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Raw Food Diet

By Lisa Booth

The raw food diet dates back to prehistoric eras but has gained popularity in the past decade. Raw food products, books on the diet, and even restaurants are expanding to meet the demand of America. Unless you are following the raw food diet or have previously researched it, it may be unclear as to the reasoning behind the diet and what foods are included in the diet. This article will provide you with some insight on the history of the raw food diet, the reasoning behind the raw food diet, and the option to experience the raw food diet.

Raw foodism is a lifestyle promoting the consumption of uncooked, unprocessed, and often organic foods as a large percentage of the diet. Depending on the type of lifestyle and results desired, raw food diets may include a selection of raw fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, eggs, fish, meat, and unpasteurized dairy products (such as raw milk, cheese, and yogurt). A raw foodist is a person who consumes primarily raw food, or all raw food, depending on how strict the diet is. Raw foodists typically believe that the greater the percentage of raw food in the diet, the greater the health benefits. Members of the raw food community claim that raw food encourages weight loss and prevents and/or heals many forms of sickness and many chronic diseases.

The history of the raw diet dates back to prehistoric eras, before humans began cooking with fire. Some believe that prehistoric humans were largely vegetarians, and thus that the human digestive system is configured for raw veganism, which can be defined as the raw diet without consumption of animal products. Others believe that prehistoric humans were chiefly hunters who ate raw nuts, fruits and vegetables. However, archaeological evidence suggests that cooking pre-dates the anatomically modern human form. Artturi Virtanen showed that enzymes in uncooked foods are released in the mouth when vegetables are chewed. It is believed that these enzymes interact with other substances, notably the enzymes produced by the body itself, to aid the digestion process.

Leslie Kenton's book, *The New Raw Energy*, in 1984 popularized food such as sprouts, seeds, and fresh vegetable juices, which have become staples in many different food cultures. The book brought together research into raw foodism and its support of health, citing examples such as the sprouted seed enriched diets of the long lived Himalayan Hunza people, as well as Max Gerson's claim of a raw, juice-based cancer cure. The book advocates a diet of 75% raw food in order to prevent degenerative diseases, slow the effects of aging, provide enhanced energy, and boost emotional balance. Today, the raw food lifestyle is practiced widely. Restaurants catering to the diet have opened in large cities, and numerous all-raw cookbooks have been published.



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Those who follow this way of eating:

- Think that raw foods contain enzymes which aid digestion, meaning that the body's own enzymes may work unimpeded in regulating the body's metabolic processes. They hold with the theory that heating food degrades or destroys these enzymes.
- Think that eating food without enzymes makes digestion more difficult, which could lead to toxicity in the body and cause excess consumption of food, obesity and chronic disease. This goes against the accepted medical definition of toxicity.
- Suggest that raw foods contain bacteria and other micro-organisms that affect the immune system and digestion by populating the digestive tract with beneficial flora.
- Think that raw foods have higher nutrient values than foods which have been cooked.
- Consider wild foods, particularly edible wild plants, to be the most nutritious raw foods.
- Argue that freezing food is acceptable, even though freezing decreases enzyme activity.

The raw food diet includes some benefits but requires a lifestyle change. It is up to you to determine your opinion on the raw food diet and the reasoning behind it. To gain a “taste” of the raw food diet, below are some recipes that someone on the raw food diet may enjoy.

Raw Food Recipes

Garden Herb Spread/Dip

Blend in Vita-Mix or blender:

2 cups sprouted sunflower seeds

1 cup plain unseasoned sauerkraut

1/2 large avocado

2 cloves garlic

1/4 tsp. tumeric

2 tsp. dried dill weed

2 tsp. dried basil

1 medium onion

kelp to taste

small pinch of cayenne (don't overpower dill and basil)

Use purified water, tomatillo juice or tomato juice to thin to approximately mayonnaise consistency.



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"Spaghetti" and Tomato Sauce

To make sauce, blend in blender or Vita-Mix:

6 medium tomatoes

3-4 Tbs. tomato powder or all-purpose seasoning

2 tsp. jicama powder (optional)

1 tsp. beet powder (optional)

Italian seasoning

Onion and/or garlic or kelp to taste

To make "spaghetti" grate gold zucchini or butternut squash lengthwise. pour sauce (ingredients above) over "spaghetti" and mix together. Minced, grated cauliflower can be added to give a taste and feel of grated cheese.

Wild Rice Salad

4 cups wild rice (presoaked for 48 hours)

2 cucumbers

2 red or yellow bell peppers

1 small jicama, shredded

2 tomatoes

4 celery stalks

6 scallions or 1 small onion

1 cup cilantro, parsley or basil

4 Tbs. kelp to taste

Chop all ingredients fine and put into large bowl. Then make dressing below.

Dressing:

1 large avocado

1/2 to 1 cup tomatillo juice or sauerkraut juice

pinch of cayenne

kelp to taste

cilantro, basil or parsley to taste

Lisa Booth is currently a Dietetic Intern at Patton State Hospital in Patton, California. Her areas of interest include working with eating disorder patients and outpatient counseling. After completion of the dietetic internship she plans to gain some experience working in a clinical setting along with furthering her education to help form a basis for her future specialties.