

# Healthy living

**Michael Sultan** highlights the importance of balance and moderation.

I have an aunt who not long ago turned 92. I have an enduring memory of her insisting that she did not want to live for a long time, she just wanted to live healthily. As such, she always used to make grand pronouncements in the kitchen about what we should and shouldn't eat – "Don't cook with olive oil," she'd say, or, "Never eat margarine, it's a poison." She told us to eat butter instead. We used to laugh at her but she has probably been proved right and so I always try to keep in mind the message she must've been trying to get across to us when we were younger – about taking care of your health in all aspects of life.

When my aunt published her first cookbook *Middle Eastern Delicacies, 200 Years of Culinary Heritage* she dedicated it to her old family doctor in Cairo, Dr Tewlik Ta'laat Bey. He cared for her during a time when diseases such as typhoid and malaria were treated at home – not only through medical prescription but by also focusing on the right diet to help recovery. It may not be quite like that now, but still food and healthy living are inextricably linked – and we must be more aware of this fact now than ever before.

I recently read an article suggesting



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that by the year 2020 more liver transplants will be necessary because of over-eating than because of alcoholism. Indeed, healthcare professionals are similarly concerned that, by the same year, at least a third of people in the UK will be obese. Of course, obesity can lead to a number of other health complications, including heart disease and diabetes.

We are very fortunate as a profession to be able to help with this. We are in the perfect position to provide better quality of life in this regard, and potentially help extend healthy lives. We all know about the links between oral health and periodontal diseases with both heart disease and diabetes, which puts us, as dental professionals at the very forefront of effective preventative treatments. By being able to help people with these conditions, we can also help advise them how to best take control of their own health. We can teach our patients about moderation, control and balance.

If we do this I think we would be better clinicians and, as a result, find ourselves with better patients. It is important that we encourage our

patients to come to us with a similar attitude towards moderation. In endodontic practices, for example, it is beneficial for patients to be at least a little anxious – so when we advise them about the treatment of asymptomatic teeth they take on board our advice and can appreciate the potential problems if no action is taken. Of course, we don't want an excess of anxiety, since this only hampers our efforts. Similarly, for cosmetic cases, we need our patients to be a little bit vain; if they weren't, it is unlikely they would come in for treatment at all because they wouldn't care about how their teeth appear to themselves or to others. But, again, too much vanity, to the point of dysmorphia, can lead to unreachable standards for clinicians. So, it is all about finding the right balance.

In all aspects of life, we should try and exercise this kind of moderation – not just with the food we eat. By doing so, we can promote a healthy, longer and better life.

References available on request.