

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach, and that proverb can be a dangerous one to a cook, attests Australian chef George Calombaris.

His weight has ballooned since he put on an apron more than 15 years ago and this year, he decided it had to stop.

"Before I was a chef, I was always fit, you know. But when I was committed to the stove, I forgot to look after myself," mused the famed chef, restaurateur and judge on reality show MasterChef Australia.

With a little exercise and plenty of determination, it took him just eight months last year to lose more than 20kg.

Surprisingly, he did not adhere to any fad diets nor restricted himself from eating food that he loved.

Instead, he made a few small adjustments, which included removing sugar from his daily coffee fix and having meals at appropriate times.

The success of this healthy lifestyle inspired him to open a restaurant, Mastic, in Melbourne, Australia.

The idea behind the restaurant is based on cooking using whole foods, such as goat's milk and coconut milk, with little or no processed food on the menu.

It is scheduled to open later this month.

"There was a point in my life when I said, 'Hang on, you know what? I need to start caring about myself,'" the chef recalled.

That was when he decided he should not only commit himself to the stove, but to also keep fit for his family.

The 36-year-old has two children, James, three, and 23-month-old Michaela, with his partner of six years.

Playing football on a weekly basis and participating in a local football league helped with his endeavour.

The social experience of football was a great way to lose weight and keep fit, as well as an excuse for him to keep in touch with his friends.

His love for the sport extends to supporting his hometown team, Melbourne Victory Football Club.

He is the club's No. 1 fan and when he is not rooting for his home team, the football fan supports Manchester United as well.

"I wanted to play for Manchester United when I was younger, but I'm no good," he quipped.

His other passion for cooking and TV was met when he was asked to be a judge on MasterChef Australia from the very first season. He remembers all the past winners and has fond memories of them.

"They have all done something memorable and they're all out there living and breathing food," he said.

The quality of participants has increased tremendously. In the latest season, contestants were required to reproduce the Lemon, Lime and

# George Calombaris' bag



## WHO

George Calombaris, 36, is a chef, restaurateur and judge on MasterChef Australia. Notable accolades include Melbourne Chef of the Year 2008 and his flagship restaurant, The Press Club, winning The Age Good Food Guide's Best New Restaurant Award in the same year.

ST PHOTOS: RUDY WONG, EBEL TANG

## > His headphones

I cannot remember a time when I was without them. I have been using them for so long. I use them to listen to music or to watch movies.



## < His Nintendo DS

It relaxes me. When I am not writing e-mail messages, working on my cookbook or a menu, I get on it and play Fifa. It makes me feel like a kid again.

## > His Apple iPad

I use it mainly for work and for football, not so much for games. There are a lot of football apps on my iPad. For example, during the Fifa World Cup, there will be a World Cup app in there. I use it to watch football matches too.



## > His scarf

Melbourne Victory is close to my heart and a lot of the players are good friends. This scarf is a lucky charm for me and I take it everywhere.



## < His cookbook

It has taken me three years to develop my current cookbook and I am still working on it. It is the same for my other cookbooks. They are wonderful because once they are done, they are in print for life. A cookbook is not only about the recipes but the story of the chef as well.

Bitters dish from his award-winning restaurant, The Press Club.

Given that they were amateurs and not professionals, the results that day were amazing, he said.

When he is not out to impress his fans and customers, the one dish he loves to make – and feels that

everyone should learn how to make – is plain fried eggs on toast.

While it is an unusual choice for a chef of his calibre, it is a dish that currently echoes his healthy lifestyle and whole foods philosophy.

"It's simple to make, delicious, nutritious and all you need is bread

and eggs," he exclaimed.

Catch George Calombaris in MasterChef Australia S6, airing on weeknights at 7pm & 11pm on Lifetime (StarHub TV Ch 514).

By Ebel Tang