

# 'We look after our cars better than our bodies'

WE DON'T REALISE THE KIND OF DAMAGE WE ARE INFLECTING ON OURSELVES IN THE NAME OF LIFESTYLE — BUT THERE'S HOPE YET, SAYS **DR NANDITA SHAH**. PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE... AND THE SIMPLEST WAY TO DO SO IS THROUGH NUTRITION. WE ARE WHAT WE EAT

BY **SUSHMITA BOSE**



**P**ills vs Peas — other than the alliteration — sounded catchy; it's the title of one of the workshops Dr Nandita Shah conducts in India and the world over, and it was one of the first snatches that showed up online when I did a search in her name. The recipient of the prestigious Nari Shakti Award 2016 from the President of India is also the founder of SHARAN ([www.sharan-india.org](http://www.sharan-india.org)), an organisation devoted to disease reversal through food. The website says she is "a doctor that believes each of us can be our own best doctor most of the time", and she "conducts specific health workshops — such as 'Reversing Diabetes' and 'Reversing Heart Disease and Hypertension' as well as a 21-day residential disease reversal programme". I also find out she's the author of the bestselling *Reversing*



*Diabetes in 21 Days* published by Penguin India at the end of last year.

In a freewheeling interview to *WKND*, Dr Shah tells us she chose to “become a doctor because of a desire to reduce suffering, and specifically chose homeopathy as a holistic healing form that encompassed mind and body. It gave me an insight into human nature and allowed me to grow and experience vicariously through the life stories of my patients”. When she contracted Guillain-Barré syndrome – a serious autoimmune disease – she decided to heal without the “use of modern medicines”; “this further fuelled my understanding about the healing power of the body”. “In an attempt to slow down, I moved to the international community of Auroville in India,” she recalls, “which was a 180-degree shift from my life in Mumbai and further fuelled my personal growth. I realised that medicines never cure, but the body always knows how to heal if the causes of disease are removed.”

Excerpts:

**What got you interested in the preventive — rather than curative — field?**

I became a doctor because I was interested in real health. Real health is prevention rather than cure. In ancient China, doctors were paid according to the number of days the patients were well. Today, medicine has become commercialised. Doctors’ conferences and vacations are paid for by pharmaceutical companies, and even medical textbooks are written by pharmaceutical companies. Hospitals are run by business school graduates; doctors are given goals and targets just as in any big corporate. And patients, too, clamour for relief of symptoms rather than cure, and do little to understand about the working of their own body. I’m interested in treating patients who want to take responsibility for their own health and are willing to do everything to reach their highest health potential.

**I know this is old hat, but again — how have modern lifestyles impacted our health so much? Is it just the stress and the preservatives in food, and the bad air and pollution, or are there any new learnings?**

Our modern lifestyles are affecting us in ways we can’t even imagine. The most important fallout is that there is no time to think and reflect. We are doing things on conditioned reflexes rather than by thinking through. We have become slaves to commercial interests but even money doesn’t make us happy. We have no time to think about one of the most important needs of our lives: fuelling our bodies. We look after our cars better than our bodies – and it’s making us sick. We have outsourced our health to insurance companies, doctors and pharmaceutical companies and we have become so dependant on medicines that we cannot live without them. We live in concrete jungles and have lost touch with nature, animals and our instincts. We depend on drugs to manage our moods.

Disease reversal requires a shift in consciousness, from a culture of disease to a culture of health. Once

**FOOD TIPS YOU CAN INCORPORATE IN YOUR DIET FOR A ‘HEALTHY START’**

**Eat like a monkey.**

Eat the parts of fruits and vegetables that a monkey would. Avoid peeling fruits and vegetables that the monkey would not peel. The maximum nutrition is just under the skin, and the skin is valuable fibre — too precious to throw away. This means, peel your bananas but never peel apples, pears or even carrots or potatoes.

**Learn how to cook without oil.**

Techniques include steaming and baking, to bring out flavours without destroying nutrients.

