

Raw Food Diet

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What is the Raw Food Diet?

The raw food diet is a diet based on unprocessed and uncooked plant foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, sprouts, seeds, nuts, grains, beans, nuts, dried fruit, and seaweed.

Heating food above 116 degrees F is believed to destroy enzymes in food that can assist in the digestion and absorption of food. Cooking is also thought to diminish the nutritional value and "life force" of food.

Typically, at least 75% of the diet must be living or raw.

What are the Benefits of the Raw Food Diet?

Proponents of the raw food diet believe it has numerous health benefits, including:

- Increased energy
- Improved skin appearance
- Better digestion
- Weight loss
- Reduced risk of heart disease

The raw food diet contains fewer [trans fats](#) and [saturated fat](#) than the typical Western diet. It is also low in sodium and high in potassium, magnesium, folate, fiber and health-promoting plant chemicals called phytochemicals.

These properties are associated with a reduced risk of diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. For example, a study published in the *Journal of Nutrition* found that consumption of a raw food diet lowered plasma total cholesterol and triglyceride concentrations.

What are the Guidelines of the Raw Food Diet?

1. What can I eat?

Unprocessed, preferably organic, whole foods such as:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Nuts
- Seeds
- Beans
- Grains
- Legumes
- Dried fruit

- Seaweed
- Unprocessed organic or natural foods
- Freshly juiced fruit and vegetables
- Purified water
- Young coconut milk

At least 75% of food consumed should not be heated over 116 degrees F.

2. What cooking techniques are used?

Specific cooking techniques make foods more digestible and add variety to the diet, including:

- Sprouting seeds, grains, and beans
- Juicing fruit and vegetables
- Soaking nuts and dried fruit
- Blending
- Dehydrating food

3. What equipment can I use?

- A dehydrator, a piece of equipment that blows air through food at a temperature of less than 116 degrees F.
- A good-quality juice extractor for juicing fruit and vegetables
- A blender, food processor, or chopper to save time
- Large glass containers to soak and sprout seeds, grains, and beans
- Mason jars for storing sprouts and other food

Side Effects

Some people experience a detoxification reaction when they start the raw food diet, especially if their previous diet was rich in meat, sugar, and caffeine. Mild headaches, nausea, and cravings can occur but usually last for several days.

Precautions

The raw food diet may not be appropriate for certain people, such as:

- Children
- Pregnant or nursing women
- People with anemia
- People at risk for osteoporosis - A Washington University study found that people following a raw food diet had lower bone mass. Bone turnover rates, however, were similar to the group that ate a standard American diet.

Considerable time, energy, and commitment is needed to be healthy on the raw food diet. Many of the foods are made from scratch. Some ingredients may be hard to find,

such as Rejuvelac (the fermented liquid drained from sprouted grains), sprouted flour, date sugar, young coconut milk, carob powder and Celtic sea salt.

People must be aware that certain nutritional deficiencies can occur on the raw food diet, including:

- Calcium
- Iron
- B12 – The *Journal of Nutrition* study found that a raw food diet increased levels of homocysteine due to vitamin B-12 deficiency.
- Protein
- Calories

Critics of the raw food diet say while it's true that some enzymes are inactivated when food is heated, it doesn't matter because the body uses its own enzymes for digestion. In addition, cooking makes certain phytochemicals easier to absorb, such as beta-carotene in carrots.

Another critique is that the human body has changed in response to eating cooked foods. Some of these changes are that jaws and teeth have become smaller, our stomachs have shrunk, and our small intestines have grown longer, lengthening the digestive surface area.

According to other alternative diet theories, such as macrobiotics, Ayurveda, and traditional Chinese medicine, a raw-only diet may not be appropriate for people living in colder climates or for people with certain constitutional types.

Sources:

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