

# Holistic Healing

Bangkok-born healthcare pioneer **Devi Bajaj** brings her spirit of kindness to the wellness space, treating the mind and body for maximum success.

BY SHRUTI KOTHARI

When it comes to health, many of us are guilty of only paying attention to our bodies when something breaks down. Hoping to change this mindset, seasoned healthcare expert **Devi Bajaj** presents an attitude of prevention, rather than cure. As the marketing director of **BodyConscious**, an integrative wellness centre, she empowers people to implement sustainable lifestyle changes for healthier and happier living.

#### Have you always been interested in health and wellness?

Yes. While I don't come from a family with a medical background, we do have autoimmune conditions, blood pressure problems and diabetes. In my education, I learnt that some things are not reversible, but some things are preventable. If you take care of yourself, you can avoid getting into a bad situation.

#### How did your education and career decisions help to get you where you are?

I went to the University of Southern California, where I got my Bachelor of Science in Healthcare Management with a minor in International Relations. Then I moved to Boston, where I worked at Tufts Medical Center, the Clinton Foundation health arm and the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA). Afterwards, I spent eight years at Bumrungrad International Hospital, six years in the hospital side and then two years in the wellness department. I absolutely loved it!



#### Why did you switch from the hospital to the wellness sector?

It was essentially a change from curing problems to preventing them. A hospital is not the most pleasant place to work, because people who come in are already sick. With wellness, people we meet really understand that they need to take care of themselves to maintain their health. I want to see lifestyle changes in people, because that's so imperative to living well.

#### How has this change affected your lifestyle?

I always took care of my diet and I now exercise five times a week. I've also started intermittent fasting, which has been great for my digestion, as it lets my body rest. There are lots of health tips on the Internet. What does your outlook offer that the net doesn't?

What works for one person may not work for another! At BodyConscious, part of our mission is to reeducate the market about what wellness really is. It's not just a juice cleanse or an exercise technique. If you are suppressing certain thoughts, if you're not fully confronting certain issues in your life, or if you're not at peace with yourself, you're not well.

#### Mental health is still a bit of a taboo topic in Asia. How does BodyConscious help break down that barrier?

We try to make people comfortable. Even the aesthetic of the clinic is designed around curves and there are no straight edges. Everyone is unique and has their own battle. Mental health issues are very prevalent; we make it a normal part of a health conversation. Our team is highly trained and very warm. It's not doctor versus patient, but rather it's about working together.



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#### BodyConscious is largely focused on weight loss. Is this ever seen as 'body-shaming'?

We are not about losing weight for the aesthetic, but for good health. It's all about a sustainable approach. The fact is, a lot of health issues come from being overweight. Once you lose the fat and build muscle, you feel better and stronger, and that's what we're here to do. It's about achieving your optimum body, inside and out. Weight loss is really only a fraction of what we cover.

#### What excites you about BodyConscious?

BodyConscious is a real, different approach to wellness in Bangkok because it's integrative. We have a naturopathic physician, a registered dietician, a physical therapist, a Chinese doctor, a functional medicine nurse for our IV boosters and a fitness expert, so it's really about the entire body. We teach you practical solutions that you can apply to your daily life.

#### You are clearly very passionate about the industry. How do you balance that with your home life?

Growing up in Japan, I have learnt to become a very structured person. I go to the gym at seven in the morning. A typical workday is from nine to six, so I try to get there by eight to have time to myself. I'll sometimes meet my friends or husband for lunch, and I'll go see my parents some evenings. I plan well so that I can make time for things that are important, which is so vital for mental health.

#### Do you feel that your varied cultural background helps you understand your clients?

Yes. It definitely lets me appreciate people more. Lifestyle is so culture-driven; it's really important to understand a person's whole context before delving into sustainable solutions.

#### Everybody needs good role models as guidance and inspiration. Who are some of yours?

My husband is the most optimistic person I've ever met. My mother taught me strength, and my dad raised us saying, 'no matter what, just be kind.' I always try to be kind. That's not always easy in this harsh world we live in, but I think that no matter what, you have to not let the world make you hard.

#### ■ BODYCONSCIOUS AT YWELLNESS

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