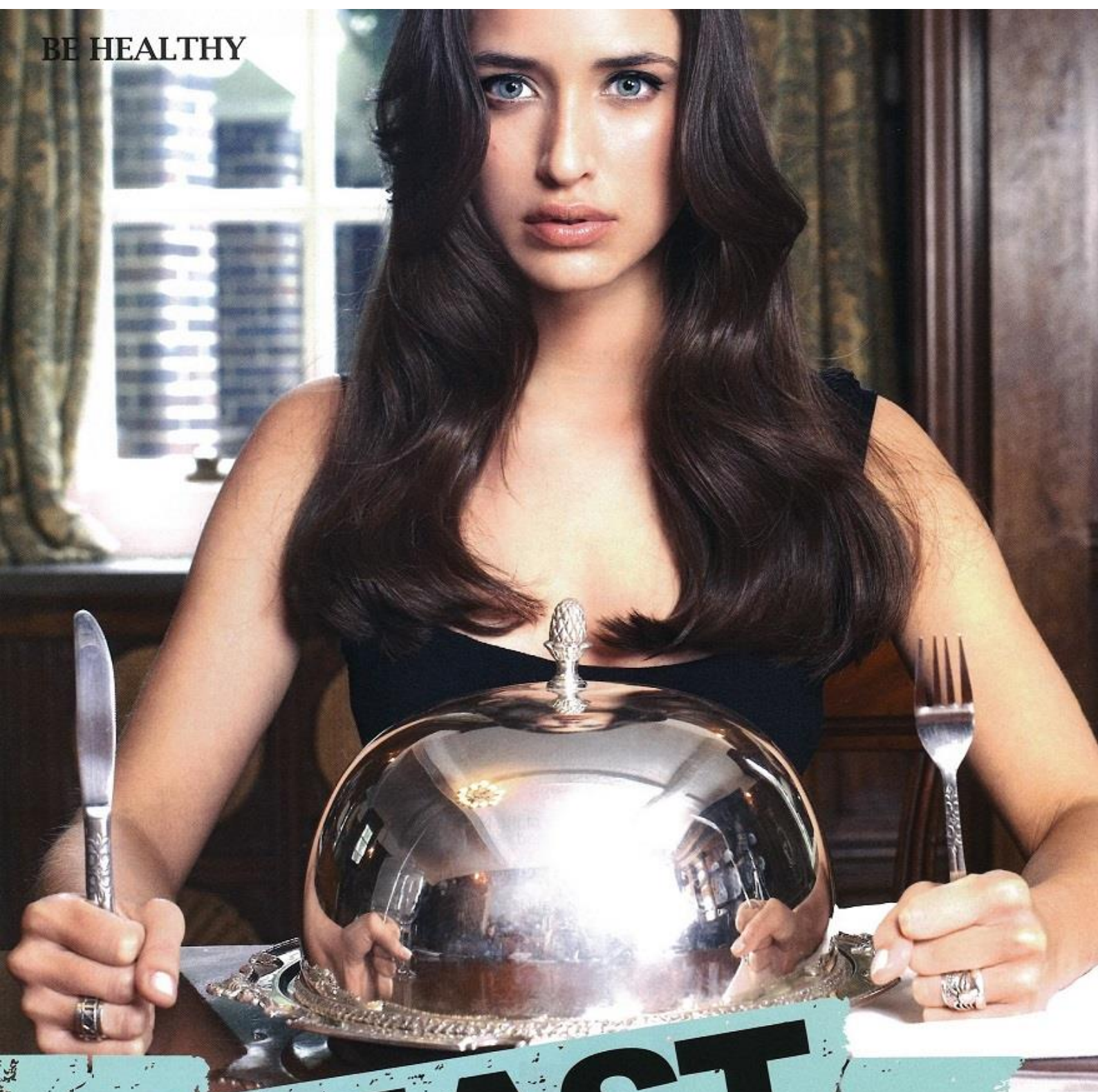


BE HEALTHY



# FEAST NOT FAST

Yes, gourmet marbled steak may sound sinful – but indulging in such decadent foods may be better for you. By KAREN TEE

