

## **Dr. Coy's reinvents chocolate as a healthy snack**

### **Wicklow health food start-up [Dr. Coy's](#) is built on a passion for positive eating and a healthy lifestyle.**

Greystones-based Dr. Coy's Health Foods Ltd is built on the research of award-winning oncologist dr Johannes Coy and offers an innovative, patented 'Nutritional Chocolate' range with certified health benefits.

"Excess body weight leading to diabetes and obesity is the most significant nutritional issue of our time," explained Alison Stroh, co-founder of Dr. Coy's Health Foods. "60m people in the European Union (10pc of the EU population) is diabetic, with prevalence among all ages increasing.

"Whilst working in Germany I struggled to find truly healthy snacks that did not spike insulin and blood sugars. I heard Dr Coy speak at a conference and inspired by his research I proposed to commercialise his invention and to bring it beyond the medical world to a wider audience. And so Dr. Coy's Health Foods was born.

### **The world's only chocolate to be patented for health benefits**

Dr. Coy's Health Foods is an Irish food business founded in 2014, offering a range of nutritional chocolate and free-from cooking ingredients.

"Dr. Coy's chocolate is the only chocolate in the world patented due to its health benefits," says Stroh.

"Developed by award-winning biologist, Dr. Johannes Coy, this is chocolate 'reinvented for sustained energy' as it contains rare low glycemic, tooth-friendly sugar and EFSA (European Food Safety Authority) certified health benefits: 'No sugar spikes', 'Gluten free', High Vitamin E and 'High Fibre'.

"Our chocolate, with 54pc cocoa in irresistible flavours, is neither too sweet nor bitter suiting a wide audience. The taste combined with the health benefits deliver a real WOW factor making it the perfect healthy on-the-go snack."

### **Unique and revolutionary**

Stroh founded Dr. Coy's in 2014. "I was on parental leave from Hewlett Packard in Germany at the time and I had the opportunity to return to a solid career there, but did always want to be my own boss. Prior to this I lived and worked in both New York for three years and in Germany for eight years.

"When at a conference in Germany I discovered Dr. Coy's amazing cancer research and low glycemic sugars, which sparked my desire to bring something truly unique and revolutionary to the market and to make a positive difference in nutrition and the obesity crisis.

"The US experience gave me the confidence to knock on doors and to get 'yes' for an answer! Working in Germany allowed me to fully appreciate the German work ethic, attention to detail, and work-life balance. I still have a lot of business links to Germany so it also opened doors for me.

"The two contrasting work ethics of the US and Germany influenced me to adopt elements of both which I have applied to being a founder entrepreneur in Ireland."

Stroh's brother Aaron O'Donoghue, a graduate of University College Dublin with a keen interest in cycling, endurance sports and nutrition, is also a co-founder. "He was an accidental recruit to the business as at the time of the company's inception he was recovering from a major injury. Every time I visited him, I was asking for his help with something or other and slowly he became part of the fabric of the fledgling company that we now run together.

"Dr Coy is of course a real person, one Dr Johannes Coy, who worked for 13 years at the German Cancer Institute in Heidelberg and has written a book called: 'The Anti-Cancer Diet' He has founded a number of companies and became a shareholder of Dr. Coy's last year."

## **Unrivalled start-up supports**

Stroh says that the supports to set up your own business in Ireland in sectors such as digital, tech and food are unrivalled compared to a lot of European countries.

"Initially I benefited from attending the Hothouse New Frontiers Workshops and Dublin Food Chain events which are brilliant for food start-ups. The SuperValu Food Academy programme was also a great launchpad into retail and it helped Dr. Coy's get our products nationwide into over 200

SuperValus.

“I was delighted to achieve the Enterprise Ireland Competitive Start Fund (CSF) specifically for female founders. I also participated in the Going for Growth programme sponsored by KPMG and EI.

“These programmes are unique in providing female founders business supports, financial assistance, mentors and workshops and most importantly, the invaluable networking opportunities with other female founders.

“I feel that the real challenge begins when your product is listed; competing for shelf space with larger brands, tight margins in the food industry and finding suitable distribution solutions.

“Dr. Coy’s also has benefitted from supports from larger companies – we participated on the Coca Cola Thrive Programme for food start-ups. The highlight of the programme was when Coca Cola hosted the participants for a series of high-level business workshops at their headquarters in Atlanta where we were treated to market insight presentations from senior executives.”

Stroh is currently engaged in an Endeavour Programme where, with a group of female-led Italian companies, she is being mentored by Ed Capaldi.

Dr. Coy’s completed half of its current required funding round with Enterprise Ireland and private investors late in 2019. “We are currently looking to secure a further €300,000 to further grow the business in new markets.”

## **Expect the unexpected**



Stroh said that challenges occur daily for start-ups, so dealing calmly with the minor challenges prepares the company for when bigger issues arise.

“One can never expect the unexpected but having risk mitigations in place is important. Be prepared for the positives and the negatives. When our warehouse was completely burnt down and we lost all our stock, having sufficient insurance in place was vital for our survival. Also having a plan b for things like key suppliers, production facilities, warehouse etc. is extremely helpful.

“Also plan for the big deal before it happens- ensure you have the production capacity etc. to meet the demand in this positive eventuality!”

Her advice to fellow founders is to test products in the local market before trying to go global.

“One expectation of a start-up is that early successes will enable you to scale quickly and export to other markets. It is often a long hard slog in the home market where you learn plenty of lessons from customer feedback and market testing before you can consider entering new markets.

“As your own boss you can pick and choose your own hours. In reality, however, most owners of start-ups could work 18-hour days as there always seems like an unending amount of work to get done and get the start-up off the ground and into a growth phase. It’s important to find a balance quite early on if you wish to stay energised for the long haul!

“I had never anticipated just how varied my working week could be. You are literally involved in looking after every aspect of the business from social media, to production, sourcing ingredients, accounts, deliveries, quality control, press, events, etc. There is never a dull moment!

“Most importantly do celebrate the small wins and enjoy the journey,” she recommends.

Technology has enabled Dr. Coy’s to remain nimble but agile. “For accounting we use [Xero](#) which simplified accounts a lot. I love using the app on the go as you can add in receipts and simply throw them away – I love decluttering! We use [Insightly](#) as our CRM tool. This enables us to track all customer interactions – also a handy one on the go which can be used on the phone.”

***Pictured at top: Dr. Coy’s co-founders Aaron O’Donoghue and Alison Stroh***

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