Ingrid Hoffmann: Living With Lupus

Ingrid Hoffmann hosts the English-language television show Simply Delicioso on the Cooking Channel and the Spanish-language version Delicioso on Telefutura and Galavision. Here, the TV chef shares her recipe for staying healthy and living with lupus.

September 14, 2011 By Cristina Gonzalez

Tell us about yourself.

I was born in Barranquilla, Colombia. I was raised between the Netherlands, Colombia and the United States. Now my home base is Miami, but I'm often traveling to make appearances and tape my shows.

I was always with mom in the kitchen, making lots of food from all over the world. I would pull up a bench to the stove and cook away. Mom is a Cordon Bleu–trained chef and restaurateur.

I started working in her catering company and restaurant very young, especially in summer breaks and weekends. I was active in the business since my teenage years.

I did plenty of acting, hard-core theater and novelas [before becoming a chef]. I never intended to become a home cook, chef or lifestyle personality. Eating was my first hobby, but I never thought I would make a living out of it.

Any advice on healthy eating?

I love real food—veggies, beans, grains and fruits. I always try to stay away from processed foods and sugar, which I almost consider the devil in disguise.

I think sugar and bleached flower are our No. 1 enemies. Just eat all that comes from the earth—steam it, roast it, blanche it, sauté it, but never fry it.

When were you diagnosed with lupus?

It was about nine years ago. I came down with uveitis, which is a very rare eye condition that only happens to 1 percent of the population and almost always to lupus patients. That was what rang all the alarms.

The optometrist asked me to speak to my doctor and get tested. It finally explained many years of different ailments, pain and suffering.

I didn't know a lot [about lupus], but I knew enough to be deadly scared when I heard the word. I questioned if I had it. Although it was extremely scary, at the same time I was relieved to know I was not going crazy and creating all these ailments in my head, as so many people always told me.

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Lupus is an autoimmune disease that's chronic, but not contagious. Because the immune system basically starts attacking healthy tissue, it often causes pain and inflammation. What is it like living with lupus?

I have tried several medications and have decided that I feel much worse on these meds than doing my own holistic routine. They do nothing for me except to make me feel really sick.

I firmly believe that we are what we eat. The best defense is having an anti-inflammatory alkaline diet—then exercise, acupuncture, yoga and meditation for pain management. And finally, rest and sleep are also key to keeping the immune system strong.

I tend to live relatively well due to my anti-inflammatory diet and lifestyle. Mentally, I am extremely strong and have not allowed for this disease to take life from me. I do believe this factor alone makes a difference between a functioning person and a non-functioning one.

You learn to tune pain out, and it becomes a mind over matter issue. Our emotional well-being has a lot to do with how we experience pain. Ultimately, the only thing I have control over is to choose how to experience this disease—and how I can keep myself as healthy as possible.

[People with lupus] all look super healthy to the naked eye, so we get a lot of grief from friends and family who think we are creating these ailments in our heads and being hypochondriacs.

This disease can go undiagnosed for years, and it can be very frustrating to navigate. [You might have to see] many different specialists and doctors [before they're] able to connect the dots.

Any final thoughts?

Remember, you are what you eat. Find out, according to your own health issues, what you should stay away from. Get moving and maintain a healthy attitude.

Click here to read the Tu Salud fact sheet on lupus.

To visit the Lupus Foundation of America, click here.

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