

Nutrition
Zone

Join the movement

Go raw: the key for vibrant health. *By Elizabeth Montgomery*



Do you want to feel vibrantly healthy? Or slow down the visible signs of ageing? There are many popular diets and nutritional approaches to greater health and longevity. One in particular has been around for years, but is currently taking the world by storm. It's called: the raw food movement. The philosophy and science behind it states that eating unadulterated raw foods (the way nature intended) is the key for optimal health.

Why raw?

The benefits of eating food in its natural raw state are numerous. Raw foods contain vital life force properties and nutrients that far surpass their cooked food counterparts. This is because when food is cooked above 47.78C (118F) it destroys an array of key nutrients essential for health. There is widespread scientific evidence suggesting that a minimum of 30% of vitamins and minerals are lost during most cooking processes.

Eating foods in their raw state ensures that they are packed full of phytonutrients ('phyto' means plant) and age-defying antioxidants. Furthermore, they are full of enzymes which are vital for numerous metabolic functions including digestion, energy production, transporting nutrients into the cells and slowing down the ageing process. Since they give, rather than deplete the body of enzymes, there is more energy available for other physiological processes. It is no coincidence that those who eat a primarily raw plant-based diet are often the ones that look and feel several years younger than their biological age.

Another reason for including plenty of raw foods into the diet are for the alkalising and regenerative properties. Think of the body as an alkaline battery that runs on electrons (the source of energy the body requires) which is found abundantly in the vegetable kingdom. In health, the body is always striving to maintain a PH of 7.365 which makes it slightly alkaline. Problems begin when the body is given foods that are overly cooked or processed (animal products and sugary foods included) which leads on to an acidic internal state. This depletes the body of its alkaline reserves, or in other words, drains the battery of its energy. Ongoing internal acidity creates conditions that feed yeast, moulds, and fungus all of which contribute towards numerous health symptoms.

Benefits of raw food

1. Uncooked vegetables and fruits are high in water content (much more than when cooked) which helps to keep you hydrated.
2. They are rich in cellulose fibre which acts like a broom throughout the digestive tract and helps to prevent constipation.
3. In traditional Chinese medicine, most raw foods are *yin* and cooling in nature which is why they are ultra beneficial during the warm summer months.
4. Eating organic raw foods helps to connect to the earth and align with the seasonal cycles.
5. Raw vegetables (especially chlorophyll-rich green ones) help to open up the body's detoxification pathways and nourish healthy red blood cells.

Thousands of people across the world have embarked on a raw food detoxification and lifestyle protocol with outstanding results. Moreover, prominent natural health clinics such as The Tree of Life

and The Hippocrates Natural Health Institute have amassed decades of clinical research documenting the success of raw foods in the reversal of chronic health conditions. The main dietary protocol includes raw vegetables, sprouts, green vegetable juices and the increasingly popular wheatgrass juice.

While the current debate among health experts continues as to how much raw food is essential for health (some claim 40%, others 95%) on a daily basis, the fact remains that it's no longer considered to be just a passing dietary fad.



Tips for going raw

Transition is key. It's a good idea to slowly increase the amount of raw foods introduced into the diet to avoid detox symptoms, or signs of digestive difficulty such as bloating or wind.

Start the day with a green vegetable juice or smoothie. Juicing helps to 'pre-digest' vegetables and ensures that most of the nutrients are absorbed directly into the system. Smoothies are another easy option. Instead of adding traditional fruit and dairy (too sweet and acidifying) think of primarily adding in green vegetables with some avocado (great as a thickening ingredient), and if desired low sugar fruits like blueberries and coconut water. Think big colourful rainbow spectrum salads at lunchtime with a handful of raw pumpkin seeds, or sprouted legumes for additional protein and trace minerals.

Focus on adding in raw foods rather than taking away cooked food from the diet. This is a much more realistic approach ensuring that raw foods become a regular part of the diet. Try having a salad before a cooked meal, or swapping crisps for celery and humous. The trick is to be creative while still enjoying your food. An apple a day? So our grandmothers really did know a thing or two! ॐ

Elizabeth Montgomery is a London-based holistic nutritional therapist (holisticnutrition.co.uk)