

## A brilliant idea

Dipna Anand's low cholesterol Punjabi cuisine has put her at the top of her class

**\*When Dipna Anand set about putting her restaurateur father Gulu Anand on a diet, she had her work cut out.** Gulu, after all, is a man so stubborn that on the night in 2001 when he suffered a heart attack at his legendary Southall restaurant, the Brilliant, he drove himself to the emergency room rather than bother anyone else. Prior to that, he had been part bon vivant, part workaholic – one with a cholesterol level of 12.6.

The stubborn streak must run in the family. Dipna, who at the time was an A-Level Food Technology student, immediately took action. She set about transforming his diet to a low fat one, and in the process solving the problem of what to study for her dissertation: low fat Indian cuisine. The resulting project won a national award, and saw Dipna on the radio, in the papers, and courted by the major supermarket players.

"Don't sign anything," was her father's advice. Six years later, with Dipna, now 23, the proud recipient of a First in a hospitality degree from Thames Valley University, a scholarship for her masters degree, and now a part-time position teaching Indian cooking at TVU, it's clear this was sage advice. Instead, she's used her brains and her research to do something good for the 23-year-old family business. Thanks to her ongoing research into healthy Indian food, she's helped her dad slim down and her low fat dishes take pride of place on the menu in the newly refurbished and relaunched 250-cover Brilliant.

"What my dad had to realise was that eating here every day wasn't good for him. Eating samosas for breakfast is never going to be good for you," she says. Her dad nods with pride. "I still eat here every day actually, but now my cholesterol is down to 3.6. And the food is even better than before."

So how has Dipna done it? Quite simply, her approach has been to cut the ghee and butter out of the traditional Punjabi recipes served at the Brilliant so you no longer get the 'off putting layer of oil on the karai dish' and to work instead on using olive oils, on fine-tuning the spice mix, and switching to better quality ingredients.

It's not, however, fusion food, the very likes of which they poooh-poooh as for the West End crowd. "The concept of Indian cooking is totally lost," insists Dipna. "What we've done is balance the spices that make it a curry and not run away from the Indian concept. Our food remains truly Punjabi."

"It's easy to just chuck a pack of butter in. Automatically it's going to taste quite nice," says Dipna. "People use a lot because things fry so quickly that way so it saves time. We take a few minutes longer." Precision is key – both in the timing and in the recipe. At the Brilliant they make their garam masala using 16 different spices and now use more whole spices than before.



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The change in fat content has necessitated upping the spice content. Different meats all get a different treatment. The new 'healthy options' also involve a change to leaner meat, the introduction of newer ingredients like soya mince (for vegetable keema), the baking (not frying) of poppadoms, and the redoubled use of naturally healthy tandoor cooking. The Brilliant's six chefs were delighted by Dipna's modifications.

The measures understandably ruffled a few traditionalist feathers, but Gulu went so far as to invite colleagues in for a tasting and to reassure them he hadn't lost his marbles. "I said 'look, we don't have to go into fusion cooking but by improving on authentic dishes we can carry them on and create a new way for the whole industry. It's also for the health of the nation.'"

Dipna agrees. "A lot of restaurants are suffering. Those who fail to take healthy eating seriously will lose out in gaining a market share."

For now, there is only a handful of 'healthy options', but Dipna hopes to up the quota in a few years. Calorie counts and reduced salt versions are potential next steps. The only thing that definitely won't change is the house special, Butter Chicken. "I get asked about reducing the fat in it all the time," she sighs. "But I just can't do that one." **T**

### Brilliant offerings

On the Menu?	In Kenyan (spices): Masala	Size? 250 covers
Brilliant Butter Chicken	Fish (Tilapia chunks	Where? Brilliant
Tandoori Lamb Chops	simmered in a spicy	Restaurant
Tandoori Salmon, Chilli	Kenyan masala): Bombay	72-76 Western Road,
Moggi (Kenyan Cassava)	Ali; Homemade	Southall,
Methi Chicken; Vegetable	Rasmalai; Gulab Jamun;	Middlesex, UB2.
Keema; Nyama Choma	Vanilla Ice Cream	020 8574 1928
(Lamb chops barbecued	with Lychees.	brilliantrestaurant.com

