

The Raw food diet



The raw food diet has been around since the 1800s, but has surged in popularity in recent years.

Its supporters believe that consuming mostly raw foods is ideal for human health and has many benefits, including weight loss and better overall health.

However, health experts warn that eating a mostly raw diet may lead to negative health consequences.

WHAT IS THE RAW FOOD DIET?

The raw food diet, often called raw foodism or raw veganism, is composed of mostly or completely raw and unprocessed foods.

A food is considered raw if it has never been heated over 104–118°F (40–48°C). It should also not be refined, pasteurized, treated with pesticides, or otherwise processed in any way.

Instead, the diet allows several alternative preparation methods, such as juicing, blending, dehydrating, soaking, and sprouting. Like veganism, the raw food diet is usually plant-based, being made up mostly of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds.

While most raw food diets are completely plant-based, some people also consume raw eggs and dairy. Less commonly, raw fish and meat may be included as well. Additionally, taking supplements is typically discouraged on the raw food diet. Proponents often claim that the diet will give you all the nutrients you need.

Supporters also believe that cooking foods is harmful to human health because it destroys the natural enzymes in foods, reduces their nutrient content and reduces the “life force” that they believe to exist in all raw or “living” foods.

People follow the raw food diet for the benefits they believe it has, including weight loss, improved vitality, increased energy, improvement to chronic diseases, improved overall health and a reduced impact on the environment.

HOW TO FOLLOW THE RAW FOOD DIET

To follow the raw food diet, make sure at least 75% of the food you eat is raw. Most raw food diets are made primarily of fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Grains and legumes are often permitted as well, but usually need to be soaked or sprouted before you eat them.

FOODS TO EAT

- All fresh fruits.
- All raw vegetables.
- Raw nuts and seeds.
- Raw grains and legumes, sprouted or soaked.
- Dried fruits and meats.
- Nut milks.
- Raw nut butters.
- Cold-pressed olive and coconut oils.
- Fermented foods like kimchi and sauerkraut.
- Seaweed.
- Sprouts.
- Raw eggs or dairy, if desired.
- Raw meat or fish, if desired.

FOODS TO AVOID

- Cooked fruits, vegetables, meats, and grains.
- Baked items.
- Roasted nuts and seeds.
- Refined oils.
- Table salt.
- Refined sugars and flour.
- Pasteurized juices and dairy.
- Coffee and tea.
- Alcohol.
- Pasta.
- Pastries.



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- Chips.
- Other processed foods and snacks.

IS RAW FOOD HEALTHIER THAN COOKED FOOD?

Raw food diet supporters believe that eating mostly or all raw food is ideal for human health.

However, like many of the core beliefs behind the raw food diet, this idea is not backed by science.

In fact, research shows that both cooked and raw foods have health benefits. One of the main reasons the raw food diet discourages cooking is because of the belief that cooking destroys the natural enzymes in foods. The diet's advocates believe that these enzymes are vital to human health and digestion.

High heat does cause most enzymes to denature — that is, to unravel or change shape. However, many enzymes denature in the acidic environment of the stomach anyway.

In fact, the body already produces its own enzymes to facilitate chemical processes including digestion and energy production.

Another core belief behind the raw food diet is that cooking destroys the nutrient content of foods.

Cooking can indeed decrease certain nutrients in food, especially water-soluble ones like vitamin C and B vitamins.

However, cooking increases the availability of other nutrients and antioxidants, such as lycopene and beta-carotene. Cooking also helps inactivate or destroy some harmful compounds in food. For example, cooking grains and legumes reduces lectins and phytic acid. In large quantities, these can block your body from absorbing minerals. Additionally, cooking also kills harmful bacteria.

NUTRITION REVIEW: PROS AND CONS

A raw food diet has some positive points. Mainly, it is very high in fresh fruits and vegetables. It also incorporates other foods that are high in nutrients and fibre.

- ✓ To its credit, a raw food diet limits the intake of foods known to contribute to poor health if you eat them in excess, such as processed junk foods and added sugar. Additionally, a raw food diet nearly guarantees weight loss because it is low in calories.

