



# 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. By 'living' we mean very fresh – ideally straight from the garden – so that, like the living plant, it's still full of enzymes and water. This of course means that ideally, raw / living food diets will contain mainly local, seasonal, organic ingredients.

Although many people involved in the raw food movement are vegetarian or vegan, meat, seafood, eggs and dairy can also be eaten raw. Examples of raw meat include jamon serrano, chorizo and salami; raw fish – bacalao, sushi and sashimi; raw eggs – mayonnaise; and then of course there's honey, which contains enzymes from the bees as well as from the nectar, increasing its health benefits.

Raw food doesn't have to be cold by the way. 40°C is warm enough for a soup.

## History

Back beyond a certain point in history, our ancestors would have eaten only raw food. Some time 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 and 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 Europe it's not as big, but is growing fast.



*Tasty and nutritious courgette pasta with marinara sauce: the Italian experience with raw ingredients.*



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

## what are the benefits?

- First, a very obvious environmental benefit – every raw food meal you eat 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 vitamins, antioxidants, minerals, proteins, phytochemicals, water, enzymes and fibre.
- Cooking can destroy vitamins, minerals and proteins, and almost all enzymes. They start to be destroyed at 45°C, and the higher the temperature and longer the cooking, the higher the percentage destroyed.
- Because cooked food has often lost nutrients, our bodies tell us to eat more, which can lead to obesity.
- Enzymes 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.

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- 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 contains more fibre, which helps food pass through the intestines and stops constipation.

Studies have confirmed that increased consumption of raw foods can lower the risk of cancer and inflammation, and improve digestion and skin. However, some studies have shown that cooking can release nutrients as well as destroy them, and that people on 100% raw food diets have been found to have reduced bone mass. And so we don't encourage a 100% raw food diet, although it could be good for some people. We'd encourage a greater proportion of raw food in the diet, for the reasons outlined above.

## what can I do?

You can slowly add more raw food to your diet – either as a proportion of meals, or entire raw meals. You could 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.

Here are some useful 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 green leaves like kale, which are difficult to eat raw. The oil gets into the leaves and softens them.

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

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



You can serve raw starters or desserts with a cooked meal.

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

**Sprouting and soaking:** some nuts, pulses and grains should be sprouted and/or soaked before eating because they contain enzyme inhibitors when dry. Soaking unlocks the inhibitors and allows the enzymes to work. Sprouting comes after soaking – seeds (nuts, grains, pulses etc.) have a dormant period that can last a long time. It's not until they are soaked that they start to sprout and grow into a new plant, and that's when they become alive, and good to eat.

**Nothing at all:** and of course you can just eat lots of things raw without doing anything to them at all.

## resources

- [lowimpact.org/raw-living-food](http://lowimpact.org/raw-living-food) for more detailed information, plus courses, links, books, inc:
- Tanya Maher, *the Uncook Book*
- Karin Dina, *the Raw Food Nutrition Handbook*
- Jeremy Safron, *the Raw Truth*
- [living-foods.com](http://living-foods.com) – lots of info, recipes etc.
- [rawschool.com/basics](http://rawschool.com/basics) – FAQ
- [rawfoodrecipes.co.uk](http://rawfoodrecipes.co.uk) – raw recipes

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