

Is Edinburgh ready for the wheatgrass trip?

Contributed Article

Every day 50 Scottish people are diagnosed with diabetes according to Diabetes UK in a study which has shocked the nation. Now, 4.7 percent of the Scottish population suffers from one form of diabetes and a new patient is diagnosed every thirty minutes. Type two diabetes, the type that is caused by obesity, is rising with 10,000 cases every year. Jane-Claire Judson who heads up Diabetes UK Scotland spoke of an epidemic.

Whilst the nation parties on like there is no tomorrow, government and health officials are increasingly beginning to feel uneasy about how to tackle the issue among the population. And tackling it they must, because treatment for this many diabetics on the NHS is costing around £300 million a year.

As in so many instances when health matters circulate at the top of the news agenda, people deplore the lack of awareness. There's of course the various health organisations that are doing their level best to change public attitudes toward veggies and fruits. You only have to look around you on the streets of Edinburgh and you'll know there's lots of businesses that laboriously transport apples and pears to workplaces, exotic fruits to caterers, connected fruits to food projects and juiced fruit to classy retailers.

And it doesn't end with the vans. Edinburgh Farmers' market is a popular haunt every Saturday. Earthy has just opened another store and Princes Street is soon to be graced by the presence of a new Hanover Health Food shop as well as a Holland and Barrett store.

So it can't be all bad. People at least have the choice to do

the right thing.

But official figures show realities that are way different. Despite all the excellent healthy food choices available, the numbers show that eating a healthy diet is something that the vast majority of Scottish people will likely only consider when problems crop up.

And what do you tell a 14 year old who's sipping from a can of coke and eating a packet of crisps at the bus stop at 8 am? "Try a shot of wheatgrass" might sound like a good idea to such a youth, but most likely for the wrong reason.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, in the healthfood camp, a lot of positive change is undeniably happening. It's a matter of quality, perhaps, not quantity. It seems that the people who you can label healthfood freaks no longer are garlicky oddballs. It's no longer not at all strange for young professionals to be immensely health conscious and to refuse to buy ready made meals that are filled to the brim with sugar, fat and e-numbers.

My own business, Edinburgh Wheatgrass has been going for three years now and during those years, I have gained a valuable insight in attitudes of people toward their health. That is not in the last place because wheatgrass tastes awfully yukkie and therefore requires a person to be committed to their health to take it.

So it's no surprise that I cannot say that I have seen the Scots take to wheatgrass in great big numbers, but the growth that I have managed to achieve happens to tell an interesting story. Every time I see a customer overcome their hate of the taste of wheatgrass, I am reminded of the general reluctance people have to do something about their bad food habits.

Those customers that are repeatedly re-visiting the bars I supply in Edinburgh have realised one thing; what you put in you get out. And perhaps that's true for the nation too.

Now I won't go all hyperbolic and start to compare the output of the Scottish economy with the sales of my wee business, Edinburgh Wheatgrass. Or the number of people that work out regularly with those that are falling ill. That's too far fetched and might even prove me wrong.

On that note, I must admit, the diabetes situation in the Netherlands, my home country, is at exactly the same crossroads as in Scotland. The Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, the Dutch Statistics Office, very recently reported that the Dutch population suffering from a form of diabetes now is 4.7%. And, the figure also saw a steep increase in the past ten years, because it was 2.8 in 2001.

So even though I hate to say it, you are not alone!

And, talking about the Netherlands, there might be hope. Only this week Dutch system biologists published the world's first complete biochemical roadmap that is linked up with a person's DNA. They claim it's so important that the end of medication is in sight because they've cracked for the first time how a body ingests and digests food. Hans Westerhof, the professor in charge of the work, commented at the presentatio that if human DNA is an overview of all the houses, this is the roadmap that indicates how the traffic flows. Don't ask me why he speaks of houses in the plural but he does. According to Westerhof, the roadmap can be overlaid over a person's DNA, and will then give a human being strong indicators what to eat or not eat.

"I expect that we will be less dependent on medicines and that we'll see more changes in the types of food we will eat and the activities we undertake", he said at the presentation.

Of course such a scenario is a few years off still. DNA sequencing still takes a few months per person but will no doubt in the future become more easily obtainable.

So for the time being, get out that clothes peg and down your

daily shot of wheatgrass juice to repair those cells and cleanse out that liver.

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