

RAW FOOD DIET

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hen I first heard of the raw vegan diet 10 years ago, I believed anyone who'd choose to subsist on nothing to eat but raw vegetables, fruit, nuts, and seeds must be living in a tree with their head so far up in a cloud that they ignore all available valid nutritional data. I, like most Americans, was raised steeped in the gospel of the food pyramid. I could recite verses readily, such as the recommended daily allowance for protein, and how many servings of dairy a day one "needs" to thrive.

Not completely unaware of the health movement, I was eating a primarily organic diet, had given up red meat years ago, and swore by herbal medicine, instead of conventional, for myself and my family; but, in the grand scheme of things, the raw diet seemed to me on the fringe of extreme. Amazingly, as conscious as I was, I didn't realize the amount of inaccurate data I'd unquestioningly based my belief system about food upon. Although I went into my first talk on raw foods, given by Michael Lloyd-Billington of Fort Collins, CO, fully armed with a full house of nay-says and my trump question, "Where do you get your protein?", I was unprepared to meet with the reality of my own ignorance about food, and that the food pyramid I'd literally been raised on was upside down.

Michael suffered crippling rheumatoid arthritis at age nineteen, which he healed completely with a raw vegan diet. His search for his cure lead him to study nutrition extensively. During his talk he presented food charts from around the world and a complete breakdown of the nutritional contents of raw foods, including human breastmilk. Before I had a chance to lay any of my cards on the table, he broke down the protein question, which I have subsequently come to term "the protein myth," milligram by milligram, right before my very eyes.

Without going into extensive detail on this ubiquitous question about protein in the raw diet, I'll sum it up as this: The US recommended daily allowance (RDA) for protein is the highest in the world.

Other countries which have much lower rates of chronic disease have RDA's of protein far lower that the US. Combine this with the fact that cooking destroys half of the protein in food and renders a high percentage of what's left indigestible, the reality of the amount of protein the human body needs to thrive is roughly 30% or less of what the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recommends, or about 16% of total nutritional intake. This, incidentally, is the same amount of protein found in human breastmilk, which none would deny is the human being's perfect food for the most profound growth stage of their life. In conclusion, the amount of protein a fully-grown human body needs is far less than 16% of their intake, which can be found readily in a diet of raw plant foods.

As I watched my ace of spades float away on the power of Michael's logic, I found myself less and less skeptical by the minute; in fact, I was actually beginning to believe that this guy was on to something. Was I perhaps becoming a convert? Was the raw vegan diet perhaps not such a crazy notion, and just maybe was it a diet that just plain makes sense?

The fact of Michaels "miracle cure" was provocative enough on its own. He was and is today a glowing example of radiant health. When one enters into research of the raw vegan diet one finds countless stories like Michael's, with

miracle cures of every description. I've come to find out, during my own decade-long delve into raw food, that these stories are commonplace in the world of the raw diet.

As far back as the early 1970's, Dr. Ann Wigmore, considered the mother of the raw diet and lifestyle, healed her colon cancer with a diet of raw "living foods." She went on to create healing centers across the country, several of which are still in existence today, and continue to teach her dietary method of restoring bodily health with raw foods.

The raw diet, however, has been around since time immemorial. It is still widely adopted by all but a handful of species on the planet, including all animal life with the exception of human beings and some domesticated animals. It was a revelation to me to realize that all animals are naturally raw foodists! It made me reconsider the notion that human beings need to cook their food.

But what is it that distinguishes the raw diet from every other. And, what is it about the raw diet that is so healing? What's in the raw diet that other diets lack? Well for one thing, there is no argument that raw fruits and vegetables, are the most whole of whole foods. It is also a fact that many valuable nutrients in food are diminished or destroyed by cooking. The most important nutrients that raw foods have, that cooked foods decidedly do not, are enzymes.

Enzymes are the supreme organic transformers of nature, responsible for every chemical synthesis. That means that enzymes are needed for every cellular change in your body. If the enzymes are not present and intact in the food you eat, your body must create them at a ratio of 10/1 from its own metabolic enzymes in order to digest and assimilate food into your body. This draw on metabolic enzymes causes depletion over time and a hindrance to your metabolic activity and immune system. This enzyme depletion is experienced as mental and physical fatigue, sickness, and disease.

Further, the enzymes the body creates to digest cooked foods are imperfectly cut out for their tasks. They are capable of only partially utilizing the nutrient package delivered by the food that is eaten, resulting in indigestion of food particles, fermentation, allergies, etc. In a nutshell, food enzymes found in raw foods are the instruction manual for your body's digestion and assimilation of food. If you're eating cooked food, it's like running your metabolism without letting your body read the instructions.

In contrast, the enzymes present in raw foods are perfectly and specifically designed to digest those foods.

This is the beauty and perfection of nature; each food contains the perfect balance of materials for its optimal delivery. For instance, if a food is high in fat, like an avocado, it has high levels of the enzyme lipase, the enzyme that breaks down fats into fatty acids. Cross reference the same scenario for starches, proteins, sugars, vitamins, minerals, etc., and you get the picture. So the result of eating enzyme active raw food is more efficient metabolism and . . . more energy for you!

