



raw/living food



what is it?

'Raw' food is food that hasn't been heated to more than 40-45°C, and typically includes grains, pulses, seeds, fruit, spices, nuts, flowers, green leaves, roots, stems, seaweeds, herbs, fungus and yeasts (and although many people involved in the raw food movement are vegetarian or vegan, it can also include meat, seafood, eggs and dairy). Raw food doesn't have to be cold. 40°C is hot enough for a soup. By 'living' we mean very fresh, ideally straight from the garden, so that, like the living plant, it is still full of enzymes and water. This of course means that ideally, raw food diets will contain mainly local, seasonal, organic ingredients. Examples of raw meat - jamon serrano, chorizo and salami; raw fish – bacalao, sushi and sashimi; raw eggs – mayonnaise; and of course there's honey, which contains enzymes from bees as well as from nectar, increasing its health benefits.

Beyond a certain point in history, our ancestors would have eaten only raw food. At some point after the use of fire, they would have discovered that it changes the consistency and flavour of foods, and cooking was born. Throughout history there have always been people and places where food was predominantly raw, including monks, yogis, and Japan has always had its raw fish, fermented foods and pickles. The modern raw food movement started in the 20th century, took off in the 60s, and there has been a boom in the 21st century. In the US, it is a huge movement; in the UK & Europe it has just started, and is growing fast.

Victoria Boutenko is a pioneer of this recent boom. Her family in the 1990s were overweight and suffering from various health problems including diabetes, rheumatism and asthma. She



using a spiral slicer to cut vegetables into spirals, and to make vegetable pastas.

studied ancient human and primate diets, but found the quantities of green leaves unpalatable. So she made smoothies by mixing them with fruit to improve the taste. She persuaded her family to change to a 100% raw diet overnight, and the health problems disappeared. Her experiences, plus website and books have contributed greatly to the raw food cause (see resources).

what are the benefits?

First, an obvious environmental benefit - raw food means less energy consumed for cooking, with all the emissions associated with it.

Using fresh, local, seasonal, organic ingredients reduces the need for transport, freezing and pesticides (however, some raw foodies use a lot of exotic, imported ingredients that cancel out other environmental benefits).

Raw food is all about aiming for the maximum nutritional value from food (which is actually the purpose of food when you think about it), not just filling up. Raw / living food contains all the vitamins, antioxidants, minerals, proteins, phytochemicals, water, enzymes and fibre that our bodies need. Cooking can destroy up to 80% of vitamins and minerals, 60% of proteins and almost 100% of enzymes. They start to be destroyed at 45°C, and the higher the temperature and longer the cooking, the higher the percentage destroyed. So when people ask 'how do you get your protein with a raw food diet?', it doesn't make much sense. Our course tutor was a triathlete on a raw vegan diet, and, well, gorillas are raw vegans, and they're not exactly weaklings.



tasty and nutritious courgette pasta with marinara sauce – get the Italian experience with raw ingredients.



Cooked food has lost nutrients, so our bodies tell us to eat more, which can lead to obesity.

Enzymes are essential to help break down food to be absorbed by the body; the older people get, the more digestive problems they tend to have, and the more they need enzymes - but enzymes are almost entirely destroyed by cooking.

Cold pressed oils are raw; when you cook with them they become saturated and contribute to increased cholesterol levels.

Raw foods contain a lot of water. If you drink water, it passes through your body quickly; if it's in your food, it stays in the intestines longer, and your cells get a constant supply. Our bodies are 60-70% water, and we need to be hydrated all the time to stay healthy.

Raw food has more fibre, which helps food pass through the intestines and stops constipation.

what can I do?

You could decide to go for a 100% raw / living food diet, or just have the occasional meal. You could even have a cooked meal with a raw starter, side dish or dessert. The more you do, the more of the above benefits you get.

You can have soups, salads, pasta, lasagne, pizza, flat breads, wraps, curries, ice-creams, sorbets, nut and seed milks and much, much more. You can find recipes online, attend a course for inspiration and ideas, or buy a book or two. A good one to start with is *Be Your Own Doctor*, by Ann Wigmore, which outlines the benefits of wheatgrass, and raw foods in general. Here are some techniques.

dehydration: leave in the sun (like sun-dried tomatoes) or in a dehydrator; dehydrated foods should only comprise a small part of your diet, as they don't contain water.

maceration: chop vegetables, herbs etc, put them in a pre-prepared oil-based sauce and leave to soak overnight.

massage: rub and squeeze with your hands into an oil and salt mix (and maybe vinegar) – ideal for leaves like kale, which are difficult to eat raw.

blending: use a blender to make juices, smoothies, sauces or creams.

fermenting and pickling: lots of different ways – e.g. soy sauce, miso.

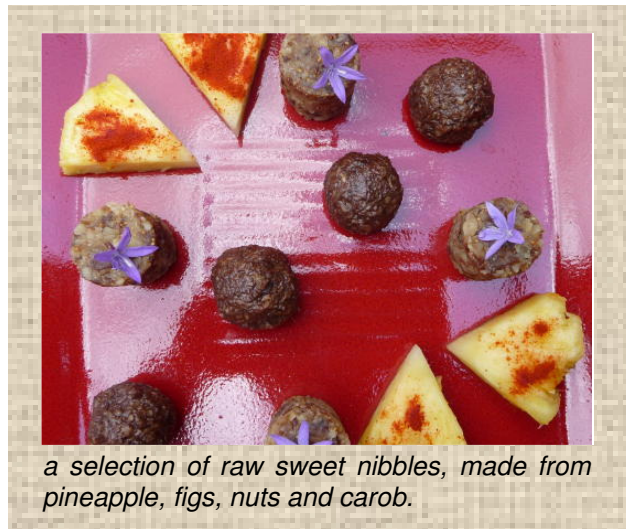
infused oils: put in a jar with oil and herbs, and leave on a windowsill to absorb the flavours.

sprouting and soaking: seeds (nuts, pulses and grains etc.) should be sprouted and/or soaked before eating as they contain enzyme inhibitors when dry. Soaking unlocks the inhibitors and allows the enzymes to work. Sprouting comes after soaking – seeds have a dormant period that can last a long time. When they are soaked they start to sprout and grow into a new plant, and that's when they become alive, and good to eat.

nothing at all: you can just eat lots of things raw without doing anything to them at all.

resources

- Victoria Boutenko, 2007, *12 Steps to Raw Food*
- Gabrielle Chavez, 2005, *Gourmet Raw Food*
- Jordan Maerin, 2004, *Raw Foods for Busy People*
- Steve Charter, 2004 *Eat More Raw*
- these books and more available from LILI, as well as raw food courses from 2010
- rawfoodrecipes.co.uk – tons of raw food recipes
- the Raw Food School - therawfoodschoo.com, 07986 458863, raw food information & courses
- The Fresh Network – fresh-network.com, 0845 833 7017, information, articles, shop and Get Fresh magazine – raw/vegetarian food
- Raw Family – rawfamily, the story of Victoria Boutenko and her family; info and books
- Funky Raw – funkyraw.com, supporting people eating a raw food diet
- see the raw food links page on LILI's website for more recipes and raw food delivery companies



a selection of raw sweet nibbles, made from pineapple, figs, nuts and carob.

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