

# #THEFITFOODIE

From kitchen dunce to healthy-eating guru...with a bit of help from good ol' Mum. Sally O'Neil is proof that by helping yourself to cook more and eat healthier, you can encourage others to do the same.

**W**hen backpacker Sally O'Neil arrived in Australia from England six years ago, she was a non-starter in the foodie stakes.

The prevalence of convenient, pre-cooked meals in English supermarkets meant she'd never come eye to eye with a raw chicken, or wrestled with onions in their natural state.

"I was 24 and had absolutely no cooking skills," she recalls. "I'd got through uni on biscuits and cereal and frozen food. I didn't have a clue how to cook."

She realised she had to change her ways, otherwise she'd either starve or overdose on Tim Tams. So change she did. And how.

Today, Sally's a widely followed food and fitness blogger (*the-fit-foodie.com*), a contributor to several health magazines, an official – cue fanfare – Jamie Oliver Food Revolutionary Ambassador, and early next year she'll launch her first book, *Love Move Eat*.

Not bad for a woman who could barely boil an egg an egg six years ago.

They say a journey begins with one step, and for Sally that step was a stir-fry. "I was in a short-stay holiday apartment and I didn't have an oven, just two gas hobs.

"The first thing I cooked was a simple chicken stir-fry, and even then I had to ring mum back home and ask her what chicken looks like when it's cooked.

"At first, I overcooked everything, it was all burnt and charred, but slowly I learnt. The first lesson was how not to poison myself!"

Then Sally emailed her mother asking for some of her favourite recipes, began modifying them with healthier ingredients, then emailing back her results.

"It became a game to reproduce things my mother cooked and make them healthier. I'd research ingredients and see what I could change.

"It was a journey of self-education in food."

For convenience, the email exchange became an online recipe bank, which strangers soon began to check out.

"One day, my partner showed me how many hits it had, and I thought, 'Gosh, people are actually looking at this!'"

And so The Fit Foodie was born.

With her professional background in public health, Sally's approach was not to reinvent the wheel, just to modify traditional dishes for healthy eating. So Greek yoghurt replaced cream. Stevia replaced sugar. Fresh replaced pre-cooked, packaged and frozen.

"The unavailability of my usual pre-cooked meals turned out to be a blessing," she enthuses.

"Why would you eat something pre-packaged when fresh is so much tastier and better?"

## **MAKING IT BETTER**

### **What's your ingredient du jour?**

Kangaroo mince. I was really impressed the first time I tried kangaroo; it was so lean and gamey. I'm using it to replace beef mince in a traditional bolognese sauce.

### **And on tonight's menu?**

Crispy-skinned salmon fried in coconut oil, with steamed greens – whatever's in season, bok choy or broccoli would be nice – with home-made hummus, and maybe some sweet potato fries.

### **Please tell us there'll be dessert...**

Yeah, my own raw peanut slice using homemade chocolate.



Sally is loving her new life as a foodie blogger. And to think, it all started with a basic stir-fry!

## #Roasted sweet potato fries with lemon cashew dip

So you love fries, but also your thighs. It's a dilemma we all face. The solution? Bake them in a little healthy oil, and using low-GI sweet potatoes to keep blood sugars stable. As a good source of dietary fibre too, you'll struggle to over-eat these. They're just as good (if not better) than the ones you'll find at the takeaway, just try not to burn your mouth on them.



### INGREDIENTS

for 2 serves

- ▶ 2 large sweet potatoes, cut into fries
- ▶ 1tbs extra virgin olive oil
- ▶ 1tsp Himalayan sea salt
- ▶ ½tsp each of cinnamon and paprika
- ▶ 2tbs cashew butter
- ▶ 1tbs tahini
- ▶ 1tbs extra-virgin olive oil, extra
- ▶ 1 clove of garlic, crushed
- ▶ 1tsp rice malt syrup
- ▶ 2tbs lemon juice
- ▶ 3-5tbs water
- ▶ 1tbs chopped rosemary, optional

**1** Preheat the oven to 220°C. Add sweet potato fries to a baking tray, and drizzle over the olive oil. Sprinkle on the salt and spices, then toss to coat. Roast for 25-30 minutes or until tender.

**2** Make the dip by adding cashew butter, tahini, olive oil, garlic, rice malt syrup and lemon to a small bowl and mix well. Add water and mix well to thin out the dip to your desired consistency.

