


THE “RAWSOME” WAY TO BETTER HEALTH



If you can't stand the heat, you *don't* have
to get out of the kitchen. Go raw and get healthy.

By Susan Smith Jones, Ph.D.

Raw food diets have become trendy in recent years, with hip raw cafes opening up in stylish neighborhoods all across the country (and the rest of the world too). Ironically, the raw diet is not new—it's actually one of the most ancient ways of eating. If you just think of early man foraging for raw fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds, you can easily understand how our bodies originally evolved with a diet that was totally unprocessed and uncooked.

Today, raw diets are often of the vegan variety, although not exclusively. Some raw dieters also eat unpasteurized dairy foods and even raw eggs, meat, and fish. A food is generally considered raw as long as it's relatively unprocessed and heated to no higher than about 115 degrees (although some people claim 118 degrees is the limit).

I've been a proponent of this way of eating ever since I was a teenager, when my grandmother introduced me to the value of eating raw foods. She taught me that a diet rich in raw fruits and vegetables promoted radiant health, and she also encouraged me to avoid meat and animal products, which I have done for decades.

Benefits vs. Risks

The basic idea behind eating a raw foods diet is that cooking destroys natural enzymes (complex proteins) as well as many of the nutrients found in foods, particularly vitamins B and C. Cooked spinach, for example, has only one-third the vitamin C raw spinach has. This isn't always the case (uncooked tomatoes actually have lower lycopene content than cooked tomatoes, and cooking carrots lowers polyphenols—one type of antioxidant—while it simultaneously increases carotenoids—another kind of antioxidant). Overall, though, more is lost than gained through cooking.

Enzymes are important because they're catalysts for innumerable metabolic processes, including producing energy, absorbing oxygen, and reducing inflammation. Enzymes come in three categories: digestive enzymes (in our saliva, stomach, and small intestine), metabolic enzymes (within our cells), and food-based enzymes, which we must consume through our diets. Insufficient dietary or digestive enzymes may lead to reduced availability of metabolic enzymes, setting the stage for chronic inflammation, compromised immunity, and gastrointestinal problems.

A diet high in raw fruits and vegetables is not only higher in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, but it's also lower in calories, has little to no fat, and contains

no added sugars. Raw foods are also loaded with phytochemicals—chemical compounds naturally found in plants—and fiber, which mops up toxins and waste products in the digestive tract for healthy elimination. Numerous studies have shown that consuming abundant fruits and vegetables is associated with lower risks of cancer, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.

Unfortunately, scientific literature on the health benefits of a strictly raw, plant-based diet is rather limited. Few studies have examined the long-term effects of the diet, and the ones published primarily come from Europe. Yet the data we do have is fairly positive and certainly worth noting.

A 1995 study done in Finland showed people following a raw vegan diet consumed significantly higher amounts of dietary antioxidants than a comparison group following a cooked, omnivorous diet. The raw vegans took in more than 100 percent of the United States' recommended daily allowance of vitamin C, vitamin A, and vitamin E. Compared with omnivores, the raw vegans had significantly higher blood concentrations of beta-carotene, vitamin C, and vitamin E. This more favorable antioxidant profile is significant, given that antioxidants protect cells from oxidative damage, provide immune support, and benefit the eyes, heart, prostate, and more.

In the U.S., adherents to a vegan diet typically get significantly higher levels of vitamins A, B6, C, and E, as well as fiber, folate, copper, and potassium—while they get much lower amounts of protein, total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, vitamin B12, phosphorus, sodium, and zinc. For this reason, it's especially important for vegans to take B12 supplements, and raw dieters should also make sure they eat enough protein throughout the day.



Because raw vegan diets tend to be lower in calories, it's not surprising they're associated with significant weight loss. In a 1999 study of more than 500 people who followed a raw food diet for nearly four years, researchers found the more raw foods the subject ate, the more their body weight decreased. While this is good news for many of us, already-thin women do need to be aware this can increase their risk of amenorrhea—the abnormal absence of menstrual periods. In one study, 30 percent of women under age 45 who were on a long-term raw vegan diet had partial to complete amenorrhea.

