

All You Wanted To Know About The Raw Food Diet

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Raw food diets can be a great way to not only lose weight but also lead a much healthier, natural lifestyle in general. Most raw food diets are plant-based, with at least 75% of the diet composed of raw food.

Food examples include living and raw fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, rolled or flaked grains, and seaweeds. Some adherents may also eat cooked grains and legumes, fresh fish and poultry.

For the strict raw food diet, however, nothing should be heated over 116 degrees Fahrenheit. Some raw food dieters can be classified as vegans as well. The following report is meant to give an introduction to raw food diets and provide some sample recipes that one can try.

Part One: A Defining Moment

Before jumping into the nuts and bolts of a raw food diet, it would be expedient to define some key terms.

Raw: a material that is in its natural, unprocessed form, e.g. a food that has not been cooked

Vegan: a person who ascribes to a philosophy and lifestyle that seeks to exclude the use of animals for food

Enzymes: biomolecules that catalyze, i.e. increase the rates of, chemical reactions

Legumes: the seedpod of a leguminous plant (such as peas or beans or lentils)

Unpasteurized: refers to a liquid that has not gone through the process of heating for the purpose of destroying bacteria, protozoa, molds, and yeast.

Organic: in reference to foods that are grown without the use of conventional pesticides, artificial fertilizers, human waste, or sewage sludge, and that were processed without ionizing radiation or food additives.

To Raw or Not To Raw: Simple Pros and Cons

Pros:

- raw food diets have proven to improve digestion as well as other general digestive disorders
- research supports that a diet of at least 75% raw foods can help prevent illness and cancer
- a diet rich in traditional nutrient dense foods has been linked to greater overall dental health
- those who select a raw food diet often report losing weight and maintaining the weight loss by continuing the diet
- some research supports that a raw food diet increases the intake of antioxidants, thus slowing down premature aging
- skin complexion is often enhanced by the raw food diet
- those who chose a raw food diet often report an increase in energy and a general feeling of "well-being"
- the heating of many foods can reduce both the vitamin and mineral content

Cons:

- can be time consuming in the preparation of food and the need for shopping every couple of days
- those who chose a raw food diet often get stymied by the seeming lack of food variety
- some nutrients and vitamins are actually made more absorbable by the heating process
- there is a calculated risk in eating unpasteurized dairy products

The Nuts and Bolts

The following list is to give a clearer picture of the foods one can eat on a raw food diet: Raw and frozen fruits and vegetables, dried fruits and seaweeds, fresh juices, cold pressed oils, herbs, sprouts, sprouted legumes, steak carpaccio tartar, ceviche, sashimi, fish tartar, raw eggs unpasteurized milk, yogurt and cheese. There are some variations on the raw food diet which might exclude certain foods listed here.

Research has also shown that soaking seeds, legumes, grains, and nuts actually deactivates certain enzyme inhibitors. This creates more digestible enzymes. Another thing to note about seeds, beans, legumes, and grains is that: allowing them to sprout also increases their nutrients and digestible enzymes.

If possible, growing one's own fruits and vegetables can be a great asset. This can cut down on trips to the market. It also allows one to know for certain the complete history of the foods eaten. If food is purchased, organic foods are highly recommended. They have been found to be much more beneficial than the alternative.

If one does not have the opportunity to grow their own food, farmers' markets can be an alternative to supermarkets. Farmers' Markets, however, are very hit and miss. Some growers use chemicals, some do not. It is best to ask, but buying locally can be very beneficial.

A raw food diet is not hard to follow. Neither is it hard to try. The best way to venture into the raw food world is to systematically add more and more raw foods into one's daily diet. This can be over a matter of weeks or a couple months. What scares most people is that they do not want to spend all their time in the kitchen preparing food and they are afraid of missing out on protein.

First of all, many raw food recipes are much simpler than their counter parts. Also, as one gets in a routine, the preparing of fresh foods becomes a part of their lifestyle. It becomes a joy, not a burden. They also tend to get quicker and quicker at it. In the second place, there are plenty of proteins to be had in the raw food world. Some common providers would be nuts, seeds, seaweeds, some fruits, sprouts and leafy veggies. Our bodies are made to run on natural, raw foods. This is a service to them!

A quick note about weight loss: weight loss is very common during a raw food diet. Traditional staples of the Western diet, such as fast food and high processed sugars and carbohydrates, are excluded. The diet also encourages high water and fiber intake, providing that "full" feeling. It is rare for one to overeat on a raw food diet for this reason.

Tools of the Trade

The tools needed for a raw food diet are few and simple. One will actually use less kitchen equipment on the raw food diet than eating normally, unless the fast-food diet is the alternative. A food processor is a must. Nothing fancy, but this will serve as engine that propels food preparation. Also highly recommended are blenders and juices. This allows for the liquid intake of the fresh fruits and vegetables.

It is recommended that any freshly made juice be drunk within thirty minutes of the juicing. This is to ensure maximum nutrient and juice quality. Another item that could be found very helpful is a food dehydrator. This way one can save those fresh fruits and veggies from the garden. Other suggestions are a good set of sharp knives and a water distiller, to take out all the chemicals that are put in it before it reaches the spout.

Part Two: Raw Food Diet Meal Plans

The following recipes and meal plans are to give one an idea of how they can expect to prepare and what they can expect to eat on a raw food diet.

