



RAW

WHAT IS A RAW FOOD DIET?

A raw food diet consists of uncooked, unprocessed and often organic foods that have not been heated above 115°. According to raw foodists, enzymes are the life force of a food, helping us digest and absorb nutrients. The theory follows, if we over consume cooked food our bodies are forced to work harder by producing more enzymes. Over time a lack of enzymes from food is thought to lead to digestive problems, nutrient deficiency, accelerated aging and weight gain. Most raw foodists are vegans who eat no animal products, but some do consume raw eggs and cheese made from raw or unpasteurized milk. Staple foods of the diet include: fresh fruits and vegetables; seaweed; sprouted seeds, whole grains; dried fruits, and nuts.

WHY CHOOSE A RAW FOOD DIET?

The raw food diet, plentiful with fruits and vegetables, is typically low in sodium, sugar and saturated fat and high in potassium, magnesium, folate, fiber, vitamin A and other health promoting antioxidants. Raw vegetables are believed to help reduce the risk of cancers of the stomach, esophagus, and mouth. Raw foodists avoid consuming foods that have been fried or barbecued at a high heat because they may contain toxic compounds as a result of the cooking process. Finally, over-cooking can cause food to lose a significant amount of the vitamins and nutrients that are found in the raw form of the food. Eating raw vegetables means avoiding the risk of overcooking.

Reported benefits of the raw food diet:

- Increased energy
- Improved health and appearance of skin
- Improved memory
- Improved immune system functioning
- Improved fertility
- Improved digestion
- Weight loss
- Decreased risk for developing heart and cardiovascular disease
- Enhanced sleep
- Increased mental clarity

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WHY NOT CHOOSE A RAW FOOD DIET?

Proponents of a raw food diet claim that cooking destroys enzymes found in plants. However once plant enzymes are ingested they do not function as enhancements or replacements for human digestive enzymes. These molecules exist to serve the plant's purpose, not ours. In the digestive tract, plant enzymes are broken down along with the rest of our food, where they are absorbed and utilized as nutrients.

Even though following a diet focused on fruits and vegetables can enhance our health on many levels, these foods do not necessarily have to be raw for us to reap the benefits. In fact, several foods become more healthful after cooking because their fibrous portion is broken down. Some of these foods include: tomatoes; eggs; beans and lentils; bitter greens, and starchy foods such as potatoes, yams, squashes and grains. Even more important than the nutrients that cooking can "add" to food are the things it can take away, namely pathogenic bacteria. Cooking is the best and final defense against Salmonella, *E. coli*, and other microscopic organisms that can hitch a ride on our foods.

The raw food diet is not for everyone. Children, pregnant and nursing mothers, anemics and people at risk for osteoporosis should be cautious if considering a raw food diet. There is a potential risk for nutritional deficiencies such as vitamin B12, iron, zinc, calcium and omega-3 fatty acids.

Reported drawbacks of the raw food diet:

- Requires a lot of organization and preparation
- Digestive problems
- Expensive
- Difficulty eating out
- Potential risk for nutritional deficiencies
- Possible decrease in bone density
- Food cravings
- Stalled weight loss due to low metabolism
- Amenorrhea
- Loss of libido
- Hair loss and nail problems
- Dental erosion
- Potential risk of food contamination



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PREPARATIONS FOR A RAW FOOD DIET

Raw foodists do not cook using a traditional stove or oven, but instead use blenders, food processors, juicers and dehydrators to lend the taste and texture of cooked food. Many raw foods are simple to prepare, such as fruits, salads, nuts and dairy. However, other foods can require considerable advanced planning to prepare for eating. (The only heating that is acceptable is with a dehydrator that blows hot air through the food, never rising above 115°.)

Equipment Used:

Blender; thermometer; dehydrator; juicer; mini-blender; food processor; spiral slicer, and large containers or trays to soak and sprout seeds, grains and beans.

Soaking and Sprouting:

Raw beans, legumes, nuts and seeds contain enzyme inhibitors that are normally destroyed with cooking. The nutrients can be released by soaking them (germination) or sprouting them. Although the recommended time can vary from hours to up to one day, soaking overnight is sufficient and convenient.

Sprouting:

After germination, seeds, beans and legumes can be sprouted. Food that has been sprouted is easier to digest, higher in nutrients, rich in cancer-fighting substances and less likely to cause allergic reactions. See our *SPROUTS consumer guide for more information on sprouting.*

Blending:

Foods can be blended or chopped using a food processor or blender to make recipes for smoothies, pesto, soups and hummus.

Fermenting:

A controlled process of food decomposition where foods begin to naturally break down, creating new nutrients and beneficial digestive bacteria. See our *PROBIOTICS & FERMENTED FOODS consumer guide for more information.*

Dehydrating:

Foods can be heated, never above 115°, using a piece of equipment called a dehydrator to simulate sun-drying. Dehydrators can be used to make raisins, sundried tomatoes, kale chips, crackers, breads, croutons and fruit leathers.

Pickling:

Originally developed as a means of food preservation, pickling offers several additional advantages: reduced food storage costs; flavor and culinary enhancement, and increased health benefits such as vitamins, amino acids and healthy bacteria.

Juicing:

A great way to incorporate a wider variety of produce into your diet, juicing extracts the juice from whole fruits and vegetables giving your body a boost of vitamins and other necessary nutrients.

TIPS FOR TRYING A RAW FOOD DIET

- Ease into the diet. Don't be focused on being 100% raw but instead find the balance that works best with your lifestyle and consider it an evolving process.
- Choose a raw food plan you can stick with. Find recipes and make meal plans, especially as you begin.
- It is normal to experience a detoxification reaction when starting a raw food diet, especially if your previous diet was rich in meat, sugar and caffeine. Mild headaches, nausea and cravings can occur but usually only last a few days.
- If you don't want to go completely raw but still want the nutritive benefits, you can consume the same types of foods that the raw food diet focuses on: vegetables, nuts, seeds, etc. but prepare them differently. Have a veggie stir-fry, soups, stews, steamed vegetables or fresh fruit and juice instead.
- It is true that many people are enzyme deficient. Consider taking an enzyme supplement which is designed to survive the acidic environment in the stomach and release digestive benefits once it reaches the small intestines where most nutrients are absorbed.
- In addition, the minerals zinc and chromium support digestive function, while cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, and other herbs strengthen the digestive system, alleviate occasional digestive discomfort, and promote healthy liver function.

Sources:

Whole Foods Companion
by Dianne Onstead
Healing with Whole Foods
by Paul Pitchford
Medical News Today; WebMD;
Huffington Post (online)

Check out the Co-op's Raw Foods section on Aisle 1 for:

- sprouted trail mixes
- seeds
- grains
- nuts
- berries
- cookies
- granolas
- granola bars
- truffles
- chocolate bars
- cocoa powder
- cocoa butter