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**O**kay, 'fess up – which of these are you guilty of? You either pick low-fat or diet food, stinting on calories, or you go for the most convenient, filling options such as junk food or greasy hawker fare. If you admit to either, it's high time you reconsider your eating habits and pamper yourself with quality gourmet food instead. Surprisingly, experts agree that a decadent diet might actually be better for you. Here's why:

### You eat less

Fast food tends to be served in large portions (think a big bag of chips or a jumbo-sized cup of Coke), encouraging you to eat more than you should, says Jaclyn Reutens, a clinical dietitian at Aptima Nutrition & Sports Consultants.

Compare this with the gourmet food in fancy restaurants, usually served in small quantities because "they are artistic foods presented in a petite style". It's a no-brainer form of portion control. And as you eat slowly so as to enjoy every mouthful, you'll feel satisfied sooner.

### You savour every morsel

Gourmet foods also have a unique mouthfeel or texture that is lacking in junk food, which tends to taste "flat", says nutritionist Pooja Vig of The Nutrition Clinic. Gourmets pay attention to the sensory quality of their food, and take the time to chew and savour every bite because of the distinct way the food feels in their mouths.

When you savour every morsel, you also eat slower, which is better for digestion, and consume fewer calories, as numerous studies have shown. It takes about 20 minutes from the time you start eating for your brain to send out signals of fullness. Eating slowly allows ample time to trigger the signal from your brain that you are full. And when you feel full, you stop eating.

### You enjoy richer flavours

Gourmet foods also have more complex flavours that stimulate your taste buds and leave you feeling satisfied relatively quickly. In comparison, junk foods tend

to be loaded with artificial flavourings such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) or salt, which merely make you thirsty while keeping you reaching for more.

Pooja says: "If you eat feta or goat's cheese, for instance, it has a strong taste and you won't be able to eat a lot as you feel satiated quickly. But if you eat standard sliced cheddar that you get from the supermarket, which barely has any flavour, you can eat an entire packet of it without even realising it."

### You avoid bad chemicals

Junk food tends to contain chemicals that can be harmful to the body when consumed in large amounts. For example, blue, green, red and yellow artificial food colourings have been linked to behaviour issues in children, as well as cancer, while high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) – found in most junk food – boosts fat-storing hormones and drives people to overeat, says Pooja. HFCS is a major cause of heart disease, obesity, fatty liver, Type-II diabetes, and even cancer, doctors say.

Eat large quantities of junk food, and your liver also becomes less able to neutralise chemicals; the body then stores them within fat cells. That's how you put on weight, Pooja explains.

### You feel happier

Gourmets also tend not to feel deprived as they generally do not watch their calories as closely as dieters do.

On the other hand, strict dieters often find themselves fighting food cravings and obsessing about the foods they have restricted themselves from eating, says Jaclyn. The moment they are off their diets or cave in to their urges, they make a beeline for that forbidden item – whether it's an entire tub of ice

## Why they splurge

"I take pride in my cooking, so it is important for me to pick out quality ingredients. My dishes taste much better too, and at the end of a meal, everyone is satisfied and happy."

– Janet Lim, 33, public relations manager

"My husband will buy a huge tin of biscuits and leave it untouched for ages – that's a waste. I'd buy a small packet of artisanal cookies that costs more, and I'd savour every last crumb." – Diana Ong, 36, co-founder of a public relations company

"I always go for quality and taste. I don't bother with diet-friendly or low-fat options because if I am to rack up the calories, it had better be food I enjoy."

– Felicia Tan, 23, entrepreneur

cream or a bucket of fried chicken – and end up negating the effects of all their hard work.

Jaclyn says: "Self-control is the key to eating 'decadent' foods. That way, you can enjoy them without pigging out. And you will better understand how even rich foods can be part of a healthy, balanced diet."

"Ironically, one of the benefits of enjoying 'sinful' foods is a healthier attitude towards food," says Jaclyn. "If you are obsessed with counting calories, you will end up in a downward spiral of food obsession which can lead to an eating disorder." **F&F**