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Here's to Good Health (but No Toast)

By BEE SHAPIRO

Not long ago, at a Midtown luncheon hosted by Arianna Huffington and Lucy Danziger, the editor in chief of Self magazine, Dr. Frank Lipman, 59, was settling into his seat on a panel along with the wellness stars Deepak Chopra and Joy Bauer.

When his turn came, Dr. Lipman (perhaps best known for the fighting words "gluten and sugar are the devil") spoke with fervor about getting people to "take control of their health" — meaning, largely, to pay more attention to nutrition.

"To me, junk food is modern-day cigarettes: they're the same thing," he said, as onlookers munched on poached salmon and Greek salad, many casting a wary eye on the bread basket.

A few weeks before, with no audience in his Flatiron office, he looked crisp in a blue dress shirt tucked into trousers, rectangular glasses and the inevitable Jawbone fitness bracelet. The office was decorated wall to wall with artifacts from South Africa, where he was born. Dr. Lipman was less animated and more circumspect than he was at the luncheon. He said he hadn't the slightest interest in "selling out," decrying celebrity doctors as "cheesy — a required part of television that I want no part of."

But there is no doubt that even if Dr. Lipman has no ambition to be the next Dr. Oz, his own star is quietly on the rise. He has a powdered-shake line, Be Well, and a diet book, initially called "Spent," that was recently renamed "Revive." On Oct. 25, he gave his first TED talk, arguing for prevention over disease management.

And despite his professed resistance to television, he is brainstorming about a possible show with the chef Seamus Mullen of Tertulia and the Food Network, a client since January. "We'd only do it if there was control over the editing process," said Dr. Lipman, who in 2012 did a solo show for Google TV, though it never aired.

He is not exactly new to the scene, having opened his Eleven Eleven Wellness Center (an integrated East-West health practice, as he described it) in 1992. Ms. Huffington, Gwyneth Paltrow, Donna Karan, Maggie Gyllenhaal and Kyra Sedgwick became just a fe
recognizable clients, and several of their glowing visages and testimonies are
website. "I've never sought celebrities out," Mr. Lipman said. But "I think the
more used to exploring things that are different, and they want to look better

and this is what I do."

He is doing more of it since Ms. Paltrow introduced her much-mocked but ardently read website, Goop, to which he has contributed articles on topics like the so-called superfoods like avocados and beans. "She has more clout than anybody," Dr. Lipman said. "We get more calls from Goop than anything else."

More controversially, he has also promoted a 14-day "detox" program featuring his supplements and smoothies. But Mr. Mullen, who has rheumatoid arthritis, attested that Mr. Lipman is "very open-minded," not dogmatic about such regimes. "If antibiotics are right, he'll try it," he said. "If it's an anti-inflammatory diet, he'll do that. He's looking at the body as a system rather than looking at isolated things. That is different than traditional medicine, which just focuses on medicines to heal."

Dr. Lipman, whose manner is amiable but decidedly clinical, may feel more comfortable before the cameras with an established on-air personality like Mr. Mullen.

"In the early days," he said, "I was a lot more rigid."

Born in Johannesburg in 1954, Dr. Lipman grew up in a politically active, vocally anti-apartheid household. "You grew up not trusting the system," he said, adding, "I compare apartheid in South Africa to apartheid in medicine — or the separation and discrimination towards non-Western medical traditions."

He attended medical school at the University of the Witwatersrand, where he met his future wife, Janice, a ceramic artist who now runs his Pinterest page, and worked for a while as a general practitioner. In 1984, inspired in part by the American music and pop cultures, the couple emigrated to the United States. To secure a green card, Dr. Lipman got a job at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, where many American doctors refused to work, he said. "It was pretty rough in those days, lots of heroin and crack," he said.

In three years there, he became chief medical resident, and was enamored with the hospital's alternative addiction clinic, which used acupuncture to treat addicts off-site "in a burnt-out building," he said.

