

GUT Instincts

A doctor's passion for her job, and how she stays healthy

Gastroenterologist and mother-of-two ANDREA RAJNAKOVA reveals her top health tips, what she stocks in her fridge, her secret to staying energised, and more.

BY AMY GREENBURG

Dr Andrea knew she wanted to be a doctor from the moment she received her first toy “doctor’s set” for Christmas at age four. Born and raised in Slovakia, she attended medical school there before starting work at one of the country’s largest hospitals, where her boss, a professor in gastroenterology, inspired her to choose gastroenterology as her specialisation. In 1995, she moved with her husband Peter to Singapore, where she earned her PhD and MMed, and worked at a local hospital before opening her own clinic in 2010.



“I love my job and my specialty,” says Dr Andrea, who treats patients with a wide range of gastrointestinal conditions such as reflux, inflammatory bowel disease, gallstones, and gastric, colon, liver and pancreatic problems, and provides endoscopy procedures like gastroscopies and colonoscopies. “Gastroenterology and endoscopy are dynamic, fast-changing medical fields with a wide range of new technologies, innovations and treatments, developed and implemented in clinical practice over the past decades.”

In addition to using these modern advances, Dr Andrea says she’s able to provide patients with holistic care by focusing on their diets, lifestyle choices and food allergies, which have become increasingly important in recent years as food-related allergies and gastrointestinal problems have substantially increased.

“The reasons for increasing frequency of food allergies and coeliac disease are unclear, but could be related to recent dietary changes, gluten-rich dietary patterns, processed foods, food additives and changes in microbiota,” she says.

Her advice: Get in all the valuable nutrients you can, and avoid artificial processing, artificial sweeteners, colouring and flavouring, additives, chemicals, too much sugar and saturated fat.

“Healthy choices would include regular meals divided into five servings per day, containing small amounts of complex carbohydrates, lean protein, healthy fat in the form of omega-3 fatty acids, plenty of vegetables in any form, and some fruit,” she says. “Hydration is very important, too. People often have too many sweetened drinks and diet sodas, which bring extra sugar, colouring, artificial flavouring and sweeteners. It’s better to have either water or herbal caffeine-free teas or infusions.”

The best health advice she’s ever gotten, she says, is to make realistic choices with realistic expectations to avoid disappointment.

“Food selection must be sustainable and for the long-term. There’s no point in ‘dieting’ for a few weeks or months and then returning to your original eating habits. That will only create a yo-yo effect, not just in one’s weight, but in one’s health as a whole.” She adds that people are able to comply with healthy diets only when they feel satisfaction from the foods they take in. “Starvation is the biggest enemy of healthy diet and lifestyle. It never brings good results!”

So, what exactly would we find in Dr Andrea’s fridge? “I have a very large compartment for fresh vegetables – you’ll always find some fresh greens, tomatoes, capsicum, broccoli, cauliflower, pumpkin, celery, eggplant, zucchini, beetroot, avocados, mushrooms,



spinach, and lettuce there, along with fruits such as green apples, oranges and bananas.” In addition, she stocks up on walnuts, cashews and almonds, cheese, Greek yoghurt without additives and free-range eggs. For protein, she favours fresh fish like salmon, and organic chicken and other organic meats. “I also keep chia seeds and flax seeds in the fridge to maintain freshness since Singapore is very hot and humid,” she notes.

“I eat a healthy, well-balanced diet, absolutely free of processed foods, fast food and junk food. Almost all our meals are cooked at home, so we are in charge of food quality and ingredients.” She adds, “I don’t take any supplements, as I believe if we eat properly balanced, healthy food, all necessary nutrients, vitamins and minerals come with it.”

According to Andrea, our look is a reflection of our lifestyle and diet. So, in addition to avoiding processed foods and maintaining a healthy diet, Dr Andrea counts a positive attitude and open mind as crucial factors in keeping fit both mentally and physically, along with physical activity, of course. And, though her busy work-family balance doesn’t allow any spare time for the gym, she still works exercise into her daily life.

“I keep myself active by avoiding lifts. I always choose to take stairs instead, no matter what floor I need to go to. I call it self-discipline!”

As for staying energised for it all, the mother of two (son Alex is 15 and daughter Annette is 13) credits a positive attitude and her family.

“My family brings the sunshine into my life,” she says. “I devote every second of my free time to kids and my family. My husband is very supportive and he helps a lot with the children, who do a lot of extracurricular activities. I really enjoy watching and supporting my children during their sports events, concerts and other performances; it’s a major ‘mental relax’ for me.” *a*



Andrea’s Digestive, Colon, Liver and Gallbladder Clinic
#12-10 Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre,
3 Mount Elizabeth
6836 2776 | andrea-digestive-clinic.com