

THE CURE FOOD AS MEDICINE

AN ACCLAIMED KITCHEN INNOVATOR FLIPS HIS SKILLS TO COOK UP THE ULTIMATE HEALING DISHES

When chef Mike Bagale left Chicago's smartest restaurant, Alinea, in 2018 he was ready for something new. After almost a decade spent creating hundreds of dishes, including his famous edible floating balloon made from sugar syrup and fruit essences, he was done with gimmicks; he wanted to move on from tasting menus that favoured flavour over nutrition and left diners sluggish. Based on an idea sparked by the bone broths he was cooking at home, Bagale set up Super Food Concepts and travelled the world developing avant-garde dishes as a consultant. He believes the pandemic could be the wake-up call needed to embrace ingredients that some cultures have been using as medicine for centuries. 'Time and health are the most priceless commodities on the planet. Without health, you have nothing.'



THE BEST HEALTH-ENHANCING INGREDIENTS

ADAPTOGENIC MUSHROOMS

It has been shown that fungi such as *cordyceps*, *chaga* and *reishi* – part of the adaptogen family that also includes holy basil and other herbs – help the body to manage the release of the stress hormone cortisol. They can be added whole to soups or mixed in powdered form into smoothies with avocado and cocoa. Bagale recommends lion's mane mushrooms, which contain compounds that play a role in stimulating brain-cell regeneration. Named after their pom-pom-like flowing white fungus mane, they grow in North America and taste like seafood.

MARSHMALLOW ROOT

Containing antioxidant-rich mucilage, a sap-like substance, this plant aids pain relief and has long been used for skin irritation and coughs. A predecessor of the gelatine that goes into the confectionery of the same name, it has a cool, slightly bitter flavour, sometimes with notes of vanilla. Bagale serves his roasted duck with a sauce containing marshmallow root as well as ginger, to ease digestion, and liquorice root, which has antimicrobial properties and eases stomach pains.

MCT OIL

The term 'medium-chain triglycerides' may sound unappetising, but this product commonly derived from coconut oil converts to ketone, a chemical that breaks down fats in the liver, improving energy levels and brain function. While butter, coconut and olive oil are

all considered good fats providing digestive support, this oil is more concentrated in MCTs for efficient fat-burning. Bagale makes a salad dressing combining it with apple-cider vinegar, olive oil and mustard.

TURMERIC

Long praised in India for its powerful anti-inflammatory properties, this spice has gone mainstream in recent years. What most people don't know is that it should be eaten with a sprinkling of black pepper, which slows the breakdown of the active ingredient curcumin in the liver, making it easier for the body to access. Cooking at a high heat reduces the effect, so turmeric is best eaten raw or prepared at a lower temperature. Bagale juices it fresh before freezing it as ice cubes and mixing it with MCT oil, passionfruit and orange juice.

FRESH FLOWERS

While many restaurants garnish plates with petals for effect, Bagale only includes fresh blooms and herbs that have clear benefits. Holy basil – which is considered sacred in India – has a peppery taste and can alleviate anxiety, while chrysanthemum is a staple in Chinese medicine for everything from cold relief to soothing inflammation. The sunshine-coloured pot marigold is full of antioxidants and carotenoids, a type of phytonutrient that's key to boosting the immune system and reducing the damage caused by free radicals. Bagale suggests growing herbs at home and adding flowers to salads, teas and tinctures. LAURA PRICE