

## Eating Raw Foods

By Tula Karras WebMD Medical News

**Uncooked fruits and vegetables pack more of a nutritional punch than their cooked counterparts. But how much of a difference can an all-raw diet really make?**

*Medically reviewed by Dr. Craig H. Kliger*

July 17, 2000 -- Curiosity overpowered hunger as I arrived at Organica restaurant, an unconventional member of San Francisco's eclectic range of cuisine offerings.

There's no place for a stove at Organica. Vegan dishes -- containing no meat, fish, eggs, or dairy -- made of raw, organic foods fill the menu, which includes much more than just celery sticks and kidney beans.

I sampled "mashed potatoes," a mixture of walnuts, cauliflower, and spices. "Salmon," a combination of carrots, walnuts, dill, and onion, delighted my palate. Fresh-tasting guacamole, spicy hummus, and a traditional mixed green salad rounded out the meal.

A dessert of fresh coconut juice -- which I sipped straight out of a baby coconut -- topped it all off.

The raw foods philosophy, however, was hardly founded in the search for culinary aesthetics. This fledgling but growing movement is drawing Americans looking for overall well-being, purification, longevity, more energy, and a cure for diseases like chronic fatigue syndrome, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, and even cancer.

While there is no scientific evidence yet available to back up these claims, devoted raw food fans swear by their diet's powers.

**"By the third day of eating all raw, I found I had solved the riddle to my health," says David Klein**, who was chronically sick for eight years with an inflamed colon and fatigue. Now he runs *Living Nutrition*, a raw foods magazine, which he founded four years ago in Sebastopol, Calif.

### Heating Away the Goods

Raw food devotees like Klein stick by their own scientific explanation for why they think carrots, or any other food, aren't as good cooked. Their theory is that the body depends on foods' store of enzymes -- the spunky proteins that help break down food to aid in digestion, says Organica's manager Larry Weinstein, a longtime raw food enthusiast. But expose these enzymes to heat and nearly all will be inactivated. The body, he says, then has to pick up the slack and make more of its own enzymes, using energy that it could've used for other things -- like chewing a raw carrot.

However, heat of less than 105 degrees doesn't "kill" the food. So raw-food enthusiasts can use a heat dehydrator, an appliance that blows hot air on food until it "cooks." For example, Weinstein uses heat-dehydrated garbanzo beans to make falafel, among other dishes, at Organica.

### But Wait, There's More

Most physiologists would cringe at the raw food theory, especially because digestion is a scientifically proven process that depends on enzymes that the body generates, and not food enzymes.

Theory aside, however, it appears that eating raw food is a smart step toward good health. For instance, consuming more fruits and vegetables can give your body a noticeable boost. Researchers have found that a diet rich in raw vegetables can lower your risk of breast cancer, while eating lots of fruit can reduce your risk for developing colon cancer, according to a study published in the May 1998 issue of the journal *Epidemiology*. And including fresh fruit as part of your daily diet has been associated with fewer deaths from heart attacks and related problems (by as much as 24%, according to a study published in the September 1996 issue of the *British Medical Journal*).

However, don't get bogged down with figuring out yet another diet or baffled over how to cook (or not

cook) your veggies or fruits. What's most important is that you actually eat them: 3 to 5 servings of vegetables and 2 to 4 servings of fruit every day, as recommended by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This amount is a far cry from the 3.6 servings of fruits and vegetables, combined, that Americans are now getting.

The raw foods diet might help bring you above the average American's intake. At least that's what I've found. After following it for a month, I'm eating more fruits and vegetables, though not necessarily raw (I sometimes steam or grill them).

I have more energy. I'm spending less at the grocery store (processed snacks are alarmingly expensive) and crave less sugar and fat. I've even lost a little weight -- it's almost impossible to over-eat crudités.

No matter how you slice it, making room for raw isn't doing me any harm. On the contrary, it's most likely doing some good.

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## **Eating Raw a discussion of the "raw" diet.**

**Question:** Is it more healthful to eat raw vegetables or cooked vegetables?

**Answer:**

According to Dr. Fuhrman true health is achieved when your diet offers more nutrition than calories. His formula Health = Nutrition over Calories. When you eat plant food "Raw" you absorb a greater quality and quantity of Nutrients. When you cook your plant food you receive a greater quantity of calories. The opposite of what you need for good health.

### **Boiling It Down**

When you heat your produce certain nutrients, such as vitamin C and folic acid, are easily lost during cooking or when produce is left on a store

shelf, in a refrigerator or on a buffet table.

Boiling results in a great loss of nutrients. Typically, vegetables lose up to 75 percent of their vitamin C. Raw green beans lose 25 percent of their vitamin C. Frozen green beans lose about 20 percent of their beta-carotene, 50 percent of their vitamin C and most of their folic acid.

There are other key questions to consider:

- **How fresh is the produce?** Choose vegetables that have deep, rich colors. Bright orange carrots, dark green broccoli and vivid red tomatoes have higher nutrient contents than paler produce. Frozen vegetables are your best option when very fresh produce is not available. Finally, canned vegetables will do in a pinch, but include the liquid, since many of the nutrients will have leached into the juice.
- **How long do you store your produce?** If you leave it in the crisper for days, many of the nutrients are lost. Broccoli, for example, loses up to 35 percent of its vitamin C content after just 24 hours in the refrigerator. Limit your vegetable purchases to those you plan to eat within two days or three at the most.
- **If you must cook how do you cook your produce?** Use the shortest cooking time and the least amount of water possible, and cover the cookware container. Try to steam vegetables or cook them whole, as a lot of peeling and cutting results in lost nutrients. Serve vegetables as soon as possible after cooking.

The wisest strategy (if you have to cook) is to prepare your meals with a combination of raw and cooked vegetables for maximum nutritional value. And don't forget juicing, which is a great addition to eating salads, fruits and steamed vegetables. Finally, make sure you eat enough fruits and vegetables -- at least five servings per day, ideally nine (most people average only three).

**WARNING:** The Information in these articles is not intended to replace medical advice or treatment. Questions about symptoms, specific dietary needs and medications, general or specific, should be discussed with your physician. The information in this article is for informational purposes only, and is not medical advice or a substitute for a physician's consultation and/or examination.

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