Abundant energy is one side effect of a raw diet. People experience mental clarity, immunity to colds and flus, enhanced well being, more restful sleep, needing less sleep, and spiritual awakening when they adopt a raw diet. With results like these it's no wonder I've seen the raw diet go mainstream.

Today the raw food diet is becoming more and more popular. As more people experience the "raw buzz" many variations of the raw diet have emerged. From simple plant foods, a raw gourmet revolution has taken off. Far from Dr. Ann Wigmore's healing green soups, salads, and nut pates, famed chefs like Charlie Trotter have lifted raw food

to official five-star-cuisine status. Restaurants have popped up all over the US with nothing but raw dishes on their menus.

This gourmet movement has done a lot to dispel the myth that the raw diet is boring. If you can imagine it, any food in the cooked realm has its counterpart in the world of raw. I call raw the “no deprivation diet.” Raw vegans eat burgers, pastas, crackers, dips, breads, hummus, soups, pies, cakes, and ice cream. There are raw tomato terrines and pine nut beurre blancs. There is angel hair, linguini, and fettuccini (though it is all made from zucchini!). There is masala, Alfredo, mole, marinara, and hoisin. Raw food is not bound by borders except the ones in your imagination. Many will attest that the raw versions are far superior not only in health benefits but also in color, flavor, and texture. Perhaps the best of the raw food sensual pleasures is that people claim they feel so much better after eating a raw meal than they do after eating a cooked meal. For one thing, there is no energy lag. This is due to the fact that raw foods simply give to the body without taking away. In a word, they enhance you.

Raw gourmet means that no raw-lover need do without their favorite flavors and food fixes. The downside to it is that often the recipes are complicated, full of improper food combinations,

rich with acidic nuts and oils, and, in effect, straying away from what’s truly healing about raw foods. When looking at the raw lifestyle from a perspective of seeking the health benefits, it helps to look at the people who have really healed with raw foods and follow their advice. As raw guru David Wolfe says, “Only take advice from people who are getting the results YOU want.” The raw food world is full of such examples.

Raw food speakers and authors who have cured everything from arthritis to obesity to colitis to cancer abound, and their methods are pretty similar. Every single healing center in the world which teaches a raw diet for health also follows the same principles. Simple foods, greens, sprouts, fresh juices, blended foods, fermented foods, low sugar fruits, and soaked, sprouted, and fermented nuts adorn the menus of the institutes of Hippocrates (FL), Ann Wigmore (PR), Tree of Life (AZ), and Omega (CA). These are all centers with a rich history of healing testimonials. It is important to have a foundational understanding of the nuances of a truly healing raw diet, which these institutes and many individuals offer, when adopting the raw lifestyle. With this proper perspective, a balanced

raw diet is indeed attainable and diet itself becomes a thing of the past. With raw food, body, mind, and soul are transformed from a DIE-T into an enjoyable LIVE-IT!

Since listening to Michael Lloyd-Billington’s life-changing talk, my interest has led me to experience many sides of the raw diet equation. Some of my first attempts were unsuccessful, as I wasn’t sure what to eat, how much to eat, and how to deal with the detoxifying effects of cleansing my body. Nevertheless, somehow there was an inkling that stayed with me through the years that there was something to this raw food thing. It percolated in my psyche during my studies with the Boulder School of Natural Medicine. Then in January of 2004 I signed up for a graduate program at the Ann Wigmore Institute in Puerto Rico. Traveling there with my school, I was unaware that during this trip I would learn all the knowledge and skills I had lacked when I experimented with the raw diet in the past. Emerging from their Living Foods Teacher Training Program, my inkling had burst into full knowing that the living foods raw vegan diet was the way I wanted to eat. The energy I experienced during my time at the Institute was nothing short of a state of grace. The diet, coupled with practicing daily yoga, nature immersion, group support, and dance created in my life complete at-one-ment with true healthy being. Recreating this state of being for myself and others became what I chose to devote the rest of my life in service to.

Sitting with this epiphany, it still took me three years to transition, fully, away from the cooked foods I'd grown up loving. It took me this amount of time also to acquire all the tools I needed for my raw foods kitchen, but I don't look at it as a detriment that it took so long.

I was not facing an acute chronic illness, so I had the time to adjust to the raw diet slowly. As my body felt the effects of enzyme-rich digestible food, I watched my old eating habits fall away as if on their own accord, effortlessly. I never felt deprived; I never felt anything except the desire to follow my body to the raw food that made me feel better and better. This is the path I now offer to those I teach. Diet/Live-it should be fun! Food ought to be healthful, and it should be enjoyed. I encourage anyone interested in the raw food diet to learn from the experts who are living "the life you want," who have healed on raw food and who have maintained this health for many years. But the most important thing is to listen to the expert within and follow your body to understand your own unique and wonderful living way, "in the raw" or otherwise. ♣