

**Raw Food**  
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Greater clarity and sharper awareness, radiant health and glowing vitality. These and more are the promises of a raw foods diet.

“Eating raw is the yoga of food,” according to New York City-based yoga teacher and raw food chef Shanti Devi (née Michal Adi). When we spoke she was in Costa Rica preparing for a yoga and raw foods retreat.

“With yoga, you stop the fluctuations of the mind, stay out of the head and go into the heart,” she explained. A 100% raw foodist 99% of the time for the past three years, this 32-year-old Kundalini, Vinyasa and Anusara practitioner believes a raw diet creates the same effect.

“Like practicing yoga, when you eat raw you become more peaceful, clear and relaxed.” Both practices also have the aim of raising consciousness. “Just by upping the standard of what you eat makes you more present,” Devi said.

Eating a raw foods diet is just what it sounds like: food is consumed in its natural, uncooked state, although heating food up to 47°C is still within the dietary parameters. When heated to temperatures beyond that, raw foodists contend that the enzymes begin to break down, nutrients seep out and food starts to lose its nutritional value.

In addition to the benefits cited above, Devi finds ingesting all food as close to nature as possible increases strength, energy, flexibility and lightness of being, as well as enhances focus, psychic awareness and the ability to perceive subtle energy.

### **Raw v. Cooked**

Living raw has many detractors, as any diet does, particularly one that is viewed as restrictive or that boasts life-altering results. Health officials warn of bacteria, while most nutritionists view 100% raw as extreme and unbalanced. And research demonstrates that, in some cases, cooking trumps raw.

According to a recent article by Jack Norris, R.D., a vegan registered dietician and former 100% raw foodist, “Cooking liberates some nutrients, such as beta-carotene and other antioxidants, for easier absorption.” He also points out that cooking can aid digestion of protein and destabilize some toxic components of many foods.

However, no one disagrees about the value of adding more fresh, alive vegetables and fruits to our diets.

On the other end of the scale from the critics, some strict raw adherents are hard-core and often a bit holier-than-thou. And of course their web sites proclaim miraculous cures and warn of dire consequences for not eating their way.

The truth is, only you can make the choice about what's right for your body.

### **Raw Emotions**

Far from being shrill, the raw foodies I met while researching this topic are encouraging, supportive, and best of all, non-judgmental about anyone's food choices. They've opted to go raw for myriad personal reasons: to overcome physical ailments, to conquer emotional demons, to loose weight, to be more environmentally aware. All said they feel more alive, more conscious, closer to God and more connected to the earth.

For instance, Debbie Davis from the U.S. state of Wisconsin has experimented with the raw diet for about three years. At one point she estimates she was 95% raw and is now at about 85%. She looks at the diet as a way of maximizing her health and the environment. "I do a lot of meditation. I thought being raw could be better energetically. This was a new step that made sense," she told me at an uncooked pot luck dinner I attended with her and other raw foodists. "It feels right to be raw. It's right action for my body, my being, my relationship to others and for the planet."

Husband and wife raw foodies John and Jean Clagherty, also from Wisconsin, point out that food isn't the only thing that's raw when you're eating this way. "If you've been hiding and masking things with food and busy-ness, you will go through an emotional detox. We've had rough times and stellar times," said Jean, who is a psychotherapist.

### **The Tao of Raw**

Despite what the zealots say, the raw diet doesn't need to be all or nothing. Devi, Norris and others point to a Middle Way: eating 60-80 % raw most of the time and the other 20-40% preparing food lightly steamed, baked or grilled. If that's still too daunting, just one raw meal a day on an ongoing basis or a periodic one-week raw fast can yield results. "Even people that consciously try being raw just one day will say, 'Wow! I'm so alive!'" Devi said.

Like any other new venture, it's important to do your research. Read up on raw, talk to those following the lifestyle, try it out on a temporary basis and listen to your body. "It's an individual journey, like yoga," Devi said. "It's about finding what works for you, finding the balance of what your body needs."

