

'Fasting can boost the immune system and slow down ageing'

Michael now eats a Mediterranean diet, full of fruit, vegetables, nuts, oily fish, eggs, dairy and olive oil. He also enjoys a few cups of coffee after learning he metabolises caffeine very quickly

levels of blood glucose and his cholesterol levels, previously high enough to necessitate medication, were healthy again.

"To start with, I was interested in the evidence that intermittent fasting could lower blood-sugar levels and help manage type 2 diabetes – I'd recently been diagnosed with the condition, but it is now in remission," says Michael. "But it turned out that fasting had a raft of other potential benefits. It can boost the immune system and has, at least in animals, been shown to reduce the risk of dementia and slow down the ageing process." The simplicity of it appealed to weary dieters and it became an instant bestseller.

Six years on, I wonder, does he still fast in the same way? He says he uses an occasional weekly mini-fast as "a way to bring my weight back under control if I see it creeping up".

THE MEDITERRANEAN WAY

Describing his current attitude to food as "flexitarian", Michael says he tries to have a few meat-free days each week and broadly sticks to a Mediterranean-style diet, the benefits of which he also uncovered in his documentary research. A Spanish study (the PREDIMED study) of 418 participants at high cardiovascular risk found that eating a Mediterranean diet halved their chance of developing diabetes (a major risk factor for heart disease and dementia) over four years, compared with a low-fat diet. "As well as a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables, it includes plenty of nuts, seeds, oily fish, eggs, dairy



and olive oil," he says. "As a bonus, a moderate amount of dark chocolate and red wine are not just permitted but actively encouraged."

His typical breakfast would be scrambled eggs with smoked salmon, or a Spanish-style omelette using leftover vegetables. "I sprinkle on some chilli flakes and a bit of cheese," he says. "Cheese is allowed on the Mediterranean diet and I'm a big fan of dairy as it's rich in things like calcium and iodine [essential for thyroid function]."

He also admits to several cups of full-caffeine coffee with breakfast. "I learned from my 23andMe test that I am someone who metabolises caffeine and alcohol very quickly," he says. "Clare, by contrast, is slow to metabolise both. It shows how different we all are." Lunch is, at most, a soup or a sandwich,

but is often skipped when he is busy filming or writing.

TRIED AND TESTED

Michael's subsequent diet books have both had companion recipe books written by Clare (*The 8-Week Blood Sugar Diet Recipe Book* and *The Clever Guts Diet Recipe Book*, both Short Books; £14.99). "She tests all the recipes out on us," says Michael. "Most are a resounding success, but others need tweaking. The world is not yet ready for chicken stew with seaweed!"

Clearly, the couple are passionate about spreading the word when they discover something that could transform the health of others. "One patient told Clare: 'My husband's better than me...'; and for a second she was confused. Then the patient added, 'He's lost five kilos and I've only lost four...'"