

“JUICE GAVE ME BACK MY LIFE

A diet shake-up helped Joe Cross, 45, recover from a devastating illness. As told to **Liz Graham**

“When I was young, I was one of those guys who never got sick, except for the odd cold. I was a real athlete in my teens – I played rugby, I rowed. In my 20s, I was still physically active, but that changed when I started my own financial services business at 28. I started focusing on my wealth, not my health. I was 90 kilos when I started my own business, but very quickly, within four years, I weighed 110 kilos. It was then, at age 32, that I got sick.

“One day I woke up with itchy hands and feet. Then I noticed that I had a rash of welts that went up my arms and torso. When I

looked in the mirror, I saw the elephant man. I was put in hospital for a week. They did tests, and eventually I was diagnosed with chronic urticaria, or chronic hives.

“My hives could get into my joints, so they were incredibly painful. They were triggered by pressure on the body. If I shook your hand firmly, it would swell up like I jammed it in the door. One of the worst things was that I couldn’t walk barefoot on the beach anymore, something I loved to do.

“I had to take prednisone, a strong steroid, every day. That enabled me to do things like sit in a chair, walk around, lie down, but doing anything more strenuous

than that would cause a flare-up. The drugs weren’t curing me, they were just carpet-bombing symptoms.

“For several years I saw different doctors and had countless tests, to try to find a cure. I went all over the world, trying different things, including non-traditional medicine. None of it worked. The whole time, though, I didn’t think I was the problem. I was still smoking, still eating hamburgers and pizzas, still running my company.

Moment of truth

“By my 40th birthday, I was 141 kilos, and also had high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Then I had an ‘aha!’ moment. I looked in the mirror one morning and thought, ‘Who are you?’

“I knew for years I should be eating more plant-based foods, but I hadn’t done anything about it. Now, I wanted to do an experiment on myself – I wanted to see what would happen if I consumed only plant foods for 60 days. My priority wasn’t only about losing weight, it was about getting well and getting off my medication. That’s why I chose to have my plants in juice form. I felt I needed to repair my body, and give it a break. When you have juice, it’s easier for the body to digest, and you absorb the nutrients more quickly.



Joe’s Mean Green Juice

Serves 1

- 1 bunch kale
- 4 stalks celery
- 1 cucumber
- 2 granny smith apples
- 1/2 lemon
- 1 thumb-sized piece ginger

15%

About 15 per cent of people will suffer from urticaria at some point. Chronic urticaria is where symptoms last for more than six weeks.

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“My family were very supportive. They had lived with me through eight years of pain. My dad, who’s a surgeon, was particularly concerned the medication I was on could lead to osteoporosis.

“To make all this happen, I reprioritised my life – I sold most of my businesses and I quit smoking. I decided to do my experiment in America, while travelling around the country, and make a film out of it, called *Fat, Sick And Nearly Dead*. My thinking was if it worked – and I didn’t know if it would – my story could inspire others. Being in America would help reach the widest possible audience.

A new way of eating

“I started in mid-October 2007. I had six juices a day, 350 millilitres each. I started with fruit-based juices. As the day went on I would switch to juices with green and cruciferous vegies, lemon, carrot, beets. I tried to have as much variety as possible.

“One or two days in, I felt like someone had put a chainsaw

down my chest, put rocks in and zipped me back up. I was really doubting myself. But by day six, I no longer had joint pain. I looked better than I had in a long time.

“By the end of 60 days, I’d lost 37 kilos, and had significantly reduced my medication. I went through a big emotional change, as well. I became much more relaxed – driving across America, I didn’t get road rage once! I also realised that I have to love myself, and put myself first. Without our health, how can we be there for others?

“I felt great, but I wasn’t cured. My hands still swelled up during tests. So instead of just juicing I also ate fruit and vegetables, as well as nuts, beans, seeds and extra-virgin olive oil.

“It took three more months, but I did it – I came off my medication. I could finally walk on Bondi Beach with no shoes again, too, which was a phenomenal moment.

A plan for life

“These days, I have two juices a day and eat plenty of plant foods.


Juicing helped Joe Cross lose 37kg and fix his health problems. Top right: Cross at 141kg in 2007. Below: after his transformation



PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHELLE ABOUD (MAIN IMAGE)

I also have some seafood, a little bit of dairy and rice. I haven’t eaten red meat or chicken in four years. My tastebuds don’t want it. I also don’t have alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine and soft drinks. I try to get an hour of exercise a day. I go the gym, I like to go hiking, swim and play tennis.

“I created the Reboot community after we did the first test-screenings of the movie, because our audiences wanted the juice recipes. We’ve now got over 165,000 members. I want to stress that juicing’s not a long-term diet, but I believe it will get you kick-started for a healthier life. It’s great if you can juice for just a few days.

“People say what I did was extreme, but I think not eating fruit and vegetables is extreme. I want to be playing tennis when I’m 95, and I know that my choices today will determine whether that happens.” 

+ The Fat, Sick And Nearly Dead DVD (\$19.95) is available at Woolworths or online at www.jointhereboot.com