**3** Serve fries sprinkled with rosemary. Dunk away.

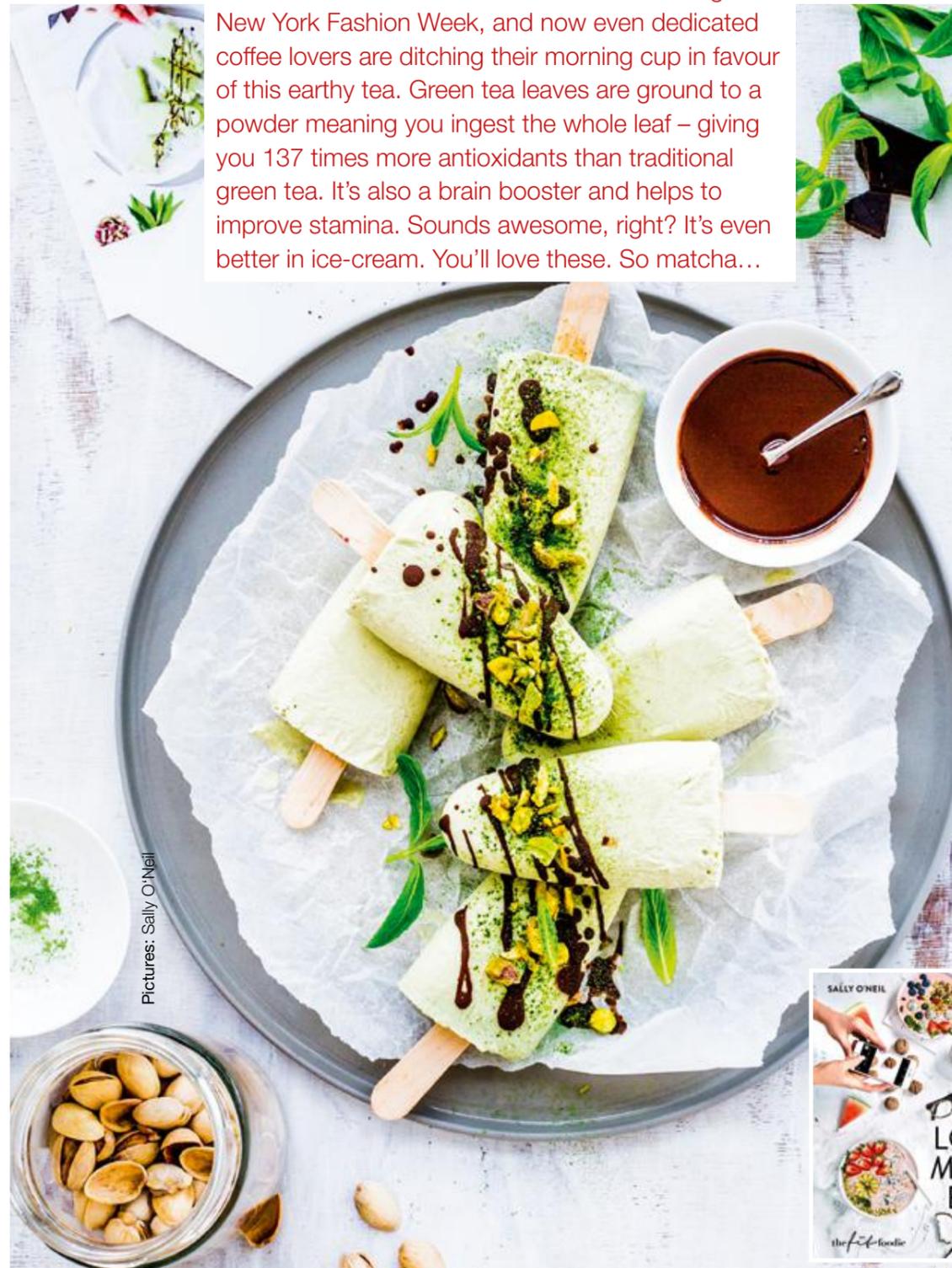
- ▶ Preparation + cooking time 35 minutes
- ▶ Degree of difficulty: easy

### GET NUTTY

Make your own cashew butter by adding 2 cups cashews to a food processor and processing on low for 20-25 minutes or until creamy, scraping down the sides as necessary. Resist the urge to add water – the oils from the nuts will eventually release to form a creamy butter, just be patient! Don't forget to give your food processor a few breaks so it doesn't overheat. Add a pinch of sea salt and blend again for 30 seconds. Store in the fridge for up to 2 weeks, or freeze for up to 4 months.

## Vegan #matcha pops

The health world is currently green with envy over matcha. Shots of the drink were the "it beverage" at New York Fashion Week, and now even dedicated coffee lovers are ditching their morning cup in favour of this earthy tea. Green tea leaves are ground to a powder meaning you ingest the whole leaf – giving you 137 times more antioxidants than traditional green tea. It's also a brain booster and helps to improve stamina. Sounds awesome, right? It's even better in ice-cream. You'll love these. So matcha...



Pictures: Sally O'Neil

### INGREDIENTS

for 6 serves

- ▶ cup coconut cream\*
- ▶ 1tsp matcha green tea powder (I use Matcha Maiden)
- ▶ 3tsp rice malt syrup or 8 drops liquid stevia
- ▶ ¼ cup basic raw chocolate or 75g 90% dark chocolate, melted
- ▶ 2tbs pistachios, chopped
- ▶ mint leaves and extra matcha, to garnish (optional)

**1** Add coconut cream, matcha powder and sweetener of choice to a bowl or blender and whisk or blend until smooth. In a popsicle mould, pour in the mixture evenly, leaving a small gap at the top for expansion. You can tap your mould on a hard surface to knock out any air bubbles.

**2** Pop in the freezer to set briefly, before adding the popsicle sticks (they should be able to stand upright). Leave to fully freeze for a few hours until completely set.

**3** Remove from moulds, drizzle with chocolate, top with pistachios, mint and a little extra matcha, and enjoy!

- ▶ Preparation time 10 minutes
- ▶ Freezing time 2 hours
- ▶ Degree of difficulty: easy

*\*For a lighter option, use coconut milk or unsweetened nut milk. For a post-workout version with more protein for muscle repair, sub half the coconut cream for plain Greek yoghurt.*

### THE WHOLE STORY

You'll find more of Sally's work at [the-fit-foodie.com](http://the-fit-foodie.com) and [instagram.com/the\\_fit\\_foodie](https://www.instagram.com/the_fit_foodie). And look out for **Love Move Eat** (RRP\$34.99), available from bookstores and [awwcookbooks.com.au](http://awwcookbooks.com.au) in March 2017.

