



FOOD HERO

Culinary superstar Seamus Mullen runs three acclaimed restaurants in New York City, plus another in London. But the long-time cyclist and award-winning chef wants to do more than feed you—he wants to heal you.



BY SELENE YEAGER ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLIN CLARK

Mullen's newest culinary venture: El Colmado Butchery in the Meat Packing District, just off the West Side Highway. It's a full-service tapas restaurant where cyclists can also grab homemade bars and maybe some jerky for the road, and sit down for coffee and sandwiches when they return.



PREVIOUS SPREAD
"The yogurt and dill dressing on this **kale salad with apple, pecans, and creamy avocado** makes a mundane dish so much more satisfying after a big ride," Mullen says.

1 "I make my own ride food with no added sugars. These **tropical energy bars** are easy to digest and don't sit in your gut like a bomb."

2 "These **savory oats with bacon, mushrooms, and an over-easy egg** are loaded with flavor, plus plenty of carbs and good fats to fuel long rides."

Seamus Mullen achieved a huge life goal this past November. He finished the brutal La Ruta mountain bike stage race in Costa Rica—pretty impressive for anyone, but for this celebrated chef, the odds of even getting to the starting line had been steep.

Mullen had raced mountain bikes in the '90s before he began experiencing a relentless cascade of maladies, marked by recurrent digestive issues and mysterious severe pains (“like someone stabbing me with a hot knife and twisting it”). One especially acute episode immobilized him on his apartment floor for hours and led to an almost two-week hospital stay—and finally to a diagnosis: rheumatoid arthritis (RA), an incurable autoimmune disease that causes the body’s immune system to attack the joints, resulting in chronic inflammation.

Prescription drugs helped for a while. But the attacks persisted and got bad enough that he underwent spinal surgery, which landed him back in the ER, minutes from death, with 36 blood clots scattered throughout his lungs. Later, doctors discovered that intestinal parasites he’d unknowingly contracted in Mexico 10 years prior had perforated his gut, leading to a bout of bacterial meningitis that almost killed him—again.

“I was a mess,” Mullen tells me over broccoli salad and parsnip soup at Tertulia, one of his tapas-inspired restaurants in Manhattan. “I wasn’t active. I’d gained 50 pounds. I was taking piles of medicines and pain pills. I hurt all the time.” Then he met Frank Lipman, a physician specializing in integrated medicine and author of *Total Renewal*, who convinced him that they could overhaul his diet and lifestyle to rid the inflammation Lipman believed was the root of Mullen’s ills.

“In little over a year,” Mullen says. “I was off all meds and pills.” Today he has zero markers of RA and rides his bike regularly—and still relies on food choices (like the ones he shares on these pages) to maintain his health and overcome the occasional setback. This time, it’s the foot he broke in a recent motorcycle accident. “I can drink bone broth and take grass-fed beef collagen capsules to heal myself faster than just sitting around in a boot,” he says. He’s turned his health around before, and even wrote a book about it: *Seamus Mullen’s Hero Food*. He shares his philosophy here.

WHAT TO EAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION YOU MAKE ON A DAILY BASIS. And it has to be consistent. I would have a flare-up and try to fix it with a kale smoothie. Then I realized that you have to eat kale and ginger and turmeric and anchovies and olive oil and anti-inflammatory foods on an ongoing basis. That is how you ensure you don’t get sick. It’s preventative.

GETTING RID OF SUGAR AND PASTA WAS ONE OF THE BEST DECISIONS FOR MY HEALTH. When I was cross-country mountain bike racing in my early 20s, that’s all I ate—lots of pasta, lots of grains, way too much sugar, and way too little fat. That’s how I thought you were supposed to fuel yourself, and I bonked constantly! The starchy carb dominance in our diet is a disaster.



It makes us fat and causes inflammation and disease. Fat—even saturated fat from quality sources like grass-fed beef—is good for you.

NOW I FUEL PRIMARILY ON GOOD MEATS, FISH, FRUITS, AND VEGETABLES. When racing La Ruta, I made my own bars from coconut and macadamia nuts, and bacon, mushroom, and seaweed. Any grains I have are protein-rich, like quinoa. I get most of my carbs from cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and brussels sprouts, which have so many more nutrients your body can use. I’m 40 pounds lighter and never bonk anymore.

A RICH VARIETY OF GUT BACTERIA IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOOD HEALTH. It builds immunity so you can fight off pathogens. It influences your cravings,



3 "Roasted bone broth with fresh ginger is rich in collagen and healing antioxidants, which help repair soft tissue and also promote digestive health."

ing these foods in my diet every day builds a complex microbiome [the trillions of bacteria that line the gut] and strong immune system.

FOOD HAS TO BE DELICIOUS. I read a lot of cookbooks and diet books on RA when I was first diagnosed. None of them made me want to change my diet. I never thought, "Wow, that tempeh, almond, dairy-free, wheat-free burrito sounds amazing!" That's why I spent so much time finding real, amazing healing foods. In my book, I talk about good eggs, meats, stone fruits, sweet peas, squash, and delicious oils. Who doesn't want to eat that?

MY REBOOT WAS MORE THAN JUST WHAT I ATE. It was how I lived. I needed to

metabolism, insulin response, inflammation, everything. Traditional cultures intuitively understood this and cultivated a diverse gut flora with probiotic-rich fermented foods like sauerkraut, yogurt, kefir, miso, and kimchi. I eat a variety of fermented and living foods like aged beef, aged cheese, and apple cider vinegar daily. It's not like having yogurt every morning will keep me from being sick. But includ-

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take time to eat at least two, preferably three, real meals a day. I needed to not eat after 7 at night, because when you eat later at night you end up digesting rather than resting (though I do take a little raw honey before bedtime, because it improves the quality of my sleep). I needed to be strict about not eating sugar and starches. I needed to take care of me.

I DIDN'T GET BETTER OVERNIGHT. I'd have a moment of feeling better followed by a not-so-great moment followed by another good moment. Eventually I was able to string those good moments together. About six months into my reboot I woke up and walked down the stairs and it didn't hurt. It was the first time in years. I was like, "I'm going for a bike ride!" My bike was a complete mess from disuse, but I didn't care. I pumped the tires and rode about 10 miles.

I was exhausted and elated. The next day I did it again, and then again. On day six I bought a new bike.

I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD MOUNTAIN BIKE AGAIN. I am missing a disc in my back. I've had ankle surgery. No cartilage in my knee. I thought, "No effing way." But then I thought, "Maybe I can." I went upstate and set out on this great singletrack with a rocky, steep descent. I took a deep breath and dropped in, one ledge after another. And I'm screaming with joy. I feel so good and I'm flowing after 13 years of not riding and it's the happiest moment of my life.

LIFE IS ALL ABOUT DECISIONS, thousands of seemingly small decisions that create a monumental impact. Every bite you eat is a decision. Your thoughts are decisions. They all impact your health. When I was lying on the table in the ER burning up with meningitis, I totally saw the tunnel of light. I remember deciding, "No fucking way," and clawing my way back and suddenly hearing the room and becoming aware of my surroundings. The doctor standing over me said, "Almost lost you there!" I was like, "I'm fully aware of that." And I made the decision to be here. **B**