




THE RAW END

From fast food addiction and stockpiled frozen meals, to veganism and organic advocacy, modern food culture is marked with an infinite list of dietary habits. The irony of this situation is that in an age of exceptional understanding about health and nutrition, we are eating in more varied ways than ever. The choices we make tend to repulse each other, ricocheting into strict dietary schools of thought, and conversely, into nutritional thoughtlessness.

by : Alexandra Wilson



WHEREVER one falls along the spectrum of nutritional extremes though, you can bet that there's a motive for their food choices. Whether it's the craving for some taste sensation, the objective to lose weight, or a stance against animal cruelty, we are all active in deciding the constituents of our diets. A small number are so motivated by dietary devotion, that they are prepared to commit to a life of rules and regulations, or as they see it, a road to physical and cerebral fulfilment.

Among this handful of devotees, is a bunch of satisfied raw foodists who are committed to a staple diet of vegetables, fruits, sprouts, seeds and nuts, all in their uncooked forms. Based on the theory that uncooked, organically grown foods retain the essential nutrients that are lost during the process of heating, the raw foods diet has been coined the living foods lifestyle.

Alive with vitamins, minerals, and most importantly, the enzymes that enhance digestion, the complete living foods diet gained prominence from the 1980s due to the efforts of nutritionist, Ann Wigmore, and a bevy of celebrities and supermodels who joined the bandwagon. You may recall that Demi Moore and Woody Harrelson followed the diet, or that wheatgrass juice catapulted to the forefront of health consciousness for a short time: a craze directly linked to raw foodism. Today however, testaments to long-term physical and mental health benefits, online support networks, raw food restaurants, and world-class health retreats resonate that raw foodism is neither a fleeting, nor superficial lifestyle choice.

Raw food fans are convinced that the diet staves off sickness, increases energy, and extends youth, reasoning that the digestive enzymes in uncooked food allow the body to retain its own limited supply of enzymes. Confident that cooking depletes proteins, vitamins and minerals and aggravates the toxic and carcinogenic effects of pesticides, raw foodists have gone to great lengths to preserve their eating habits.

Loyal followers maintain the requisites of raw foodism in urban and rural environments across the globe, making the effort to go raw for a multitude of reasons, observing the benefits, and finding the means to sustain the diet.

The decadence and diversity that beckons from neighbouring omnivores is no barrier, much less temptation for raw foodists who have integrated partial subsistence, connected with organic grocers, and engaged with new preparation techniques in order to meet their ends.

Perth Raw Food convert, Kate Quinn explains the qualms of going raw, "I had been a junk food vegetarian caffeine addict for too long and become obese as a result. I was not a serial dieter, and did not want to go on a 'diet' - I wanted a lifestyle. When I found out about Raw Foods it was the answer, as it would cut out all the things that I would excuse as being vegetarian - such as cake. There is nothing more simple than just cutting out all processed products and eating only natural and pure foods." Over one weekend six months ago, Kate made the transition from caffeine addiction and vegetarianism, to 100 per cent raw foodism and has since lost 30kg.

Impressive weight loss figures such as Kate's have led governing health authorities to

suggest that deficiencies in nutrients such as protein, carbohydrates and calcium, deem the raw food diet to be unsustainable in the long term. The recommended daily calorie allowance for active men, for example is around 2 900, and for women, 2 400, whilst a raw foodist, eating three average meals a day can take in as little as 800 calories. Raw food aficionados explain however, that uncooked calories metabolise more efficiently, and hence the body needs less volume of food to activate the same amount of energy. Exploiting this theory (which is not supported by scientific evidence) further, raw foodists have adopted innovative and inspired preparation techniques in order to optimise the energy released from specific foods.

An active member of the Perth raw food community, Kate teaches 'uncooking' classes, preparing cultures, dehydrating foods, assembling raw cakes and vegetable combinations in order to get the most flavour and nutritional value from the most basic culinary candidates. The raw food menu, in fact, is far from bland, boasting thousands of recipes, shared and amended via online forums and trialled in trendy raw restaurants. With over 20 restaurants in the US alone, the raw repertoire is expanding at a rate parallel to the diet's growing popularity, with customers who are not necessarily prepared to accept the philosophy, still able to enjoy the products.

Ice cream made from almond milk and honey, parsnip resembling cous cous, and handmade cashew cheese are but a few of the delectable, yet labour intensive items on the raw food carte du jour. These not-so-guilty pleasures are apparently all taste, at the expense of time, and not your hips or waistline.



Rather than adopting an all encompassing approach to raw food however, conventional nutritionists recommend such foods should be integrated sporadically to form a balanced diet. Their advice ensues the fact that deficiencies in nutrients such as vitamin B12, found only in animal products, can cause nerve damage. Such warnings however, have not deterred the chronically ill, or the desperately frustrated, who have turned to the diet as a last resort in cases of ongoing health problems.

One of these people is Casey Thomas who had suffered debilitating health problems her entire life before reverting to the living foods lifestyle, "I suffered from painful eczema and way too frequent colds and flus. I found raw foods in my search to heal myself naturally. After quite a journey to find a cure, I am now fully healed and no longer need to use the steroid medication I had to use every day of my life from childhood."

Casey concedes that although she eats less, she feels energetic and enlightened, "Embracing the raw lifestyle has also given me incredible mental clarity, more energy, more passion and a real sense of spiritual awareness and connectedness." Her verification of the raw food benefits stand against the opinions of mainstream eaters whose good health affords them peace of mind about their diets. Raw foodists in fact, like most people who subscribe to alternative diets, will always be challenged by the age old refutation, "If it aint broke don't fix it." **f**