**Eat more raw.** Although this is not new, it can’t be emphasised enough. Raw foods always contain more nutrients than their cooked counterparts. A large salad can be made more filling by adding some steamed beans or steamed vegetables (potatoes, sweet potatoes, beetroot etc). This is easy to prepare, full of nutrients, and will not add to your waistline. Make dressings with whole ingredients to enhance the salads.



**Eat only organic.**

We spray poison on our foods to keep animals away from them and then eat them ourselves. How silly is that?



**Use seeds and nuts as flavourings.** Use dates and raisins as sweeteners. Avoid all refined substances.

**Replace dairy with plant-based dairy alternatives.**

Replace meat with high protein and low-fat alternatives like beans.

— Dr Nandita Shah

**“I realised that medicines never cure, but the body always knows how to heal if the causes of disease are removed”**

the shift happens, stress literally melts away as we have no need for much of what we were earlier so dependant on. Interestingly, once the shift begins, it can easily continue in a positive direction with minimal effort. A change in diet makes a profound shift in the state of mind.

**Cue: your recently-published book *Reversing Diabetes in 21 Days*. Can you really reverse diabetes in 21 days? How?**

Well, yes – and no. It takes 21 days to change a habit. If we learn new healthy habits in 21 days, then we can reverse diabetes. In many cases, it takes no longer than 21 days. I conduct a 21-day health retreat where, time and again, we see many patients get free from all diabetes medications... They leave with normal blood reports within those 21 days. It all depends on the severity of the diabetes, the length of the condition, and the age of the patient – but you can see results in 21 days... Thanks to the glucometer, we can actually see changes on a daily basis. If we reduce medicines as the blood sugar level comes down, then we can help our body heal. When we take medicines, our body exerts itself to metabolise these medicines and excrete them. This distracts our body from the actual healing process. When patients are on medicine for diabetes, they never get cured. The only way that we can get cured is by reducing medications, while getting rid of the cause of the disease. If a person follows the guidelines and reduces medication as per requirement, there is no reason that he cannot heal.

**What is the success rate with all participants at your 21-day residential programme? And how easy/difficult has it been for them to stick to their new lifestyle formula?**

Because it takes 21 days to change a habit, and because we’re having so much fun while changing our habits, most people are able to stick to the new lifestyle formula. Many of them find their families changing along with them. But some of them fall off the wagon. I would say the success rate of the 21-day programme is about 80 per cent, and it’s getting better each year as I realise the reasons why people fall off the wagon. Primarily, the foods that we are leaving behind are addictive. It’s a bit like quitting smoking. It can be done. But having just one cigarette after quitting can result in getting back into the addiction.

**What does one go through for 21 days?**

The 21-day health retreat is first and foremost a holiday. Almost nothing is compulsory, there are lots of choices and different ways to fill the day.

We do complete lab tests at the beginning and end of the programme so that we can compare the health levels after reducing medications. There are regular checkups, yoga, meditation, swimming classes, nature walks, hikes, instructional classes, cooking classes and films every day. We serve lavish – but healthy! – buffet meals everyday. There’s also dancing, talent shows, and special celebrations. We make new friends, and close bonds. Most people are sad when the programme

comes to an end, but they do leave with a new-found understanding about the working of their body, less medication, more energy, and freedom from addictions.

**You talk about healthy cooking. How does one incorporate that into their busy schedules?**

First of all, let me tell you that once you start eating healthy, energy levels skyrocket. You will be able to do more than you could do before. Secondly, most recipes [including the ones we give out] can be really simple, and with a little planning you can fix meals in just half-an-hour. It usually takes that much time to go somewhere and order food. Once you start eating healthy meals, you won’t feel like eating out anymore, so you save a lot of money too, while eating better. During our seminars, or in my book, I teach people how to cook healthy, and carry food with them. And remember, nature’s fast food is fruit: it’s available everywhere, it’s delicious, and highly nutritious and requires no effort at all.

**Tell us about your most interesting case study.**

There are so many! But here is one of my early cases:

Mr D, aged 70, was losing his eyesight on account of diabetes. He had had diabetes for 30 years, and was on medication for it.

