

You Are What You Eat

By Woodland Publishing, Inc.

A raw food diet—basically raw fruits, vegetable and whole grains—is good for health. Proponents point out that some of the health benefits of a raw food diet include: weight loss, better digestion, increased energy, and reduced risk of disease. A raw food diet is generally low in sodium and high in health-promoting plant chemicals. It contains fewer trans fats and saturated fats than a typical Western diet.

A typical raw food diet consists of raw fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, grains and legumes. Organic food is preferred. The diet excludes meat, dairy and fish. Also, foods are heated to no more than 116° Fahrenheit. Raw food advocates claim that food enzymes are destroyed when cooked at a higher temperature. Food enzymes improve digestion and fight disease.

However, some physiologists suggest that good digestion depends on enzymes the body generates and not on food enzymes. Registered dietitian Roxanne Moore, a spokeswoman for the America Dietetic Association, points out that fiber and antioxidants—both of which are plentiful in fruits and vegetables—are retained more when a fruit or vegetable is raw. Moore adds that if raw vegetables are unappetizing, the method of cooking will determine how many nutrients are retained. Using short cooking times, or steaming rather than boiling, retains more nutrients. Fresh produce is always a better option than processed or canned items.

Some nutritionists worry that a raw-food diet may lead to nutritional deficiencies such as B12, iron, calcium and omega-3 fatty acids. Always meet with a healthcare provider, such as a dietitian, when beginning a raw food diet.

Buying organic fruits and vegetables is an important choice. A study in *The Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* showed that organically-grown tomatoes have almost twice the level of flavonoids, which may protect against cardiovascular disease and fight age-related diseases, than conventionally-grown tomatoes.

Many raw-food enthusiasts recommend that people begin the diet slowly. Start with a diet that is at least 50 percent raw and increase the percentage from there. Eat foods you like and then incorporate new foods. Several cookbooks and self-help books are available on the subject, as well as online support groups. Start connecting with people at natural food markets and become familiar with your local community. In addition, raw food restaurants are springing up everyday.

A plant-based diet is definitely a healthy choice. The variety of fresh produce available—from açai berries to zucchini—makes the change to a raw food diet easy and delicious.