- ✗ Yet despite this, there are also many cons to a raw food diet. When someone switches from a mostly cooked diet to a mostly raw diet, their calorie intake is likely to decrease dramatically. Some people may not find it possible to eat enough raw food to meet their daily calorie needs. This is partially because fruits and vegetables, though healthy, simply don't provide enough calories or protein to make up most of the diet.
- ✗ Additionally, cooking increases the digestibility of foods, making it easier for your body to get calories and nutrients from them. In some cases, your body gets significantly fewer calories from a food if it's raw. Cooking also increases the amount of certain nutrients and antioxidants your body absorbs.
- ✗ Finally, raw diets tend to be nutritionally unbalanced because they must be mostly made up of either fats or fruits to meet calorie needs. This means raw diets may be deficient not only in calories, but also in some vitamins, minerals, and protein.

HEALTH BENEFITS REVIEW: PROS AND CONS

Like most of the beliefs behind the raw food diet, many of the supposed health benefits are not supported by evidence. Some studies have found the raw food diet to have positive health effects, but much of the research has found it has negative effects.

- ✓ One study of people following a raw food diet found that it lowered blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels.
- ✓ Studies have consistently found that the raw food diet is associated with having less body fat. One study of participants following a raw diet long-term found that it was associated with large losses of body fat. Men lost an average of 21.8 pounds (9.9 kg) after switching to a raw diet and women lost an average of 26.4 pounds (12 kg).
- ✗ In one study 70% of women on the diet experienced irregularities in their menstrual cycle. And nearly one-third of women developed amenorrhea, meaning they stopping menstruating, which can be a consequence of low body weight.
- ✗ One study found that people following a raw diet had significantly lower calorie intake and body fat than those who weren't following the diet **BUT** they also had low protein, calcium, and vitamin D intakes. The



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same study found that participants following a raw vegan diet had low bone mass, potentially due to low calorie and protein intake.

Overall, following a raw food diet may lead to weight loss or even improve some markers of health, such as blood lipids. But despite this, the significant risk of negative health effects outweighs the potential benefits of this diet.

A WEEKLY SAMPLE MENU FOR THE RAW FOOD DIET

A raw food diet can vary based on the foods that are allowed and the dieter's food preferences. If you decide to try a raw food diet, here is an example of what one week on a 100% raw food vegan diet might look like:

MONDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Green smoothie.
- **SNACK:** Carrots and raw hummus.
- **LUNCH:** Raw squash noodle pasta with pesto.
- **SNACK:** Strawberries and almonds.
- **DINNER:** Raw vegetable pizza.

TUESDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Chia seed pudding with fruit.
- **LUNCH:** Apple and walnut salad.
- **SNACK:** Freshly squeezed juice and nuts.
- **DINNER:** Raw zucchini noodle pasta with tomato sauce and basil.

WEDNESDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Overnight oatmeal with chopped fruit and nuts.
- **LUNCH:** Raw sweet potato chips and fruit.
- **SNACK:** Broccoli and raw hummus.
- **DINNER:** Stuffed portobello mushrooms.

THURSDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Fruit bowl.
- **LUNCH:** Salad with figs and nuts.
- **SNACK:** Banana and raw nut butter.
- **DINNER:** Raw lasagne.

FRIDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Green smoothie.
- **LUNCH:** Sprouted quinoa Buddha bowl.
- **SNACK:** Apple and berries.
- **DINNER:** Raw tomato soup with marinated veggies.

SATURDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Soaked oats with berries.
- **LUNCH:** Salad with avocado and fruit.
- **SNACK:** Sliced bell pepper and sunflower seeds.
- **DINNER:** Raw veggie sushi and chopped veggies.

SUNDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Raw banana pancakes and fruit.
- **LUNCH:** Raw squash soup.
- **SNACK:** Orange slices and nuts.
- **DINNER:** Kale and mushroom salad.

IS THE RAW FOOD DIET SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE?

In the short-term, the raw food diet is not likely to pose major health concerns.

However, you may develop problems if you follow the diet long-term. A mostly raw diet makes it difficult to get enough calories, protein and certain vitamins and minerals. Some people may not be able to get enough calories from this diet. The evidence also shows that the larger the proportion of raw food in your diet, the higher the risk of negative effects.

Unless you take supplements, you may develop problems from nutrient inadequacies over time as your body's vitamin and mineral stores are used up. However, even nutrition supplements cannot make up for a lack of calories and protein in the diet.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Fresh, raw foods are a valuable part of a healthy diet. However, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. Cooking is important to make certain foods and nutrients more digestible.

A completely or even mostly raw diet is likely to cause weight loss, but also makes it difficult to meet your nutritional needs. In the end, eating a combination of cooked and raw foods is ideal for your health.