

**lifestyle** health

# African parasite infection led to empire worth millions

**When Sarah Holloway suddenly dropped to 42kg and was constantly tired, she had no idea something shocking was lurking inside her.**



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JULY 6, 2019 9:55PM

When Sarah Holloway returned from a trip to Africa, she came back with more than just lifelong memories.

Within days of being home in Melbourne following a charity expedition with her fiancé Nick Davidson, the 30-year-old lawyer began to suffer with tiredness and sudden weight loss.

“I just kept losing weight. First it was 5kg, then 10kg,” Ms Holloway told [news.com.au](#).

Before she knew it, she had dropped to just 42kg and felt extremely lethargic and rundown, saying she struggled to stomach certain foods.

“I became emaciated and wasn’t able to eat much food,” she explained.

“I was not eating well at all, and I didn’t realise how bad it was until I completely crashed and burned.”

Like many other overworked and tired people, Ms Holloway turned to coffee to help get her through. But even coffee wasn’t sitting right anymore.

“I would have a full-blown panic attack when I drank coffee because the caffeine was so harsh on my body. My heart rate would just go up, and I would get extreme jitters.”

Eventually, she crashed and burned with adrenal fatigue, leading doctors to discover the awful reason she’d been so run down.

During her time with Nick in Rwanda where the pair had helped a youth group build schools, Ms Holloway had contracted a parasite.

In total it had been lurking in her body for two months, secretly wreaking havoc on her body.

Doctors advised the best way to beat the parasite was through her diet, which involved banning coffee while she recovered.

For Ms Holloway, it all but signalled the end of her life as a functioning human being and forced her to search for other alternatives.

Around the same time, she was sent to Hong Kong for work where she discovered the marvels of matcha green tea powder — green tea leaves that are ground into a fine powder.

While it still gave her a good caffeine buzz, it was without the crash and jitters that a coffee hit gave her — which was particularly bad on her recovering 42kg frame.

After a few months, she managed to get rid of the parasite through changes made to her diet, which as well as ditching coffee included switching to organic cooking, cutting out booze and minimising sugar intake too.

She also took antibiotics and carved out more time for sleep and rest.

But despite recovering from the bug, her love of matcha continued, with her and Nick becoming “hooked” on the natural tea powder, adding it to salad dressings and morning smoothies as well as enjoying matcha lattes instead of coffee ones.



Co-founder of Matcha Maiden, Sarah Holloway, was struck with a parasite when she travelled to Africa in 2017. She lost 15kg, weighing just 42kg after being struck with the bug. *Source: Instagram*



After a few months of taking antibiotics and changing her diet and lifestyle, she got rid of the parasite. *Source: Instagram*

## PARASITE LEADS TO MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR EMPIRE

After making the switch from coffee to matcha permanently she realised it was hard to find places that sold it in Australia.

That's when she founded her now multi-millionaire dollar tea empire Matcha Maiden with Nick.

The couple originally invested \$5000 into the [social media driven-business](#), which after just 18 months made its first million.

Just six months after Matcha Maiden launched in 2015, US retailer Urban Outfitters placed a monthly, 3000-package order for six months (selling across their US stores) after spotting the product on Instagram, which really catapulted the product's success.

"It honestly just started as a side hustle and hobby that I was doing while I was a lawyer and it exploded and grew so fast, beyond anything we ever expected," Ms Holloway told [news.com.au](#)

"All I wanted was to find a source of caffeine to boost my energy levels but something that was gentle on my adrenals."

They ordered 10kg of it online because it was only available in bulk and started selling it as they had so much left over.

Ms Holloway then expanded the product offering and built a strong social media following by tailoring it as a lifestyle brand — part of the reason Urban Outfitters jumped on-board.

At this point things had grown so much she had to decide whether to focus purely on the matcha or continue with her lawyer career.

Despite having been offered an associate role with the chief justice of the High Court, a position she had waited six years for, Ms Holloway decided to follow her creative heart and focus on her business.

