

Ben's food life

A childhood food memory: The Sunday roast. It was the chance for us to all get round the table together - my dad worked long hours so being together for this meal at the weekend was a big deal. By contrast, my kids really love Japanese food, the fact that it is so exciting and different.

The last meal you ate: Fish and chips from Whitley Bay after my Speedflex marathon! Got to get the calories back up. Massive portion, couldn't eat it all!

Restaurant you return to time and again: Petersham Nurseries is close to where we live and is an incredible place. Great surroundings, chef and restaurant. I like Jamie Oliver's trattorias too.

Memorable meal: I was lucky enough to be invited to one of the Heston Feasts that were on TV. It was a 70s-influenced meal and it was one of the most extraordinary experiences ever. It was like being at a circus - edible paper, gases to inhale - we just marvelled at what he was able to do. I am reading his book at the moment and took my parents to the Fat Duck - amazing.

Inspirational chef: Jamie Oliver for what he has managed to achieve with his foundation. He has changed a lot of views and made people think - quite inspirational.

Favourite drink: I've done dry January so am ready for a nice cold pint of lager.

Favourite ingredient: Tomatoes. I could eat them all day. I loved Heston's magical popping candy too!

Favourite meal: A good burger. Nothing quite like a proper burger, the cheese, the relish, the fries.

Last meal: Ice-cream!



Curry classroom

fq There could really only be one thing on the menu for TV presenter and charity whizz Ben Shephard - the ultimate comfort food with a spicy twist

Ben Shephard is one of those bright, perky people who, Tigger-like, exude an enviable supply of energy.

True, the sporty stuff is his thing - as a presenter with Sky Sports Goals on Sunday, a tireless fund-raiser and devoted West Ham fan - not to mention keeping up with the antics of sons Jack, seven and Sam, eight.

The pitch, the gym, the open road are more familiar territory than the kitchen stove, he readily admits, even after spending a good few months last year presenting What's Cooking with Lisa Faulkner.

Excitedly, he's just been signed up as one of the presenting line-up for ITV's

new-look breakfast programme alongside Susannah Reid. He's a nice face to wake up to!

We catch up with 39-year-old Ben at Peace&Loaf in Jesmond where he is going to hit the kitchen to cook up a spicy version of Shephard's Pie. As ever, Bob Arora, owner of Sachins and part-owner of Peace&Loaf, is taking today's curry class. Ben's a regular visitor to Newcastle as a fund-raiser for the Freeman Hospital's CHUF charity which is close to his heart. The reason? Ben's school pal and best friend (their mums were midwives together) Ivan Hollingsworth founded the charity Seb4Chuf after his son Seb was successfully treated for heart

problems at the hospital.

The pair have raised thousands of pounds for the on-going charity campaign to secure the future of the heart unit. In 2010, Ben and Ivan ran the Coast-to-Coast Challenge, raising over £120,000 for the CHUF in a 145-mile run that took them five days.

The day before we met, Ben had joined Ivan at Speedflex in Jesmond and burned ten thousand calories in a charity challenge alongside Welsh rugby captain Tom May. It had been a long and gruelling challenge - rewarded at the end of the day by a well-earned fish and chip supper at the coast.

You might expect Ben to feel a bit worn

out and rest-ready but though slightly ached after those exertions, he's full of energy and enjoying his Geordie break.

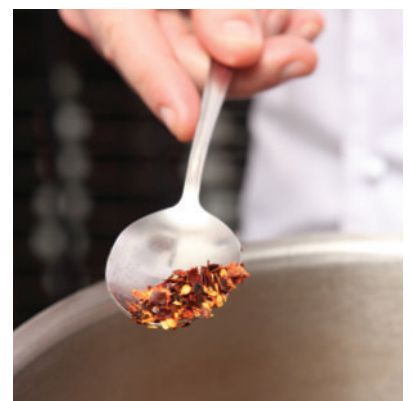
"I've played up here in a celebrity match at St James' Park. I've played there twice now and as someone who loves his football, that has been amazing.

"I am really happy to support CHUF when I can - I am a dad myself and when Ivan and Nadine had Seb it became apparent how ill he was - the hospital saved his life and now he is a confident little five-year-old boy."

fq Bob Arora owns Sachins, Forth Banks, Newcastle. www.sachins.co.uk



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On the menu: Spicy Shephard's Pie

What it's got going for it: a twist on this traditional comfort food meal with spices added to the lamb for a bit of kick
The trick: adding a little saffron to the mash adds something different to the flavour

Ingredients

Serves 8

3 tblsp oil
3 onions, diced
2kg lamb mince
3 carrots, diced
1 stick celery
2 baby leeks
Salt
1 tsp chilli powder (to taste)
1 tsp garam masala
2 dstsp Worcester sauce
1 glass red wine
1 glass stock
Pinch chilli flakes
1 dstsp tomato puree
12 large potatoes
Pinch saffron
Paneer cheese

Method

Add the onions and vegetables to the warmed oil in the pan and lightly fry for five minutes until soft. Add the lamb mince and brown. Add the remaining ingredients and cook gently for 15-20 minutes. Retain the stock as you can keep adding the stock to the mixture if it gets too dry. Adjust the seasoning to suit. You should have mixture that is reasonably solid - it does not want to be too runny.
Peel and boil the potatoes for 20 minutes or so until they are ready to mash. Use a potato ricer to get the potato really smooth.
Mix a pinch of saffron with a little water then add this to the potato - it will make it a soft yellow colour and give a distinctive flavour.
Put the mince mixture in a casserole dish and top with the mash. Grate a little paneer cheese on the top then cook in the oven at 200C for about 25 minutes until the pie topping is browned.