Even with the possibility of all the payoffs mentioned, it still might be rather radical to ponder ruling out all cooked foods from one's diet. Consuming basically just raw fruits and vegetables, soaked raw nuts and seeds, fresh juices, oils, soaked or sprouted grains and legumes, seaweed, algae, olives, avocados, coconuts and possibly some fermented items sounds pretty intense. Exactly! That's what most raw foodists I talked to are going for: an intense, vibrant aliveness.

To see if cook-free is all it's cracked up to be, I decided to go raw for a month so I could report back to *Yoga Magazine* readers with first-hand experience. Although Devi and most other raw foodies I talked to are vegans, I'm an omnivore, so I included unpasteurized dairy and even some occasional sashimi in my experiment.

### **The Raw Deal**

Following are excerpts from my Raw Diary, recorded during the month I was eating raw:

*The limited list of edible items is what alarms most people and is often the barrier to entry. I actually find it liberating. The very restrictiveness of it simplifies some things ("Should I eat that piece of pizza?" "No."), and at the same time opens a whole new world of possibilities.*

*Before being raw, I had never truly noticed the bountiful array of fruits and vegetables available. Just the vast variety of lettuces and the innovative ways to eat them is now dazzling. And I bet you have no idea how many different culinary creations you can make with nuts! Foods—and ways to prepare them—that have been outside my awareness are now capturing my attention.*

*I felt freer in lots of ways. One is that my body felt lighter. Not just weight-wise, but in a way that can only be explained as being not full.*

*Fears that I might feel deprived gnawed at me before starting. But in its natural state food often tastes more intense, so I want significantly less of it, yet enjoy it measurably more. When anxious feelings that I attribute to a perceived lack of food come up, I remember what Jean and John told me and I challenge myself to look deeper into what I truly feel is lacking.*

*My mental clarity and vibrancy are heightened most of the time. "Everything has an energy field. When we destroy the energy field of the food, there's no vibrancy to it," Devi pointed out. "The high vibration, living food I eat gives me a vibration that's clear, awake, sharper, more crispy," she said. "You're eating sheer kundalini; it's pure, vital life-force."*

*I've become more conscious of what I'm eating because I have to make choices about everything I put into my mouth. My husband claims I'm more even-keeled and quietly grounded than ever before. Is it possible that the way I eat affects my response to stress?*

*"Being raw brings a greater awareness of the direct connection between what we put in our bodies and how we feel," Devi told me. "What we think and what we put in our mouths affects us in a big way."*

*A friend told me my skin was glowing. I've noticed my eyes are strikingly clear. Devi observes that many people are drawn to this style of eating to be more beautiful and loose weight, which is often the initial draw to yoga as well. But raw, like yoga, ultimately reveals the beauty and sacredness within.*

*The main downside I've been experiencing is energy swings. To address this, Devi suggested I incorporate super foods such as bee pollen, spirulina and raw cacao and cut back on the fruit, fruit juices and "heavy foods," such as nuts. She also advised me to up the greens. The adjustment rendered immediate high energy results.*

### **The Raw Verdict**

My biggest hurdle in undertaking a raw diet was all the work I envisioned came with being raw: juicing and chopping and soaking and grinding. But in fact it was a benefit, as it created mindfulness. But if you want, you can skip the in-depth prep and be pretty lazy for a few weeks eating this way. How tough is it to peel a banana, switch on your blender or make a fresh salad?

Make no assumptions, however, about your menu choices. Raw cuisine goes way beyond those simple options. Raw has gone gourmet and been elevated to an art form. Entire cookbooks, restaurants and web-sites are dedicated to delectable raw creations. Even the celebrated haute cuisine American chef Charlie Trotter recently published his own contribution to the un-cooked movement. (See sidebar for raw recipes and resources.)

### **Raw Unfolding**

Despite my powerful experience living raw, I don't plan to stay cook-less for life. The Middle Way is a better balance for me, although I'll certainly do long stretches of 100% raw, just because it feels so good.

And as glowing as my account is, I'm not saying I blithely skipped down the raw road. Like yoga, living raw is a path to consciousness that takes dedication. It can't be rushed or forced. It's an unfolding that happens from the inside out. Like that first yoga class, however, when you try going raw and the life-force begins to flow like you've never experienced before, you may find yourself hooked.

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