

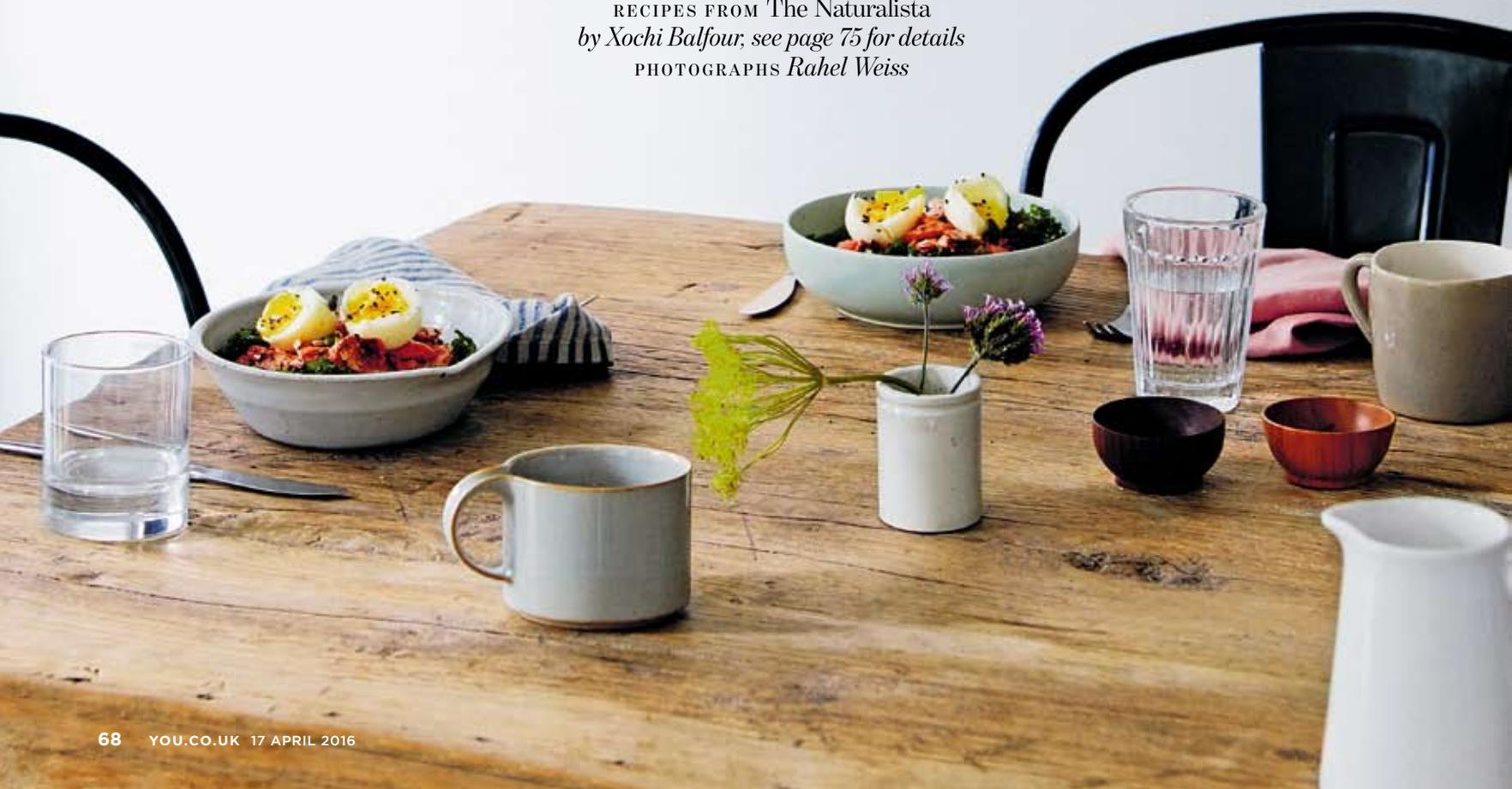


Living La Vida

NATURALISTA

Health blogger *Xochi Balfour* presents a gentle path to nourishing ourselves inside and out

RECIPES FROM *The Naturalista*
by *Xochi Balfour*; see page 75 for details
PHOTOGRAPHS *Rahel Weiss*



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Smoked mackerel, beetroot & fennel salad

FOR RECIPE, SEE PAGE 75 ►

bitesize

Xochi on her three pillars of wellbeing and food Naturalista style

Three pillars? Tell us more...

My blog The Naturalista explores holistic health in all its aspects. For me, the three pillars of optimal health and vitality are a wholefood diet, natural skincare and the cultivation of mindfulness. I'm passionate about living a balanced life in harmony with the world around me.

Your take on optimal eating?

I'm currently finishing my training as a naturopathic nutritionist. My recipes are gluten- and dairy-free and are largely plant-based – although some do contain meat and fish, which many of us need from time to time. We should be eating fresh ingredients in their natural state as much as we can, so many of the dishes in the book are entirely raw.

Weren't you veggie before?

