

Understanding a “Raw Foods Diet”

When people find out they have cancer, they often make healthy changes to their diet and lifestyle. Some people consider a raw foods diet because of the potential health benefits. This handout will go over the potential benefits and concerns of a raw diet to help you decide if it is right for you.



A raw foods diet should **not** be followed by immunocompromised or neutropenic patients undergoing bone marrow or stem cell transplantation or for patients in the Protected Environment. Raw foods can increase the risk of infection in these patients.

What is a raw diet?

A raw foods diet is also known as a “living foods diet.” It often includes vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and sprouts. Food is eaten raw, or uncooked. Some heating is allowed, but foods can only be heated to a temperature of 105°F (40.5°C) or lower to be considered raw. Dehydrated fruits, vegetables or grains can also be eaten, but only if they were not heated to a temperature of 105°F (40.5°C) or higher in the dehydration process.



The number of raw meals eaten each day by people on this diet varies. Some eat one raw meal per day, while others may eat all raw meals.

Why do some people follow a raw diet?

Raw foods may have less processing and fewer added ingredients. Raw foods are typically whole foods, which require very little processing. They also contain little to no additives, unlike foods such as refined flours and simple sugars which have added preservatives and other chemicals.

Enzymes are preserved in raw plant foods. Enzymes are protein molecules found in plants and made by the human body. When plant foods are cooked, the enzymes in the plants are destroyed. Supporters of raw diets believe there are health benefits of eating plant foods with preserved enzymes. However, it should be noted that our stomach acid destroys most of the preserved enzymes in plants when we eat them.

Sprouting may increase the nutritional value of plant foods. Sprouting is the process of repeatedly soaking, then draining and rinsing seeds, grains or beans until they sprout. Some believe that sprouting increases the amount of protein, vitamins and phytochemicals in the food.

Are There Any Health Concerns?

- A raw foods diet should **not** be followed by immunocompromised or neutropenic patients undergoing bone marrow or stem cell transplantation or for patients in the Protected Environment. Raw foods can increase the risk of infection in these patients.
- Raw or undercooked kidney beans and soy beans may contain harmful chemicals. To be safe, do not eat raw, undercooked or sprouted kidney beans or soybeans.
- Low bone mass may be a potential concern among long-term raw vegetarians. This can lead to weak bones that are more likely to break. Those who follow a raw vegetarian diet may not consume enough Vitamin D, which is important for good bone density.
- A raw diet may not provide enough of the following nutrients. Add variety to your diet, whether raw or cooked. Always talk with your doctor and/or dietitian if considering dietary supplements.
 - Vitamin B-12 (also known as cobalmin)
 - Vitamin D
 - Calcium



Kidney beans and soybeans should not be sprouted or eaten raw.

What else should I know about a raw diet?

- The benefits of a raw food diet are debatable. Medical literature shows strong evidence that vegetables, both raw and cooked, can help reduce the risk of some cancers, including cancers of the mouth, throat and digestive system.
- Raw is not always the healthiest choice. Cooking kills many harmful bacteria in foods (for example, Salmonella in raw chicken), making them safe for people to eat.
- While cooking can lower the health benefits of some plant foods, cooking can increase the health benefits in others. One example of this is lycopene, a nutrient found in tomatoes. Cooking tomatoes actually increases the amount of lycopene. Spaghetti sauce has six times as much lycopene than a raw tomato.
- Raw foods typically have a shorter shelf-life.
- Sprouting decreases the shelf-life of nuts, grains and legumes. They must be eaten within a few days of sprouting or be frozen.

Resources

For more information, contact the Integrative Medicine Center at 713-794-4700.

Living and Raw Foods
www.living-foods.com

The Raw Gourmet
www.rawgourmet.com

Living Light: Making Healthy Living Delicious
www.rawfoodchef.com

Learn Raw Food
www.learnrawfood.com

Raw Food Made Easy by Jennifer Cornbleet (Both DVD and book)