1. Sea Veggie Pate/Salad

Ingredients:

2 cups almonds, walnuts or sunflower seeds, soaked overnight and then rinsed
1/4 cup pure water
1-3 T. dulse flakes
1/2-1 bunch Parsley
A few pinches of sea salt and cayenne
1/2 cup green onions, chopped
1 cup each, celery and carrots, shredded
3 T. lemon juice
1 tsp. garlic and 2 T. red onion, minced
Shredded cabbage or mixed greens or cabbage/lettuce leaves

Put the nuts and seeds in a food processor. Add the pure water and the dulse. Process until ingredients are coarsely chopped. Next add in the parsley, sea salt and cayenne. Process again. Mix in the remaining ingredients with the processed mixture. Serve over shredded cabbage, mixed greens or in cabbage or lettuce leaves.

Note: for the pate mixture, place all the ingredients in the processor and mix until a smooth texture is achieved. Add water to the mixture as needed until smooth and thick.

2. Nut/Seed Milk

1 cup almonds, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds or cashews, soaked overnight then rinsed

1 quart of pure water, at room temperature

Dash of Celtic sea salt

1/8 cup raisins or 2 dates, pitted and soaked in water

(add cinnamon, ginger or other warming spices as desired or a few raw cacao beans)

Place the rinsed nuts or seeds in a blender or food processor. Add in the remaining ingredients. Blend until creamy and smooth. Strain if so desired. Can be enjoyed in smoothies with fruit, ground flax, sprouted quinoa as well as by itself.

3. Raw Marinara Sauce

10 raw sundried tomatoes and 2 pitted dates, soaked in warm water overnight

1 fresh tomato, chopped

1/2 a stalk of celery, chopped

1/2 a carrot, chopped

2 cloves garlic

1-2 T. raw olive oil

1/2 an onion, chopped

A few pinches sea salt, cayenne and pepper

4 fresh zucchini

Place all of the sauce ingredients in a food processor or blender. Blend until the desired consistency is reached (somewhat of a personal preference). Water can be added one tsp at a time to arrive at a smooth consistency.

Take the zucchini and slice them with either a potato peeler or "spiralize" them with a spiral slicer to make the pasta. Pour the marinara sauce over the zucchini. Allow to marinate for a least a few hours, preferably overnight. Can be garnished with drizzles of raw pesto (see recipe below).

4. Raw Pesto

1 bunch basil leaves

2 cloves garlic

4 T. raw olive oil

1 tsp. lemon juice

3 T. pine nuts

2 T. cashews, soaked in water overnight and drained

A few pinches salt and pepper

Place all ingredients in a blender or food processor. Blend until desired consistency is achieved, adding water one tsp at a time as needed.

5. Raw Banana Ice Cream

4-6 medium- bananas, sliced and frozen
4-6 dates, pitted and chopped or 2 T. raw agave
1/2 a vanilla bean, scraped

Place all the ingredients in a food processor or blender and puree. Pure water, fresh juice or coconut water can be added to achieve desired consistency.

Variation: To make it a chocolate treat, add the following:

1/3 cup raw carob (or several ground raw cacao beans)
4-6 dates, pitted and chopped or 2 T. raw agave and puree very well.

Place mixture in the freezer for 20 to 30 minutes. Stir well and serve. If mixture is hardened, place in back in the food processor to puree.

Variation: Add 1/4 cup ground flaxseed to add protein, good fats and fiber. Add nut/seed milk and blend for a smoothie. If a complete meal is desired, add raw hemp protein powder.

6. Mineral-Rich Salad

5 leaves kale
5 leaves Swiss chard (rainbow is recommended)
Chiffonade with stems
2 T. olive oil
2 T. flaxseed oil
1 lemon
1 lime

Steam and slice the kale and Swiss chard. Thinly slice the Chiffonade. Juice the lemon and the lime. Combine results plus the olive oil and flaxseed oil. Marinate the mixture for at least six hours, preferable overnight.

A few pinches each of sea salt, powdered coriander and cayenne
2 T. hemp
2 T. sesame seeds
2 T. Raw Tahini
1 thinly sliced red pepper, seeded
10 baby pear tomatoes or cherry tomatoes, cut into halves

After the mixture as marinated, combine it with the above ingredients and serve. Serving suggestions include stuffed into Savoy or Napa cabbage or romaine leaves with sliced avocado and the Sea Veggie Pate.

7. Gaspacho

2 tomatoes, chopped
A drizzle of olive oil
1 lime, juiced
1/3 a bunch cilantro
1 green onion, sliced
1 clove peeled garlic
1 cucumber, chopped
1/3 a jalapeno, sliced
A few pinches salt, pepper, cumin, coriander

Place all the ingredients into a blender or food processor. Process until desired consistency is reached, added water one tsp at a time if needed. Serve in avocado halves. Sprouted quinoa can be added for a fuller meal.

As one can see, the prepared of meals will not be on obstacle. They are actually quite simple. They do require some special ingredients that may or may not be found at the corner market. That being said, they can be found in most health food stores. One can also see the need to have a food processor or blender. It is a must!

Another thing to note is that creativity is the key! These few recipes are only the tip of the ice berg. There are endless combinations of foods that will keep anyone's palate in anticipation for a life time. The added pros for the body and its cancer and illness fighting properties make a raw food diet a very healthy alternative to the normal Western diet.

In conclusion, a raw food diet is at least worth a try. It can change a life and even make it much longer. Both the length and quality of life can be enhanced by adopting a raw food lifestyle. There is no need to worry about going it alone either. There are plenty of online forums and blogs that can help one along in their raw food journey. It can be the best thing one can ever do for their body.

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