In my 20s, I was vegetarian for four years and while I felt wonderful morally speaking, I felt terrible physically. My immune system was weak, my diet was poor, and cheese and carbs were the mainstay of my meals. I now know a great deal more about how to live a healthy meat-free life, but I've discovered through trial and error that I feel at my best when I incorporate meat and fish into my diet, particularly because as a female with a strong monthly cycle, my body gives me very clear signals when it wants red meat – and no popular diet or health-food craze can compete with vividly dreaming about steak.

So we decide?

The best judge of how you should eat is yourself. Our bodies have an innate wisdom and if we learn to listen to them properly, we start to eat what we need and ditch the things we do not.

Take us back to the beginning...

In 2011, I quit my office job as a journalist in London to set up a charitable healthy street-food truck called Rainbo with my now husband Ben. We weren't chefs, so the adventure was a wild and wonderful blur of chopping, griddling, washing, packing, driving, eating, laughing and sharing (and occasional crying). After a year or so running the van I hit what I now see was adrenal burnout.

Big wake-up call?

I know I'm not the only who has felt as though their life is suddenly in control of them and not the other way round. Longer work hours, crowded commutes,



eating on the run and the round-the-clock demands of life lived online all creep up on us and keep stress levels running high. I knew that if we were to continue giving the business our all – or anything at all – something major had to shift.

Your action plan?

What we put into our bodies struck me as the most important place to start. Following swiftly on from overhauling our diet and kitchen cupboards came the bathroom cabinet, along with a chance journey to a silent retreat and meditation community in Costa Rica. A more conscious and mindful approach to living took seed and continues to flourish as I discover more.

Tell us more about mindfulness...

Just like our bodies, our spirits need nourishing, and in my experience living more mindfully is as important to our wellbeing as a balanced diet and natural beauty and skincare. In fact, meditation and mindful eating are the fundamental actions from which all wellness springs.

Is this for everyone?

My book offers a simple, inspiring wellness bible for anyone who needs to slow down and get themselves back on track. You don't need to take a week off work and trek to a meditation retreat or do a costly juice cleanse; you don't need to spend a fortune on expensive treatments or therapies. The ingredients you need to live a healthier, happier life are right here. I changed my whole life from my little London kitchen and had tremendous fun doing it.

Fun is permitted? We're listening...

Well, balance is the key to health and happiness. Feeling restricted and deprived does no one any good and I don't see anything wrong with enjoying wine, coffee and other treats in moderation if you support your body around them.

Salmon, kale & egg bowl

Transitioning from carb-based breakfasts to protein-based ones was one of the most dramatically beneficial moves I made when I started to eat more nutritionally. Bowls like this one, with oily cold-water fish and plenty of fibrous greens, set you up with so much more fuel and energy for jam-packed days than refined carbohydrates or sugary cereals. The combination of tamari and hemp oil is one of my favourites and this dish would be just as good with the kale alone. The ginger and garlic add an extra Asian flavour.

SERVES 2

- 1 garlic clove, peeled**
- 2cm (¾ in) piece of fresh ginger, grated**
- 2 tsp tamari, plus extra for drizzling**
- 180g (6¼ oz) wild salmon fillet, skin on**
- 2 eggs**
- a handful of pumpkin seeds**
- a handful of sunflower seeds**
- 1 tbs sesame seeds**
- olive or coconut oil, for frying**
- 4 handfuls of kale, washed**
- 4 tbs hemp oil**
- freshly ground black pepper**

1 Using a pestle and mortar, crush the garlic and ginger together and mix with the tamari. Pour into a bowl and add the salmon. Cover and chill in the fridge for 15-20 minutes.

2 Bring a pan of water to the boil and soft-boil the eggs for 5½ minutes. Remove from the pan and run under cold water until cool enough to handle, then peel.

3 Meanwhile, lightly toast the seeds in a dry frying pan until golden, then set aside. When you're ready to serve, fry the salmon skin-side down in a little olive or coconut oil over a medium heat for 4-5 minutes, then turn and cook for another 3-4 minutes, until it is cooked through and flakes easily. Remove from the heat and allow to cool before removing the skin and breaking into chunks.

4 Chop and steam the kale over a pan of boiling water for 1 minute, then drizzle with hemp oil and extra tamari. Divide between two bowls and add the flaked salmon. Break an egg on top, sprinkle with the toasted seeds and finish with some black pepper. ►

MORE ONLINE

For a bonus helping of Xochi's recipes including lamb tagine, banana almond pancakes and everyday courgette bread, visit you.co.uk or mailonline.co.uk/you.





Polenta cauliflower steaks with salsa verde

Crunchy, cheesy (from the nutritional yeast) and dairy-free, these cauliflower steaks make every vegan smile. The tangy salsa verde harnesses all the power of English summer herbs. Anchovies provide an optional hit of salty protein, but for a vegan version, leave them out and add a sprinkle of salt instead. The salsa is equally good with fish or on leftover veggies, and really comes to life with a grinding of black pepper.

