

RETHINKING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

BY BRENNA HOLLAND



The other day, while I was sitting in the waiting room of my doctor's office, I did something I rarely ever do—I looked up from my trade paperback mystery and watched a segment of "The View."

My attention hadn't been diverted because the ladies of the panel had a particularly 'hot take' on a recent study or news headline; rather, I became suddenly interested in the show because their guest, comedian and author Russell Brand, said something surprisingly profound.

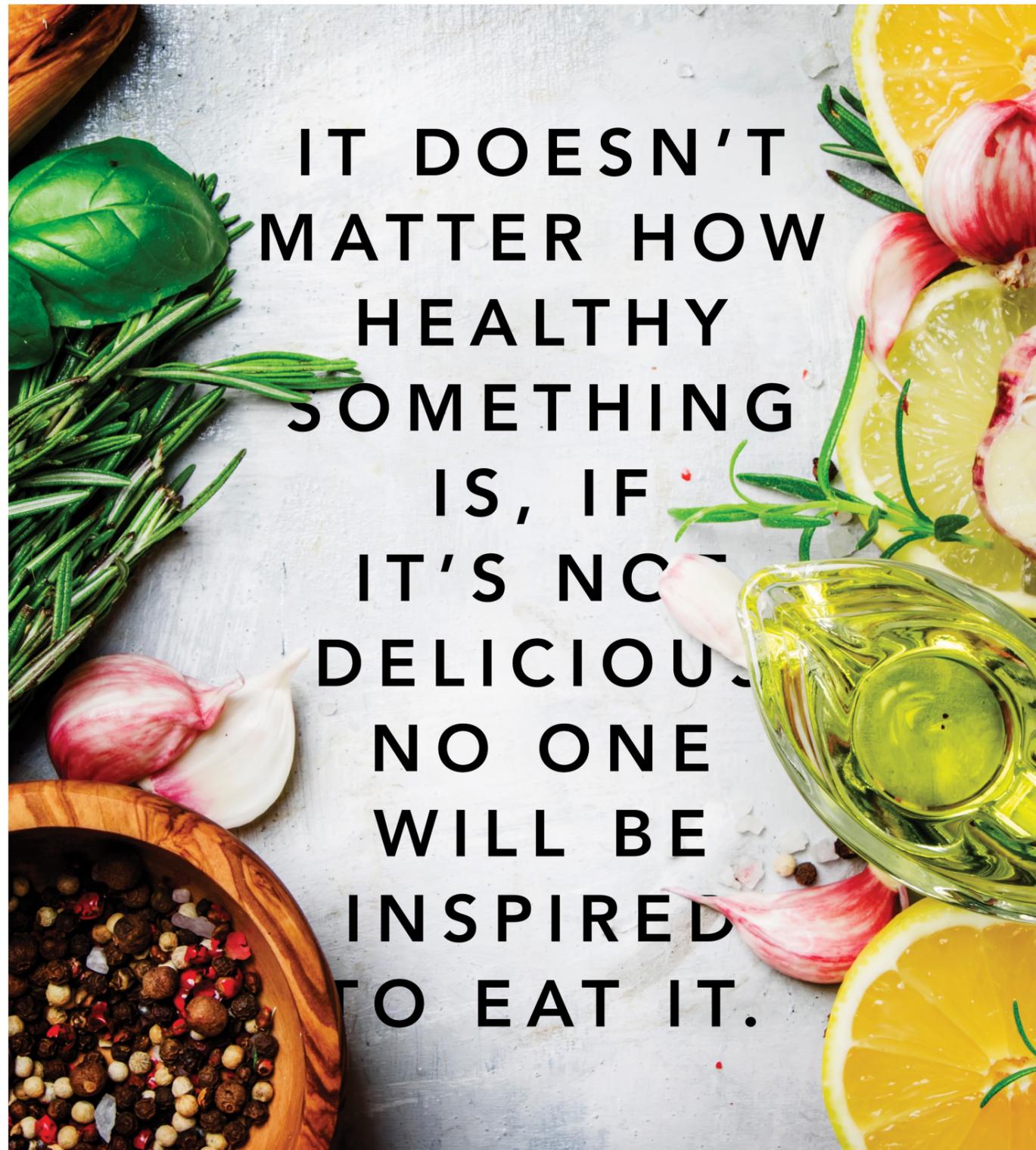
Brand appeared on the show to promote his most recent book, "Recovery: Freedom from Our Addictions," wherein he reframes and expands upon the 12-step program taught by Alcoholics Anonymous. When asked by the panel what he thought the public should know about 12 steps, Brand said the following: "We [humans] don't choose between working a program and not working a program, we choose between a conscious program and an unconscious program. If you're not consciously working a program, you are being worked by your unconscious program."