## CELEBRITIES OBSESSED WITH THE BRAND

Not long after the success with Urban Outfitters, a bunch of celebrities began promoting the business including Cameron Diaz, who listed it in her Christmas gift guide, and Victoria Secret model Karlie Kloss, who is a big fan of matcha tea.

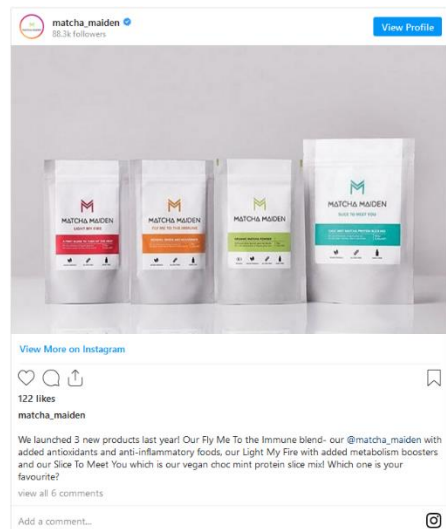
"Sales boomed again. And by the end of 2015/ 2016 we saw exponential growth of 500 per cent," Ms Holloway said.



Sarah talks to Karlie Kloss, a big supporter of her matcha brand. *Source: Supplied*



During this time she discovered matcha tea after being forced to stop drinking coffee and co-founded her tea empire with fiancé Nick Davidson. *Source: Instagram*





While success was still running hot, the pair launched a second venture by opening a vegan cafe, [Matcha Mylkbar](#), in Melbourne in 2016.

And just when things couldn't get any better, the couple's colourful and Instagramable cafe got a massive wrap in the [New York Times](#) when Chris Hemsworth name dropped it following a profile on what he loves about Australia.

"A meal at Matcha Mylkbar is a must. The restaurant serves only plant-based food and has one of the most inventive menus I have ever seen. I am not a vegan, but if I were, this is where I would go to eat," Hemsworth said about the cafe.

Prior to Hemsworth's discovery, the cafe went [viral for its blue algae latte](#), which raked in \$1000 a day from Smurf Latte sales alone, with customers queuing for up to three hours just to get a snap with the Insta-famous beverage.

Ms Holloway, who also works as a social media influencer through her blog [Spoonful of Sarah](#), uses the new "insta-website" maker [Milkshake](#) to help grow her businesses.

She said the power of the medium had been undeniable and essential to their success.

The new tool allows Instagrammers to edit their profiles from their mobile phones instead of a laptop and PC, which Ms Holloway says saves her so much time.

## HOW SHE STARTED THE BUSINESS

"It sounds so cliché but I just googled what I needed to start an online business, but one thing we were fortunate to have was Nick's background and skills in branding and marketing and my legal skills to do the corporate structure," Ms Holloway said.

The pair then focused their energy on small goals rather than the "end" goal of how they thought it should be.

"Refrain from focusing on how big your business will be. We just focused on the one thing we needed to sell our first tea bag, to get that one customer — and then dealt with things as it happened," Ms Holloway said.

The tea comes from a farm in Kyoto, Japan, the birth place of matcha. Ms Holloway said it was important to source the best, most organic matcha.

"The conditions there are the best to grow the leaves, and they have ancient Japanese technology to do it under a specific shade," she said.

Ms Holloway said the quick boom in the business underscored a massive hole in the health food market — particularly for organic tea.

"The main ingredient in matcha tea is an amino acid called L-theanine, and it slowly releases the caffeine into your bloodstream for sustained energy, which is only found in green tea," she said.

Ms Holloway said the key to success — especially for businesses that depend on social media — was consistency.

"People search for a feeling. In a sea of so much content it can be quite difficult to be moved by content, so the key is to humanise the experience and give people (consistent) content they can relate to," she said.

"When I first started the Instagram page, I just posted things that I would have liked to have seen — and just kept building it from there."



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chrishemsworth

If you're in Melbourne check out @matcha\_mylkbar, it's one of the most amazing restaurants I've ever been to, healthy, innovative, creative, delicious. (insert superlatives) check it out!! @marklippelli @liamhemsworth @australia @visitmelbourne

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