

McKeith returns

It's been a while since Gillian McKeith has been on our screens. But 2010 marks her return, with a fresh TV series, a new deal with CLF Distribution and a revamped product range. The holistic nutritionist told all to *HFB* Editor, **Rachel Symonds**.

When Gillian McKeith first swept onto our TV screens back in 2004, the snowball effect on growth of the health food trade could not have been anticipated.

Coined as 'the McKeith effect', many retailers and wholesalers enjoyed huge growth thanks in the main to the awareness raised about healthy eating through Gillian's original series, *You Are What You Eat*.

The series was backed up with the launch of a range of foods under the McKeith Research brand, not to mention a number of best-selling books.

Such rapid growth will inevitably eventually reach a plateau, particularly during a recession, and this seems to be the case with health food stores.

But despite her successes already, Gillian has more she wants to achieve, and 2010 see her back on the small screen with a new TV series, *Eat Yourself Sexy*.

Added to this, she has just struck an exciting new deal with CLF Distribution, which will see it take over the handling of her McKeith Research brand. This in turn will lead to a revamp of the range, with a particular focus placed on health food stores.

Show time

It's been a while since we've had a new show from Gillian, and by all accounts, this latest, 13-episode series, *Eat Yourself Sexy*, will be a bit different.

Filming took place in North America, and focuses on women who, as Gillian describes, had lost their mojo.

"It is definitely a different show to previous ones and the challenge is more of an emotional journey. It is the kind of show where you see women rediscovering their sense of self and reconnecting with

their partners and with themselves," she said.

"It is a more emotional show than *You Are What You Eat* as all these women were in various states of ill health and were never putting themselves first. They have been like this all their lives and when you are in a rut, it's very hard to get the energy to make lasting change.

"Poor nutrition and lifestyle was at the crux of the problems for all the women, because when you don't value yourself, you can't be bothered to put good food in because you feel you are not worth it."

Gillian believes the new show opens up a different side to her.

She explained: "I know I'm known for being tough, and sometimes it's needed. I'm definitely a no-nonsense person but perhaps missing from the other shows is that there are other facets to me and in this show there is a lot of nurturing, care and emotion and maybe that didn't come across in *You Are What You Eat*.

"And when they start to feel better and have more energy, their family lives get better. Seeing the way they change in the way they think about themselves is extremely inspiring."

Gillian is keen to point out that any lasting changes people make must go beyond simply losing weight, or changing their diet.

"It's also about mental attitude. The appeal of the series is to show that caring for yourself can lead to you feeling sexier – not sexual per se but being able to walk into a room and feel good, with your head held high. People need to ask if they feel happy with how they feel, not about how they look."

Emotions play a key role in how we feel about ourselves, and in turn how we eat.

"The emotional quotient is the hardest behaviour to break. It is not about the

food. It is about believing you can do it – people give themselves messages every day that are not necessarily positive. Someone may want to lose weight, but in the same breath they will say they'll always be fat. It is also important to show them how to make change last and make it last for you."

Health of the nation

She may have made great in-roads when *You Are What You Eat* was launched, but does Gillian believe any lasting changes have been made to the health of Britons?

"I think the nation is split," she admitted. "We have become more health conscious and there are certain areas of the population who take responsibility for their own health, exercise more and definitely take heed of the healthy eating messages. Those messages are out there but there is a whole segment that has missed that and I think the biggest problem we still have is the misconception that eating healthy is expensive.

"That's the first thing people say about making changes is they cannot afford it but in reality, that does not have to be the case. People need to realise that if you take responsibility for yourself that's the first step on the path. It is only you who can control that as no one is shoving it down your throat."

While Gillian believes many people are still eating healthily, despite the recession, she does have criticism for the approach of some retail sectors.

"The supermarkets seem to think a recession should mean they should offer discounts on bad food and alcohol and that's not helpful to the general public," she said. "What people are interpreting that as is cheap food has to be junk food, whereas I'm saying you can eat cheaply and healthily."

The general public is increasingly being made aware of the true sugar and fat content of many mainstream foods, with cereal brands being just one sector that has come under fire recently in a *Which?* report, which exposed how unhealthy some of these products were.

But it came as a real surprise when a few months ago, *The Sunday People* carried a story suggesting the sugar and fat

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content of some of the McKeith Research products were akin to junk food, which was then reported further in the *Grocer* magazine.

At the time Gillian pointed out that the sugar content of a goji berry, given it is naturally occurring, is far different to the highly refined and processed sugar in a confectionery bar, while a pumpkin seed will contain plenty of good fats that we all need, not the bad, saturated fat you find in junk food.

Today, she is still incredulous that such a report was published.

"I find it appalling that the *Grocer* magazine would use a downmarket yellow journalistic tabloid as their source for writing fantasy and untruth, as well as fabrication," she said, adding that she was also not offered the opportunity to respond.

"Everyone knows I would never add sugar to my products," she said. "Fruit has naturally-occurring sugar and they are creating a distortion whereby they want to confuse the consumer."

Health store focus

Gillian says she has always been, and remains, a great advocate of health food stores, and only has an interest in developing her product range within this trade.

She said: "Going forward, they are the only stores I care about and I want to make that clear – I will be waving the flag for health food stores. They have always been the first port of call for someone who wants to get on the path to wellness and we must fight to keep them in your stores."

"My goal is to get the British population shopping in health food stores because that's where it's at. In a health food store, you are met by people who are totally dedicated and in touch with what we should be putting into our bodies."

Turning to the product range, Gillian admits it was almost accidental that the products were created.

"I never intended to create a range of foods. People would come to me as patients and, like in the shows, I would ask them to bring their food in with them



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so I could look at what they were eating. I saw there was nothing out there at the time in terms of healthy snacks that were accessible, and people were desperate for it," she said. "We are now fine tuning the range so that it focuses on what it does best and that's things like the superfood powders and the bars, which are healthy and taste great."

So, why the new partnership with

CLF Distribution?

"I have known Robin Holiday [CLF founder and Managing Director] for many years and I have watched as his company has grown. He is the smartest guy I have met in the industry and the company is the best. Knowing this, it felt like he was the best man with the best company to take McKeith Research into the next century." **hfb**