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- Women's Style
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- Jewelry & Watches
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Home > Fashion > Health & Beauty > The Celebrity Secret to Healthy Eating: Z.E.N. Foods Founder Talks Hollywood Diets, Cupcakes and Zac Efron RSS



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The Celebrity Secret to Healthy Eating: Z.E.N. Foods Founder Talks Hollywood Diets, Cupcakes and Zac Efron

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If you're one of the people who has ever tried a meal delivery service, you know the entire experience can be—less than satisfactory. Everything is prepackaged, frozen, boring and makes you *feel* like you're on a diet—and *no one* wants to feel like they're on a diet. But Zero Effort Nutrition, or **Z.E.N. Foods**, is changing the way we diet with a tailored meal

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plan, fresh foods and healthy innovations on your favorite high-calorie foods. Who wouldn't want to get bikini ready while stuffing their face with a burger? We gave Z.E.N. foods a try and talked with **Mariana Rossano**, President, Founder and CEO of Z.E.N. about everything from her A-list clients to the kale trend (spoiler alert: she's a fan!), hoping to find that spark that sets this company apart.



Starting her career in theater arts, Rossano attended Lee Strasburg University and had hopes for fame and fortune on the stage, but soon took a job as a fitness trainer to help make ends meet. "As many of us have dreams of being a **Jennifer Aniston** or whatever, it's not going to happen for a lot of us," she admits. "I did some theater and stuff in New York and then I realized survival had to come first." Taking jobs as a fitness trainer by day and bartender by night, she began to unknowingly gain the experience she would later use to create her own brand, and was soon picked up by Zone Gourmet. Excelling quickly within the early stages of the company's growth, she was soon transferred to Los



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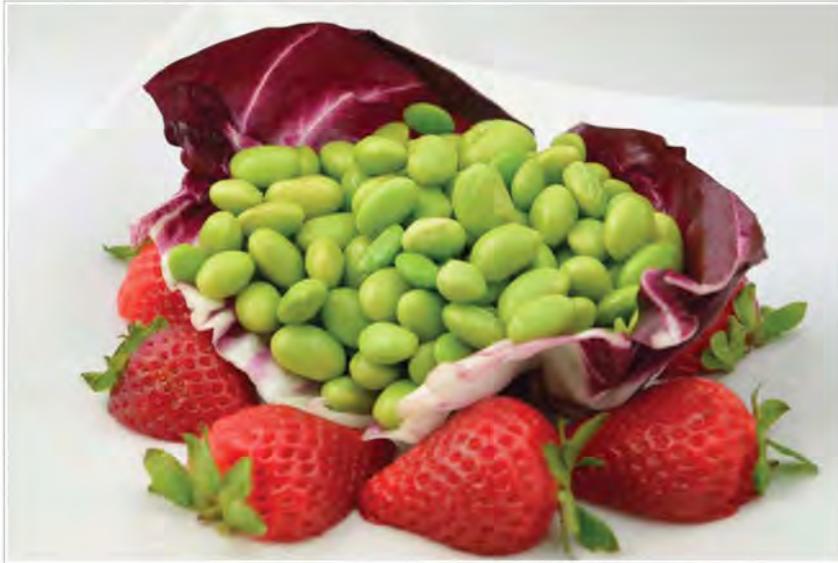


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After six years at Zone Gourmet and opening her own line, Fresh Dining, with a less than cooperative co-founder, she opened Z.E.N. Foods on her own, combining her passion for food and fitness. "My life is food as far as I'm concerned. I'm Italian and you know, we grew up eating breakfast with one eye open and then talking about what are we having for lunch and dinner before breakfast was even finished," she laughs. "I love food; I love eating; I think it's a passion that we all have—unfortunately if we eat the wrong things it can lead to some severe health problems."



And it's those health problems, weight issues and dietary restrictions that Z.E.N. Foods is so good at overcoming. Customized entirely to each client's specifications—from juice cleanses, to gluten restrictions, to a plain dislike for tomatoes—each plan is made specifically for one's needs. Done over the phone, each person receives a consultation going over their goals, plans, allergens, etc. to make sure everything is uniquely tailored. "There are the busy people out there that don't even want to talk to anybody so they fill that whole thing out online, but we prefer to go through whatever their results are going to be, what they're looking for—if they're looking to lose ten pounds, 50 pounds, are they



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looking to gain lean muscle mass?" she explains.



And she's not just talking about the Jones' next door, either. She drops her voice down, "we have so many A-list celebrities, that I've had to sign confidentiality agreements with obviously, but I mean if you looked at the first couple rows at the **Oscars**, probably half of those rows have been, or are still on our program." And of course being the fans we are, we couldn't help but wonder what it was all those stars were eating. Kale chips? Lemonade cleanses? Protein-heavy dinners? "I would say 90% of them are customized, and it's usually because they have to do something for a film, or an event like the Oscars or whatever, and we will ship it all over the United States if they're doing a film and they want to stay healthy—because we all know how much junk there is on the set," she explains. "We've had some clients lose a lot of weight, like over 50 pounds for films, so we've had to put them on specific diets where they actually have their doctor involved with our nutritionist to make sure they're getting the nutrients they need, but can lose the weight because they have to be *slim*. For some of these movies they want them skinny, I mean *skinny, skinny*," she says.



