food beauty ▶ 385

According to Oz, no bread equals no bread cravings. Could the same theory hold true for Fendi handbags?

VOGUE BEAUTY

Buddhist: If Zen followers banish the daily dramas that turn their lives into emotional roller coasters, Oz preaches rising above the food items that spur metabolic roller coasters: Things like caffeine, Nutrasweet, sugar, and wheat all turn the blood sugar into an erratic live wire. An even keel, while seemingly boring, is quite a Zen food place to be. I silently deem Oz the food Buddha and vow to continue following his path toward alimentary enlightenment.

Later that week, at a dinner party, my friend Noah serves meat loaf, mashed potatoes, and sautéed spinach. At absolute value, it is a perfectly Oz-worthy meal (the potatoes qualify as an occasionally acceptable vegetable). But I wake up bloated. So I half consciously undergo my own private detox. My food log reads: 7:30 A.M. 1/2 liter Poland Spring. 9:00 A.M. Starbucks iced decaf, skim. 12:30 P.M. 1/2 liter Poland Spring. 4:00 P.M. iced decaf, skim. 7:00 P.M. 1/2 liter Poland Spring. That night, I feel empty but righteous.

Week 5

"This is horrible," Oz says the following Monday, instantly spotting my one deviant chart. "This is the way you'd deal with a problem in junior high school!" To Oz, my compensation approach was the nutritional equivalent of a seventh-grade hissy fit. "You're eating so well. Why sabotage it?" I should have called him, he says. "You probably just consumed a lot of salt. Or maybe there was a little wheat in the meat loaf. To stay balanced, just think of deviations as not a big deal."

Oz's goal, as the title of his book explains, is *The Balance*. And my liquid Friday had been a serious teeter. My other days were perfectly Oz balanced, but he doesn't seem to notice. My hope for enlightenment vanishes like a Bouley Bakery crême brûlée.

Week 6

Over meat loaf trauma. My protein-and-vegetable logarithms returned, this time unbroken. Back to Zen and the art of food. "How do you feel?" Oz asks. Amazing. "Workouts?" Great. "Let's start building," says Oz. "I want you to start getting bodywork. Two massages a week would be best, but I'll allow two a month." I thought I could manage. Especially when Oz mentions my new least favorite word again: "Stress, as you remember, causes cortisol to swirl around the body," says Oz, "particularly in women." Hence the distant doom of New York's workplace divas becoming bottom heavy. Oz explains that working out lessens the possibility of a cor-

tisol invasion and that bodywork loosens any toxins and water retention.

The medical community is split as to whether this is valid or not. But Oz, who is not a registered dietitian, has always had gleaming success while bucking the establishment. A onetime fashion photographer who was saddled with migraine headaches, he went in search of alternative treatments—and found them—when medicine failed him. Now a self-taught, up-to-the-minute Oxford English Dictionary of health and nutrition, he heads the nutrition program at Manhattan's tony Equinox Fitness Clubs and directs its team of registered dietitians.

At the end of our session, Oz adds that he wants me to start taking Enada, or NADH, a supplement that its maker claims increases the body's available pool of ATP (or energy at the cellular level). It helps fight fatigue and foul moods; it also supposedly improves the body's ability to burn fat. Doctors aren't completely convinced, but I can't resist.

At the health-food store that evening, I ask for the Enada, and it feels as though everyone looks up when I say the name. The little boxes are stored behind the counter like contraband. As I browse aisles of herbs, a salesperson sees it in my hand. "That stuff's the best thing you can take," he tells me. "It takes your DNA back to when you were nine years old." The next morning, I swallow one tablet (with water only; half an hour before eating) and await the arrival of mini-me.

Week 7

"You look great," says Oz. "Food logs, good. Exercise, good. Bodywork?" Yes. "And how do you feel?" Great. It has been three weeks since I've had a Snapple, and I don't miss it—or anything else. Oz rattles off the latest research on the superantioxidant powers of fruits like strawberries and raspberries. But to keep blood sugar steady, he cautions, fruit snacks should be alternated with protein snacks. Ideal grabs: a small can of tuna. A piece of an Atkins bar. Fresh rolled turkey breast. Hard-boiled egg. A cup of yogurt.

I confess that I ate the croutons that I found lurking in a chicken Caesar, but that I didn't raid the Eli's bread basket as well. "Good girl," says Oz.

Couture food aside, perhaps Oz's faithful are lured by the archangelic pats on the back he offers them—the alimentary gold stars. Not to mention the metabolic gold stars: At the end of the seven weeks, I had lost five pounds. □ *vogue beauty* ▶ 386