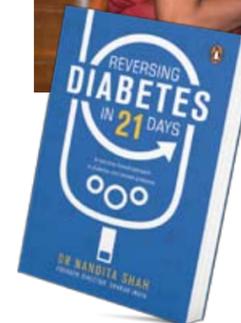
## UNDERSTANDING TYPE 2 DIABETES: WHAT HAPPENS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE:

- 1** The most important cause is **FAT inside the muscle cells.** This causes insulin resistance. To get rid of this, we must reduce all dietary fats, especially those without fibre — oil, ghee, butter, and animal products — including dairy and eggs, since they too are full of fat.
- 2** Lack of fibre: Fibre holds onto fat and sugar, and prevents them from going directly into the bloodstream. Only plants have fibre, but refined and processed plant foods lack fibre. Therefore, food should be plant-based, and all refined and processed foods should be avoided.
- 3** Diabetes is a hormonal problem and linked with other hormonal problems like hypothyroid, PCOD, infertility, Vitamin D imbalance etc. When one hormone goes out of balance, others can be affected. External hormonal influences can cause an imbalance. Dairy is full of hormones, all animal products are likely to be high in hormones, non-organic plant foods may have hormones... hormonal medications like steroids are hormones. Any of these can promote diabetes.
- 4** Chemicals are hormone disruptors: Medications, personal care products (hair dye, deodorants, toothpaste, hand sanitisers, soaps, perfumes, makeup etc), home care products (air fresheners, detergents, pest control, phenyl etc), non-organic fruits and veg, readymade products, plastics, artificial sweeteners can all contribute.
- 5** Dairy contains fat, no fibre, hormones, chemicals (pesticides, antibiotics) and is, therefore, the leading cause of diabetes.
- 6** Stress is often the precipitating cause of diabetes and, whenever we are stressed, blood sugars go up.
- 7** Lack of exercise contributes to it.
- 8** The lack of Vitamin D is another factor.
- 9** Tea, coffee, colas, alcohol and smoking raise blood sugar levels — and should be completely avoided.
- 10** On the other hand, one can eat as many fruits and vegetables as one wishes. It is important not to peel fruits and vegetables, wherever possible, because peels contain a lot of fibre and help in the healing process.

— Dr Nandita Shah



**HEALTH FIRST:** (above) Dr Shah receiving the Nari Shakti Award 2016 from then Indian President Pranab Mukherjee for her work; (left) her book cover



The medicines did not control blood sugar, which was still high. Since he was losing his eyesight, he was willing to make changes rightaway. In two weeks of stopping dairy, his blood sugar normalised and, in a couple of years, he was able to stop all his

diabetic medications. He had been suffering from a severe manic-depressive disorder for years, and this too disappeared. Difficult to say whether this happened because of the diet change or because diabetes was cured – but whatever the reason, it was a huge relief for the family! They felt they had the person they loved back after so many years!

This case was very interesting because it shows how quickly blood sugar can come down just by making dietary changes. It shows how all the different symptoms are co-related. It shows how important it is to minimise medication, because they do have side effects. And it shows how important healing is, not just for the patient, but for the entire family. It’s also a huge relief on resources – financial and otherwise.

**There’s a difference between preventing and reversing: how does this play out in your practice?**

Unfortunately, not many people want to learn how to prevent disease anymore, so we are largely working with reversing diseases. But, every once in a while, we do have people who are completely healthy and want to learn how to maintain their health. After seeing sickness in family members and friends around them, they are interested in taking charge of their health from the beginning.

**The Internet is one stop that is full of advice on how you can “self medicate” — and it’s been proven to be dangerous. What are your thoughts?**

The Internet can be dangerous, but it need not be. It gives us various perspectives: we have to be aware that everything there is not necessarily correct. We’ve become too “busy” to think. And that’s why we can easily be brainwashed by advertisements or the Internet. We need to stop and think. If animals in nature are able to heal themselves, what keeps us from connecting to our instincts?

**Tell me about your lifestyle. What are your no-nos, and what are those things that you do as a rule, and never compromise on?**

I almost never compromise on going to bed on time, getting rest at the right time, cooking my own food, and getting exercise. I never compromise on eating 100 per cent vegan. I try to put in high-quality fuel only. W

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