

Loving it fresh and organic:

# Beating diabetes with attitude

By ADAM GIBSON\*

MANY kids at this year's Sydney Royal Easter Show were upset to discover that little Flossie, the sheep they got to pat, was closely related to the BBQ lamb chops being prepared on stage, as Charlene the clucky chicken was to the McNuggets at their favourite restaurant.

One or two of the vegetarians in attendance were a little put out too.

This shock to urban sensibilities was graciously delivered by celebrity chef and celebrated foodie Peter Howard at a pavilion devoted to explaining to the wide-eyed youth of today the sources of common foods we eat as well as the best and healthiest way to prepare and enjoy them.

Howard is one of Australia's best-known food and wine commentators, with a number of his books published, many years as food and wine editor on the *Today Show* and innumerable guest appearances speaking on agriculture, horticulture and his passion for regional and organic produce.

He staunchly advocates being well-acquainted with the source of everything you eat.

"To my mind it pays to be suspicious about food," Howard says. "Before I eat anything these days, I want to know what's in it, where it came from, how it was made. It's about caring about what goes into our bodies, rather than handing over that responsibility to a stranger or a corporation."

These are comments you may expect from a man with a lifelong commitment to wine and good eating, but there is another aspect to Howard which reshaped his attitude to all things culinary – two years ago, he was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes as a result of being sedentary and overweight.

"At first I went into a state of denial – after a lifetime of eating and drinking whatever I wanted, I honestly evaluated whether or not I could cope with the drastic changes that my doctor was prescribing for me at the time," Howard says.

"For a while there, it was touch and go whether I should just continue to live the way I always had and face the consequences."



**Celebrity chef and author Peter Howard is a Diabetes Australia spokesperson, cookbook author and public campaigner. He is himself diabetic and advocates knowing the source of foods and "living well with diabetes".**

"Eating well can be as much about gourmet cooking and the celebration of quality food as it is about health and counting calories."

Happily for Howard (and the Australian food and wine industry), he chose to tackle his diabetes head-on and lost 18 kilograms by rethinking his attitudes to food and exercise.

Two realisations spurred this on:

- He had far too much to live for to ignore his diabetes; and
- It did not have to be terribly hard.

Howard's strategies were basic and largely an extension of what he had been preaching to

the Australian public for many years about food and wine, namely:

- It is completely allowable to say "No, thanks" sometimes.
- Make the time to prepare a good meal, and the time in your day to enjoy it (that is, lose the fast-food mentality).
- Enjoy delicious dishes but in smaller quantities.
- Be okay about leaving food on your plate.
- Eat fresh, regional produce – organic, if possible.
- Healthy meals do not equal boring meals.
- Make every meal a celebration.

The denial and reluctance to change that Howard experienced is a very common reaction with the 275 people newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes in Australia every day, according to Diabetes Australia Queensland marketing manager, Genevieve D'Adam.

"We want people to realise that leading a healthy lifestyle to combat, or simply prevent, diabetes can in fact be enjoyable," Howard says.

"Eating well can be as much about gourmet cooking and

## NO-ADDED-FAT BEEF AND MUSHROOM STIR-FRY

(Serves 4)

600g lean steak

- 1 tablespoon red chilli (bottled or fresh), minced
- 1 tablespoon garlic, minced
- ¼ cup salt-reduced tamari soy sauce
- 1 cup sodium-reduced, no-fat beef stock
- 1 medium onion, cut into thin wedges
- 1 red capsicum, cut into strips
- 100g sliced mushroom, medium size
- 20g green ginger, grated
- 2 cups Chinese cabbage, sliced
- 200g cooked rice vermicelli noodles
- 1 cup coriander, leaves only

**1.** Trim beef of all fat, cut into fine strips and put in a bowl with chilli, garlic and soy sauce. Turn well and leave to marinate for 20 minutes.

**2.** To cook, pour half the beef stock into a wok and bring to the boil over a high heat. Add the onion and capsicum and stir-fry for 2 minutes. Drain the beef and add. If you have a small wok, you will need to do this in 2 batches after you have removed the vegetables with a slotted spoon. You need to leave the stock in the base to stop the meat from sticking to wok.

**3.** When the beef is slightly browned, return the onion and capsicum to the wok then add the rest of the stock, mushrooms and ginger. Stir-fry for 2 minutes then add the cabbage and cook to combine.

**4.** Serve in individual bowls with the stir-fry spooned over

the rice noodles and topped with ripped coriander leaves.

I use the salt-reduced tamari sauce but you can find organic ones too. This sauce does not have any wheat in it, so is excellent for coeliacs.

Beef stock is available as a liquid or in dried cubes. Look for those that are low in salt. I have found Massel stock cubes and liquid best for my purposes.

I always cut my own beef strips so that I know how fatty the meat is. You need to have lean meat, cut in fine strips for quick cooking.

*Recipe sourced from Delicious Living by Peter Howard, available at all Diabetes Australia – Queensland shops.*

the celebration of quality food as it is about health and counting calories."

Howard is a great example of someone who has completely embraced this philosophy. Not surprisingly, he has thus been recruited as a Diabetes Australia spokesperson, cookbook author and public campaigner. His main role for the organisation is to present a public message of "Living well with diabetes" rather than present the same, old scare tactics of "Change — or else".

D'Adam says: "We see Peter's refreshing approach to diet and managing his diabetes as a great example to others – very important considering diabetes is the fastest-growing disease

in the western world. It seems crazy at first glance that becoming *more* interested in food may be the most effective lifestyle choice people can make to prevent or manage diabetes but this is exactly what Peter preaches.

"On a macro level, aligning the organic food, fresh food and wine industries with desirable lifestyle outcomes for people living with diabetes would seem to us to be a smart move for all involved."

The only parties likely to disagree with this sentiment may be Flossie and Charlene and their friends at the Show. ■

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