"These are the same patients I'm seeing in the wards, and in the wards they're pulling out their IVs, they're hard to control," he said. "With the acupuncture clinic, they were pretty calm. These same type of patients were sitting quietly, just with needles in their ears." It was enough to persuade Dr. Lipman, who never cared for the American way of doctoring ("The patient relationship wasn't that important," he said. "It was more about all the tests.") to change

course.

In 1987, he left his residency to practice acupuncture, for which he received grief from his peers, he said. He worked all around town, including at Betances Health Center, a practice on the Lower East Side that was open-minded about alternative practices; at Gramercy Park Sports; and for Dr. Mark Seem, the founding director of the Tri-State College of Acupuncture, on the Upper West Side. Dr. Lipman also fell in with the Chinese medicine practitioners Efrem Korngold and Harriet Beinfield, who wrote "Between Heaven and Earth: A Guide to Chinese Medicine," and followed Jeffrey Bland, a nutritional biochemist whose work would become the fountain of his anti-gluten stance.

When he opened Eleven Eleven, named for the Mayan predicted date of doom and renewal, or the day for "change of consciousness," as Dr. Lipman described it, his practice focused largely on acupuncture.

"I love it," he said. "You're getting close to a person. It's touchy, in a nonsexual way, and there's an intimacy about that which is good for the doctor-patient relationship."

Ms. Karan was one of Dr. Lipman's earliest patients and has been an outspoken proponent of his integrative approach, which can also include B-vitamin shots and sleep counseling. "He's my dream of where the medical system should be," she said. "He's all doctors put together in one. He sees you as a therapist and sees you as a brilliant acupuncturist. I've recommended him to everybody." (With initial visits starting at $650, and follow-up appointments $250, not everyone can afford him.)

Mr. Mullen described Dr. Lipman doing blood work, determining a high triglyceride level, and advising the elimination of nearly all grains, including gluten-free ones, in favor of healthy fats. "I'm feeling the best I've felt in years," Mr. Mullen said. In an endorsement for his site, Ms. Paltrow described "Revive" as "essential reading for anyone feeling exhausted by modern life."

But not everyone is sold on his core beliefs. Brooke Alpert, a registered dietitian with a Master of Science in clinical nutrition who also has her fingers in the diet-entertainment pie (she has a book called "The Sugar Detox: Lose Weight, Feel Great and Look Years Younger" and appears on the "Dr. Oz" and "Today" shows), thinks gluten-free eating is "certainly a fad and certainly trendy."

"The actual incidence of those with celiac disease is very low," she said. She has also found that many of her clients are "self-diagnosing, and saying how much better they are feeling because they are now gluten-free."

“But then I’ll go over what they ate the last few days, and there’s tons of gluten,” Ms. Alpert said. “In our food society, gluten is everywhere.”

She also sees potential safety issues with Dr. Lipman’s practice of employing “health coaches”: essentially holistic nutritionists, most of them educated through a one-year online course given by the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. A coach will sit in with Dr. Lipman during appointments and, afterward, support patients as they progress in their recommended diet program, he said.

“A lot of it is how do you teach people to create healthy habits: teaching people to eat better, exercise, relax, sleep better,” Dr. Lipman said. “The health coach, to me, is the future of medicine.” There are six on his staff, and he plans to hire more.

“My daughters have used them, but I already have my own routine,” Ms. Huffington said.

Ms. Alpert said she fears that such delegation to health coaches “who may not always be under the advisement of a trained doctor, like Dr. Lipman,” could be medically suspect. “There’s a clinical training that is really important, and we’re working in an American society where most patients are on some sort of medication or have a pre-existing condition,” she said. “It’s not just about feeling better.”

But Dr. Lipman, a Dr. Feelgood for the mild new millennium, sees nothing wrong with steering people away from the bread basket and toward his powders, capsules, shots and shakes.

“The easier you make it for people,” he said, “the more likely they’re going to do it.”