One of the celebs she can talk about? **Zac Efron**, who seems to be a personal favorite of hers, and who has no problems sharing his Z.E.N. Foods obsession, or the fact that he's been on the plan for over three years. "It's like the whole Zac Efron thing, that kid wanted to put on a ton of lean muscle so we sent him 4000 calories a day for almost a year before he did *The Lucky One*," she gushes. "He put on a ton of lean muscle; he basically went from a boy to a man for that movie." Indeed he did. So now that we know Zac was basically eating protein by the truckload, taking him from *High School Musical* teen heartthrob to totally drool-worthy hunk, we had to know what kind of transformation Z.E.N. could give us.



Rossano was adamant that we try the program to really see what it could do for our readers and ourselves. "I want you to speak from the heart. I'm so proud of what we have; everything is so good!" she spoke excitedly. Trying out a three day cleanse followed by a week of meals, I spoke briefly with a consultant, explaining my lactose intolerance, my adverse reactions to caffeine, that I hadn't eaten beef in over ten years and I wasn't a fan of bell peppers, nuts or anything spicy. Even with my long laundry list of things I couldn't, or refused to eat, she assured me everything would be to my liking. I then went online and chose the food I wanted to eat (it was as easy as ordering from a restaurant), then awaited my first delivery. The cleanse was fairly straightforward—a slew of juices (almost too many to finish in a day), a small salad and light soup to hold you over. A nice addition was a bag of Himalayan salts that were meant to serve as a bath soak to help draw out impurities in the body. It was a serious cleanse from both inside and out.

The first day of food delivery left me shocked. There was *fresh* food at my door, prepared earlier that morning and not an entire box of frozen entrees that were meant to hold me over for a week. Plus each item came in reusable, recyclable containers—so much greener than any other food carton I've seen. With three hearty meals, a large snack and a dessert, it was more than enough food to hold anyone over for a day without giving into cravings. The food itself was seriously delicious—at no point did I feel like I was on a diet or restricting my calories at all, which is in itself pretty amazing. Favorites like pancakes, burgers (made with turkey instead of beef) and chocolate cupcakes, made me feel like I was indulging and tasted like lighter versions of themselves—just as delicious as the original, but without the high calories. And the weight loss? Personally my weight can



fluctuate depending on how much water I've had, when I ate and how late in the day it is, but it can't fake looser pants. The scale might not have moved much but my jeans felt so much looser—in a week. Either this stuff works or a miracle happened overnight—possibly both.



For those thinking of losing, gaining or just getting healthy, Rossano has some suggestions to get you started on a path to better nutrition. Most people use cleanses as a way to kickstart their diet and while she does have her fair share of celebrities that would prefer not to eat *anything* during this time, she suggests partaking of light amounts of veggies to make sure you're not burning up lean muscle. "I believe you need to eat even when you're cleansing, I know there are a lot of people that believe you don't, and we're willing to do what the client wants," she explains. And she confesses trying to diet during the holidays is one of the hardest things to do, "if you want to stick to it you can't be going to holiday parties, because there's too much temptation," she admits. "The best thing to do is try to stay away from temptation or bring your meals with you when you go to dinner with friends, if the restaurant will allow you. That's what a lot of clients do—or just talk to [your consultant] about what you should be eating when you're out."



And what about all the healthy food trends that people are obsessing over? "I think the kale thing is wonderful! I think it's good that people are finally starting to eat the stuff that makes them healthy," she says. "And everybody's got gluten intolerance, everybody seems to have that out here [in LA]," she laughs. "Most people just don't want to gain weight! And you know if you're not eating gluten your taking weight off pretty quickly, but that's only for some people that are gluten sensitive. There are other people that can eat a loaf of bread a day and not gain an ounce."



It would be nice to be one of those people, but until then we don't mind sticking with our Z.E.N. Foods blueberry pancakes and buffalo wings. Working with a client's every need, diets are designed to be safe for new mothers when breastfeeding, cleanses are used to jumpstart diets and family meal programs are created to start children on the path to eating healthy. They are even coming out with a new family program in June that will offer more cost-effective, kid-friendly options for each family member's dietary needs. And while Z.E.N. isn't a diet miracle per se, it's probably as close as you'll ever get all while eating fresh pastas, quesadillas and burgers. Oh, and did I mention the cheesecake? Yum, yum.

Plans are available online from Z.E.N. Foods and are priced from \$49-\$630 with add-ons available.

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