



Tim and Nancy Cushman, RIGHT, top tortillas with chicken and fresh tomato salsa (recipe, p. 72).



tim cushman on spicy food as a weight-loss trick

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Chefs Go From Flabby to Fit

Inspired by TV's *The Biggest Loser*, chef Tim Cushman and his staff are competing in a 10-week fitness and weight-loss contest. Cushman aims to win with healthy salsas.

food photographs by kana okada

AS SOON AS YOU INTRODUCE ANYTHING competitive at a restaurant, everyone wants in,” says Tim Cushman of Boston’s O Ya, an F&W Best New Chef 2008. Recently Tim, his wife, Nancy, and seven O Ya staffers decided to do battle to see who could shed the most body fat in 10 weeks. Everyone put \$100 in the pot; winner takes all. Tim and Nancy have been working out every day, cutting out snacks (“I used to munch on crisp tempura sage leaves like they were potato chips,” Nancy says) and eating low-fat meals. At O Ya, Tim focuses on Japanese flavors, but at home, he’s

been making all kinds of salsas to top grilled fish and lean meat. “Really spicy salsas give me a ‘chile buzz,’ almost an endorphin rush, so I tend to eat less,” he explains. Sometimes he layers the heat, blending roasted poblanos with pickled jalapeños for a tomato salsa with marjoram (recipe, p. 74). He might add spices, too, as in the cumin he mixes into a tomatillo salsa (recipe, p. 72). Not all of his salsas are fiery, however: He makes a chunky fresh-tomato one inspired by Italian Caprese salad, with smoked Gouda standing in for the mozzarella (recipe, p. 72). “I like intense flavor in every bite,” Tim says. —Kristin Donnelly