Of course, in this statement Brand is heralding the merits of the 12-step program, but he is also commenting on an overarching need for conscious living and intentional decision-making.

My first thought upon hearing this was that the concept Brand introduced can be applied to nearly every arena of life, but feels acutely relevant in a conversation surrounding health and wellness today.

Approach the diet section of any library or bookstore and you'll find entire shelves dedicated to eradicating 'mindless eating.' For many of us still, when it comes to food, our choices feel primal rather than intentional—we are following unconscious programs.

Despite a steady progression of nutritional science and understanding in America, 80 percent of the country still fails to eat the recommended amounts of fruit and vegetables. The rates of diabetes have nearly doubled over the last 20 years and obesity continues to affect 36 percent of adults.



recently had the opportunity to speak with Nina Spiegel and Linda Eiter of the Graf Center for Integrative Medicine at Englewood Hospital regarding the disconnect between what we know and what we do when it comes to food and health.

Spiegel is a holistic counselor and Eiter is the Clean Eating Chef at the Graf Center; together, they have developed a comprehensive program that teaches their clients how to make informed, intentional decisions about food.

As a holistic counselor, Spiegel works with every aspect of her client's lives. She takes into account diet, hydration, exercise, sleep patterns and stress levels before making any recommendations for improvement.

In her sessions, Spiegel allows her clients to reimagine their lives as healthier and happier people. She helps them develop a vision for the future and harnesses the skills they need to create their new paradigm.

"I do store tours at Whole Foods. I actually walk clients through the store and teach them how to read labels and make healthy choices when they're shopping. First comes the decision to eat healthier, then it's all about where they find the food and how they do it," Spiegel said.

Spiegel teaches her clients not to work an unconscious program when it comes to their health and wellness. She emphasizes the need to meditate regularly in order to remain focused and present during all aspects of life.

The Graf Center is the perfect setting for such a lesson, as it is less like a wing of a hospital and more like a spa. Moving water fixtures, natural light and an irresistible sense of calm make the Center the perfect retreat for meditation.

"A lot of people do what's called unconscious eating. One of the things I coach my clients with is being mindful when they put food in their mouths. Practices as simple as sitting at the table for a minute before

you eat and becoming centered and mindful before you pick that fork up," Spiegel said.

After Spiegel arms her clients with the information they need to make healthier, more mindful choices, Clean Eating Chef Linda Eiter picks up the torch and teaches them how prepare healthy ingredients to make a delicious meal.

"They call me Magic Linda," Chef Eiter said. Her cooking classes have a cult-like following, and it's no surprise. Chef Eiter is a foodie and listening to her talk about the dishes she creates is something to behold.

Chef Eiter creates recipes for her clients based on their unique dietary needs; she works with individuals who have diabetes and celiac disease, as well as people looking to lose weight and or just feel better on a day-to-day basis.

"What happens with using healthy ingredients is that technique replaces the use of excess fat—organic maple for sweetener, fresh herbs for flavor, and buckwheat instead of white flour. It doesn't matter how healthy something is, if it's not delicious no one will be inspired to eat it," Chef Eiter said.

Like Spiegel, Chef Eiter is aware of unconscious eating programs—she refers to them as "survival mode." According to Chef Eiter, survival mode is eating without any forethought; i.e. opening the fridge and having whatever is available at that moment, or eating fast food because you're too hungry to go through the process of buying and preparing a meal.

In order to break out of an unconscious relationship with food, there needs to be an alternative program that works on the everyday level. This is precisely what Spiegel and Chef Eiter have developed in conjunction with the Graf Center. Within this program, there is never a need to sacrifice time, energy or taste. Healthy ingredients, coupled with a little culinary know-how and meditation practice are simple changes that have the ability to revolutionize your life.