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FREAKY EATERS: WATTS THE STORY?



Jenny Ross talks to Charlotte Watts, the new nutritionist on BBC3's third series of Freaky Eaters, about food junkies, obsessive comfort eating and 'Yorkshire Pudding Man'

If you haven't yet watched *Freaky Eaters* then you're sure to have heard about the extreme food habits on the show: the man who would only eat cheese, the woman obsessed with chowing down on chicken and that really weird one where they'd only eat burnt sausages. For these people variety isn't the spice of life, it's a scourge on their mono-diets of junk food. With 8 years under her belt as a practising nutritionist, Charlotte Watts is the woman charged with chipping away at their obsessive eating habits and she tells me that it's a pretty hard challenge for them to swallow.

Tell us about the format of the show...

The first thing we do is show them a DVD of pleas from their family and friends. Which is a great thing, in that it really makes them realise that they need to take responsibility. Often they've been like this for so long that they don't quite remember that people might be worried. Then we do something, which is almost

like a shock tactic, to show them what they have been eating, so they can't hide from it anymore. They have to look en masse at what they eat in a year. It is repulsive. Once we've done that, we take them to see the doctor who outlines that, even if they don't feel like they're ill at the moment, this is going to have consequences. Then they're given a series of challenges, depending on their particular circumstances. A lot of the time they don't have any relationship with food at all. There's a massive barrier between them and food. We see a new food and we go, "Ooohh, I wonder what that tastes like." Their reaction is, "Aaarrghhh, that terrifies me."

I've never seen anyone on the show addicted to healthy food...

Oh no. It's quick-fix food. It's empty calories. Those are instant gratification foods. The trouble is they're used to hit-you-over-the-head tastes: sugar, salt, fats. So when they taste something like a vegetable, they're like, "Oh,

it doesn't taste of anything", because their palates are very dampened.

How do you set about putting that right?

They get a hamper from me that will have something for them to do to start off the process of change. One of the most important things for me is that I take them to a kitchen and have them taste lots of new foods to see how they react to that. You have to push them out of their comfort zones and they do kick off about that quite a lot.

The fact that they've only been eating a certain food does imply a stubborn nature.

Exactly, and de-motivated from a nutritional point of view. They don't have the nutrients to create the neurotransmitters and the energy to be motivated. Lack of B vitamins, blood sugar imbalances...

What's the most shocking case from the forthcoming series?

There's a Yorkshire Pudding one, which is really shocking, where we show him a swimming pool full of batter – which is pretty much what he's been living on the whole year.

Doesn't he even vary it and make a Toad-in-the-Hole?

That would have been too much! The other one was the beans and chips one. Beans and chips themselves don't sound too unusual. The thing is he couldn't have them touching. So, if he went to a café and ordered his beans and chips and they came out with the beans on top of the chips, he wouldn't eat them.

Is it nutritional OCD then?

Definitely. They all have rules and regulations: it's got to be this, it can't be with this. That's what we really have to break down.

Are they convinced they don't like new food before they've even tried it?

No, it's more interesting than that. They have expectations about what it's gonna be like and, because they have no experience of that food, usually the expectation is completely and utterly wrong. And when they first put that food in their mouth, they go, "Oh, I didn't expect it to taste like that," which is brilliant. That's what I want to hear, because that makes you go, 'Okay, so you've got a whole world of expectation that you've imposed upon all these things here. You think you know what they're going to be like and you don't. It's all wrong!'

It must be awful to live a life where you don't take any pleasure in food?

It scares the life out of me. These people don't enjoy going out for meals. Can you imagine?! Awful; that would be one of life's main pleasures lost to me.

Have you got any favourite cases from the show?

There's one who just stuck out completely. I just knew he was gonna be a 'foody'. He was so scared at the beginning. But he was so curious when he was tasting. He was like, "What's that? What is it? What does it do?" He was one of our first cases and I've heard back that he's surpassing his husband and his mother in what they're eating. I knew he was gonna

become a gourmet, because he was a very sensitive, sensory person, very descriptive and very visual. I could see in him the reason I love food, because it's so exciting.

What is the best way to ensure people get into good eating habits?

I think you actually have to commit to it. It's really important. We live in such a world of convenience that we kind of expect that food

should just be there. But you have to make some effort and you have to have a relationship with it, because that's how you connect to it: cooking, our modern equivalent of foraging – going to the supermarket and looking for what you might buy – and getting involved in it. We are surrounded by things that make it too easy to eat crap, unfortunately.

Watch *Freaky Eaters* from Tuesday 17th February at 8pm on BBC3.

CHARLOTTE'S HEALTHY MEAL IN MINUTES

Simple and delicious for breakfast or lunch

POACHED EGGS AND SMOKED SALMON FLORENTINE

2 large free-range eggs
250 g spinach
2 slices seeded rye or spelt bread (sourdough)
2-4 slices smoked salmon
Lemon slices to serve

Serves 2



1. Boil half a pan of water, crack the eggs into the boiling water and cook for 3-4 minutes on a medium heat.
2. Meanwhile, wilt the spinach in a steamer or saucepan on a low heat. Just heat enough for the leaves to shrink and become watery, but not too much that they brown in any way – about 1-2 minutes.
3. Toast the bread and butter and cut in half, arrange on a plate and put the spinach on top.
4. Cut the smoked salmon into strips and lay on top of the spinach.
5. Drain the eggs from the water and serve on top of the smoked salmon.
6. Squeeze the lemon over the smoked salmon to taste.