



slim pickings

with
Erica Watson



SHE has a daughter named Apple and swears by yoga and natural therapies so it is no real surprise that Academy Award-winning actress Gwyneth Paltrow (pictured) has long followed Madonna's lead in adopting a macrobiotic diet.

For the diet's devoted followers, who include Paltrow and her bestie Madonna, it is more a way of life than a means of eating. The principle is that food quality and preparation greatly affect our health, wellbeing and happiness. Essentially, it is promoted as a way to live harmoniously with nature through food.

Although the term macrobiotics owes its roots to Greek, the diet is based on the Chinese principles of yin and yang. And just to make things a little more confusing, a Japanese philosopher claims to have developed the regimen in the 1920s.

While there are a few incarnations in circulation, the core principles remain the same; organic whole foods should make up the majority of what advocates eat.

Cooking and types of food are also influenced by the time of year. For example, summer months encourage lots of raw foods while winter advocates root vegetables and filling, heavy grains such as buckwheat or millet.

Brown rice is a clear winner all year round along with leafy green vegetables and soy products such as tofu and tempeh. Highly processed foods should be avoided at all costs along with very "yin" vegetable such as tomatoes, capsicum, potatoes and eggplant.

Most importantly, food should only be consumed when hungry and must be thoroughly chewed.

In today's fast-paced environment, the macrobiotic way of life can be difficult to sustain. Really, who has the time to go dig up

lotus roots from their zen vegetable garden and whip up something tasty? The microwave is also out of bounds.

Accredited dietitian Susie Burrell says the macrobiotic diet can not only be difficult to follow, it can also be quite a dense diet due to the large amount of whole grains.

"Individuals who find carbs bloat them and make them feel heavy can find it hard to follow," says Burrell of the eating philosophy.

It can also have very little protein, making it low in saturated fat. A lack of key nutrients such as calcium and iron can also be problematic.

On the plus side however, Burrell says the fact the diet is high in fibre and is free from processed foods is a good thing.

"It's likely to be easy to control weight as long as key nutrients are supplemented," she says.