Still, more studies show a raw foods diet can lower diastolic blood pressure, improve fibromyalgia symptoms

lead to the formation of glycotoxins—which increase inflammation—in certain foods. This happens with proteins, fats, and foods high in fructose that are cooked, heated, or processed at temperatures higher than 250 degrees. Fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, raw nuts, and other unprocessed, unrefined foods have low levels of glycotoxins.

How to Go Raw

For those who are trying it for the first time, making a raw foods diet consistently appealing may be a challenge. It's easy enough to pop some raw carrots or apple slices in your mouth, but it's much trickier to prepare a well-

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One final caution: Raw vegan adherents are more at risk for dental erosion—from chewing so much raw produce!

Antiaging Effects

We know premature aging is related to inflammation in the body, which causes free radical damage to skin cells. Poor-quality foods such as sugars, processed carbohydrates, and processed and fatty meats can cause inflammation and damage the skin's collagen, which keeps the skin supple and wrinkle-resistant. It stands to reason, then, that a diet rich in raw fruits and vegetables—which fight inflammation thanks to their higher antioxidant levels—would go a long way toward helping retain radiant, youthful skin.

In addition, cooking methods such as broiling, frying, hot-oven roasting, grilling, and barbecuing can

rounded meal (not to mention to find raw options on restaurant menus). Sprouting seeds, germinating nuts, and dehydrating and fermenting vegetables—all popular in raw food diets—can be a time-intensive proposition.

My best suggestion for beating the raw food doldrums is using a juicer or blender to make smoothies containing fruits, greens, nut butters, herbs, and other ingredients like flax or chia seeds. This makes an easy, delicious, and portable meal.

If you're intrigued but you want to test a raw foods diet before jumping in feet first, consider starting with a raw food “detox,” a short-term period (anywhere from three days to three weeks) when you commit to eating primarily raw, plant-based foods. You might even think of this as a cleanse since many cleanse programs are based on eating raw foods.

The aim of detox diets is to take a break from the overload of fats, sugars, and toxins rampant in the standard omnivorous American diet. It gives your digestive system and filtering organs—the kidneys and liver—a much-needed break. After a few days or weeks on a raw vegan detox diet, you may be feeling good enough that you decide to make it more than just a temporary way of eating.

May your “rawsome” food adventures bring you robust health and vitality aplenty! 🌱

🥗 Energizing Enzymes

Raw food diets are bursting with enzymes, which are important for nearly every metabolic process in the body (and which can get destroyed during the cooking process).

🥗 Antioxidants Galore

A diet rich in raw fruits and veggies provides whopping amounts of antioxidants, which are important for protecting cells from free-radical damage, especially in the eyes, heart, prostate, and skin.

🥗 Glowing Wellness

Those following a raw vegan diet report a greater sense of overall wellness—physically, socially, and emotionally.

🥗 Slimming Down

Raw vegan diets are comparatively lower in calories and saturated fat than the standard American diet.

🥗 Kicking Chronic Disease

Chronic conditions including diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol improve with the addition of raw fruits and vegetables to the diet.

🥗 Pain-Free Joints

For those with joint-related conditions such as fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis, eating raw, plant-based foods decreases pain and can improve range of motion.

🥗 Happy Guts

A raw diet contributes to healthy gastrointestinal flora and may also decrease the risk of colon cancer.

🥗 Awesome Antiaging

Premature aging is the result of inflammation, and since raw vegan diets have powerful anti-inflammatory effects, they generally help you look and feel younger.

🥗 Dynamite Detox

The high fiber content of a raw diet sweeps out toxins from the gut, giving your elimination system a break from filtering out all the unhealthy sugars, fats, and other junk present in the standard American diet.

🥗 Creative Cuisine

If you check out raw vegan restaurants in your neighborhood, you'll be surprised at what chefs are up to these days. Get creative with a green smoothie loaded with your favorite veggies, nuts, fruits, and seeds.

🥗 Spiritual Benefits

When I eat a diet of 85 percent or more raw food daily, I see wonderful, rapid benefits not only in my body, but also in my mind and spirit. My meditations are more effortless, and I also feel deeper levels of peace as doubt, fear, anger, guilt, and ego seem to fall away.

11 Reasons TO GO Raw!

