Food, fertility and fresh starts



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NICKY CLARK

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Sydney-based ION graduate and nutritional therapist, Nicky Clark, swapped the corporate world for nutritional therapy after a simple diet switch transformed her life, writes Natalie Li.

Twelve years ago, Nicky was on an unexpected detour on her road to motherhood. “We were trying to get pregnant with our first child,” she recalls. “I came off the pill, but my periods were AWOL, and so, naturally, baby-making was on hold.”

Like many in our digital age, she turned to what she calls ‘Dr. Google’. “I found out about a couple of diet changes I should make. Anyway, I made the diet changes, and two months later I was pregnant.” That simple shift was the spark that ignited her intrigue and passion for nutrition. “It was so straightforward, and I thought, wow, that was powerful.”

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Institute *for* Optimum Nutrition

Nicky’s experience of how food could benefit her health led her to study at the Institute for Optimum Nutrition. “Everyone I met there had similar stories, nutrition had

completely transformed something in their lives," she says. "It wasn't just about fertility; it was about understanding how food fuels everything we do."

Now, as a qualified nutritional therapist, Nicky's days are a whirlwind. "I've got four young kids, so my day starts with making four lunchboxes," she laughs. "It's a bit of a factory process, but I've got it down to a fine art in five to ten minutes."

After the school drop-offs, she hops on her bike and cycles into the city to see clients in her clinic for online and in-person consultations. Then, it's a ferry ride across Sydney Harbour, back home to Rose Bay, where she picks up the kids and cooks dinner for her family. "It's busy, but I love it."

The feel-good factor

For Nicky, the most rewarding part of her job is seeing real transformations. She speaks of clients trapped in cycles of discomfort and unawareness. "People are often eating a diet, they just haven't stopped to think or they're not aware that it is damaging their health and their life, particularly their energy." The simple yet powerful act of suggesting mindful adjustments yields remarkable results. "And when they come back and say, 'I can finally eat and not feel pain,' or 'I'm sleeping through the night and I've just got so much more energy,' comments like that are really the most rewarding."

The biggest challenge? "Honestly, client cancellations and rescheduling," she admits. "You build relationships with your clients, so it feels personal. I find it hard to impose cancellation fees, but it really disrupts my schedule."

Her advice to aspiring nutritional therapists? "Don't just consider it, do it! It's incredibly rewarding," she insists. "The first few years are a hustle, but I wouldn't trade it for pushing papers in an office again."

Her clients are mostly over 40, with a majority being men. "I carved out that niche intentionally," she says. "I also work with Down syndrome clients — my youngest son Michael has Down syndrome, which has been really fulfilling."

In consultations, she keeps things structured but practical. “I make recommendations crystal clear, like ‘eat three olives before lunch every day.’ That way, people know exactly what to do, and I use habit trackers to help them stick to it.”

> *“Don’t just consider it, do it! It’s incredibly rewarding”*

Nutrition mythbusting

In a world of nutrition misinformation, Nicky stays grounded. “People think they’ve found the answer, but there is no universal answer,” she says. “I often start my corporate talks with a picture of the man on the moon and make the point that over 50 years ago we were able to get a man to land on the moon, yet we are still debating whether eggs and bacon or Weetabix and yogurt are healthier for breakfast.”

For Nicky, nutrition isn’t about fixing diseases, it’s about optimisation. Living in Bondi, Australia, she’s surrounded by a vibrant, fruit-and-vegetable-filled culture. “People here are already quite healthy,” she explains. “So, my work is less about addressing illness and more about refining diets, making them as good as they can be based on the latest research.”

But being a nutritional therapist in Australia comes with challenges. “It’s a saturated marketplace,” she admits. “Naturopaths and nutritional therapist have been around for a long time, so entering the field as a new player means you really have to know your stuff and carve out a niche.”

One of the most common questions she gets, mostly from her own children, is: If she could only eat one food for the rest of her life, what would it be? “There’s a different food for every occasion, so it’s hard to choose just one,” she says. “For treats, coffee and chocolate. My favourite dinner vegetable? Broccolini. But if I had to commit, it would probably be broccoli and steak. Delicious, nutritious, and satisfying.”

Clients, of course, come with their own non-negotiables. “One client once wrote on her form, ‘Coffee is not negotiable,’” she laughs. “That made me chuckle.”

As for myths, there are plenty that frustrate her. “Everyone knows the obvious one — that fats are bad for you. But the reverse is also true: not all fats are automatically good for you either.” Nutrition, she emphasises, is full of nuances. “Another big one is sourdough bread. People assume it’s always healthy. Yes, but no, it’s complicated.”

Churn back time

If she could have dinner with any historical figure, she wouldn’t choose a scientist or a celebrity. “I’d want to sit down with one of my great-great-grandparents,” she says. “Someone who lived in Australia before electricity and the modern food environment. What did they eat? How did they manage meals without refrigeration or processed foods?”

Breakfast fascinates her. “We didn’t always have cereal, so what did they eat? I often recommend my clients try meals like chops and eggs, just like their grandparents did.”

Navigating conflicting nutrition advice is another challenge. “I always tell people that no one has all the answers,” she explains. “I go straight to PubMed, look at the research, and present what I find. There’s always nuance, but that’s how I help people make informed choices.”

The biggest challenge facing nutrition today? Qualifications, or the lack thereof. “There need to be more safeguards around who can call themselves a nutritionist or nutritional therapy. Stricter exams, better regulation are needed. Governments need to recognise this field properly because people need help.”

And then there’s the food industry itself. “Nutrition is highly politicised,” she says. “Big food companies, politicians, and consumers — everyone’s competing for money, but people are the ones caught in the middle.”

The biggest surprise she’s learned? “How little people know about the food they’re putting in their mouths, including me, before I studied nutrition.”

Food, she insists, is more than just fuel. “The modern food environment isn’t what we think it is, and that’s the real surprise.”

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