SERVES 2 AS A MAIN, OR 4 AS A SIDE

- 1 cauliflower**
- 6 tbsp olive or coconut oil**
- 4 tbsp polenta**
- 2 tbsp nutritional yeast**
- salt and freshly ground black pepper**

FOR THE SALSA VERDE

- a large handful of fresh parsley**
- a large handful of basil leaves**
- 3 tbsp olive oil**
- 1 tbsp lemon juice**
- 1 small garlic clove**
- freshly ground black pepper**
- 6 anchovy fillets, in oil (optional)**

- 1** Preheat the oven to 200C/gas 6. First, make the salsa verde. Place all the ingredients in a food processor or blender and blitz until smooth. Spoon into a bowl and chill until ready to serve.
- 2** Wash and trim your cauliflower and cut it into 2.5cm (1in) thick slices (depending on the size of the cauliflower you will get about 4 'steaks' out of it). You will be left with a few florets at the end; keep these as they can roast alongside the steaks.
- 3** Place the cauliflower slices in a large baking tray and drizzle over 3 tablespoons of the oil. Rub it in so the slices are covered, then sprinkle over 2 tablespoons of polenta and 1 tablespoon of nutritional yeast, making sure the cauliflower is evenly covered. Season, turn the pieces over and repeat.
- 4** Roast in the oven for 15 minutes, then turn the cauliflower slices over and return to the oven for a further 5 minutes. It should be crunchy and golden on the outside with a little bite in the middle. Serve with the salsa verde. ►

Black coconut rice with mango

The exotic flavours of this recipe instantly transport me to the warm shores of Southeast Asia and this recipe is one of my favourite versions of that all-time classic: rice pudding. Black rice has such a lovely, nutty texture and looks beautiful with the bright and vibrant mango (banana and pineapple also work well). The dusting of coconut palm sugar is essential for that salty-sweet butterscotchy deliciousness.

SERVES 2-3

160g (5½ oz) black rice, soaked for 4-8 hours in water
1 x 400g tin coconut milk
½ tsp sea salt
4-5 tbsp coconut palm sugar
a splash unsweetened nut milk
1 ripe mango, peeled and diced

1 Place the drained rice, coconut milk and salt in a medium nonstick pan. Bring to the boil then simmer gently over a low heat for 45 minutes, or until the rice is soft and creamy but still has some bite. You may need to add a little water as it cooks. Stir frequently to keep the rice well mixed and make sure it doesn't stick to the bottom.

2 When it is cooked, mix in 3 tablespoons of the coconut palm sugar (or more to taste). Remove from the heat and serve in a bowl with a splash of nut milk, the diced mango and the remaining sugar sprinkled on top.



Smoked mackerel, beetroot & fennel salad

In naturopathic nutrition, we encourage eating oily, cold-water fish as they are full of anti-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids. We also like to keep our veggies varied and 'eat the rainbow'. This delicious salad covers both, and makes a light yet nourishing main course packed with protein and crunch. I like to buy pepper-coated mackerel for extra spice and warmth. If you're really hungry, you can also add a quartered soft-boiled egg for extra protein.

SERVES 2 AS A MAIN OR 4 AS A STARTER

300g (11oz) uncooked beetroot, peeled and roughly chopped
1 tbsp olive or avocado oil
40g (1½ oz) hazelnuts (skin on)
350g (12oz) new potatoes, halved
1 fennel bulb, finely sliced
4 smoked mackerel fillets, skinned and broken into small chunks

1 Preheat the oven to 180C/gas 4.

2 Toss the beetroot in the olive or avocado oil on a roasting tray, season with a little salt and roast for 15-20 minutes, or until soft but still firm to the bite.

3 At the same time, roast the hazelnuts on a separate tray for 10 minutes, or until they are lightly toasted and their skins start to crack. When both are done, remove from the oven and set the trays aside to cool.

4 Meanwhile, cook the

a small handful of dill
sea salt

FOR THE DRESSING

1 tbsp cold-pressed olive oil
2 tbsp capers
juice of 1 lemon
grated zest of ½ lemon
1 small red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
salt and freshly ground black pepper

potatoes in boiling salted water over a medium heat for 10 minutes, or until tender. Drain and set aside to cool.

5 To prepare the dressing, whisk together the olive oil, capers, lemon juice and zest, and chilli, and season with salt and pepper.

6 Tip the cooled potatoes and fennel into a bowl. Pour over the dressing and mix well. Divide among plates and top with the roasted beetroot and mackerel chunks. Garnish with dill and toasted hazelnuts. **■**



GET 25 PER CENT OFF XOCHI'S NEW BOOK

Our recipes are from The Naturalista by Xochi Balfour, to be published on Thursday by Headline, price £25. As well as Xochi's introduction and tips on equipment and stocking the pantry, there are chapterfuls of recipes for optimum health and wellbeing followed by a chapter on natural skincare and another on mindful living. To pre-order a copy for £18.75 (a 25 per cent discount) until 1 May, visit you-bookshop.co.uk, or call 0844 571 0640; p&p is free on orders over £12.