

# How to Manage a Raw Foods Diet

by Steve Meyerowitz, Sproutman

*The following is an interview with Steve Meyerowitz in the Italian magazine “Salute Oggi” (Health Today) about the benefits and also the drawbacks of a raw foods diet and how to how to incorporate this diet into the modern lifestyle of the average person.*

## What are the main principles of the “raw food” Philosophy?

*Sproutman:* First and foremost it is indeed a philosophy and you are correct in calling it so. It is a diet based on a belief system. Raw foodists believe in the principles of their diet just like religious followers believe in the tenets of their religion. Raw followers believe their’s is the original diet. As the Bible in Genesis says: *“I have given you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed bearing fruit. They shall be for yours for food.”* So it is at its core, an animal-free non-violent, spiritual diet that co-exists in peace with all other living creatures.



Really Raw Granola

Just as with religion, there are degrees of differences in how the community practices and variations on how they interpret the basic tenants. There are raw foodists who are strict and those who are less so. Those who are Vegan, and those who take raw milk. Those who follow the diet 100% of the time and those that eat 80% raw.

But for me, the top three guiding principles behind this diet are those of healing, detoxification, and energy. In my opinion, this is the best diet for healing when there is “dis-ease;” the best diet for maximizing the amount of daily energy you have available for mind and body; and the best diet for maintaining a clean body including organs, glands, and all the way down to the cellular level.

## What are the Benefits of Raw Food?

*Sproutman:* First of all, this diet forces a higher level of education about food and an increased awareness about what you eat and when you eat it. That’s a good thing no matter what diet you are on. Secondly, this is a spiritual diet. It increases your awareness about your lifestyle, the earth as the source of your food, the sanctity of the environment including soil, air, and water, and a respect for other living creatures—a reverence for life. So it is going to influence or more likely change your lifestyle. And for the better—less stress, better quality of life, better health. Thirdly, it is a diet that focuses on the purity of the biophysical body. It treats the body as your inner temple. Thus, raw foodists choose only the highest quality foods. In today’s high speed, fast food world of pesticides, preservatives, and micro-wave ovens....raw foodists will eschew all things poisonous.

## Why and How did you start with this kind of diet?

*Sproutman:* I am simply a health seeker. I am where I am today primarily based on need. It’s human nature isn’t it? If you are suffering with a problem, you search for a solution. I endured asthma, allergies to foods, fabrics, flowers, etc., skin rashes, and constipation for the first 25 years of my life. I started visiting doctors regularly at age five. Was it all caused by my low quality American diet? By my lifestyle? By my genetic makeup? Probably some of them all. But the doctors were no help. I concluded that after 20 years, if they had not fixed me, they were never going to. Actually, my health was getting worse. I started interviewing other patients in the waiting room, whom I had gotten to know from my weekly visits. They were getting worse, too. That was the beginning of the end of my faith in the American system of drug treatment of disease. I set out on my own doing the only thing that is in our power as patients—I took control of my diet and lifestyle.

I did not immediately embrace raw foods as such. I started eliminating offending foods—dairy, wheat, sugar, commercial salt, and animal derived foods. All foods that could contribute to my allergies were eliminated. I even purified my drinking water. My goal was to eliminate anything that was not natural to the body. So, my first principle was purity, and that is one of the tenets of raw food.

I was lucky; I succeeded with my change of diet and my health problems retreated dramatically. I was so shocked by the transformation in such a short time, that I shared my success with everyone I knew. The raw part of the diet is a natural sequence. If you strip out most of the offending foods, you are left with natural foods—fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains, beans, sea vegetables. This does not require all raw, but if you are trying to clear your body of poisons—detoxification—then going all raw speeds up the process.

### **How can the Raw Food diet be integrated in a daily regimen without going fully 100% raw?**

*Sproutman:* Start with just one meal per day. How about a smoothie (blended drink) for breakfast or lunch? In my book *I Succi della Salute*, I have many recipes for such drinks that are both satisfying and highly nutritious.



In general they blend your favorite fruits such as banana, apples, or berries with some nutritional powders such as yeast, wheat germ, or seeds like sesame or sunflower.

Or perhaps you could start your day with a fresh squeezed vegetable juice. One glass is the nutritional equivalent of eating three or more vegetable meals. And it all gets into your bloodstream instantly. Or you could just focus on increasing the quality of your food. Shop for organic foods. Eat only foods that are in season. Buy only those that are locally grown. This will automatically increase your intake of raw foods.

And when you do cook, do it judiciously. If you are going to eat a grain for dinner. Pre-soak the rice or millet in the morning. By evening, all you will need to do is warm it up. You will preserve nutrition in these wonderful grains and avoid all the destruction that results from high temperatures.

### **Cooking food reduces the risk of contamination from viruses and bacteria. Doesn't this mean that raw foods are dangerous?**

*Sproutman:* Sure, there is a risk of food contamination when anyone eats raw foods. But this is true whether you eat them 100% of the time or just 10% of the time. No diet is immune to food contamination. There is a long list of foods—meat, poultry, eggs, peanut butter, spinach, peppers, milk, melons and more, that have carried pathogens such as E-coli and salmonella.

I mentioned before that a raw foods diet requires a higher level of education. Raw foodists need to take more care in selecting their food, examining its quality and purity, and knowing its source. They must wash it, store it properly, and compost or dispose of it before it gets old. Raw foodists also protect themselves by taking probiotic supplements and foods. Since salmonella and e-coli are intestinal illnesses, paving the intestines with friendly bacteria such as acidophilus and bifidus creates a natural defense. Eating foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, pickles, yoghurt, miso and other cultured or sour foods keeps high counts of these naturally protective bacteria in your gut. This strengthens your immune system and reduces the effects of food contamination. This is good advice for all of us.

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**Cooking food also helps its digestibility. But that’s not possible with raw. How can you improve digestion on a raw diet?**

*Sproutman:* First let us look at food in terms of its water. Water is the easiest thing to digest. Fruit and vegetable juices allow for the best digestion of anything you can eat. Similarly, foods rich in water are easiest to digest. You already know this because fruits are easy to digest and they are full of water. Leafy green vegetables are all better than 90% water. Even broccoli is 87% water. So raw can be an easy diet to digest because the foods are so juicy. However, if you eat dried fruit all day, you will be eating foods that are concentrated and difficult to digest. Fruits and vegetables pass through the stomach in about an hour. Denser foods—those with less water such as grains and beans—should be eaten after salads, for example, so they do not slow down its passage. So knowing what to eat and when to eat it is part of the art of making a good diet.

As for grains and beans, they must be germinated in order to be used on a raw diet. Sprouting is the only way to make these foods edible for raw foodists. It breaks down the proteins into amino acids and fats into fatty acids, softens them, and increases the water content. If you are a raw foodist who excludes grains or beans, you are eliminating an important category of foods. Either way, you cannot consume the same volume of beans raw as you would cooked. Raw foodists need to limit their portions of these sprouted foods. But keep in mind that the raw food diet can include 20% of foods as cooked. So 80/20 is officially considered a raw diet. I am in this category. As an alternative to sprouting, grains and beans could be lightly cooked. As mentioned before, judicious cooking is ideal. Boil water in an empty pot. Turn off the flame. Pour in the rice (or your favorite grain), put the lid on and come back 4 hours later. Many grains will be entirely softened at this point. Or you can warm them up and soften them some more. This approach minimizes the destruction of nutrients and increases the digestibility.

**Don’t you think that a raw diet, tightly vegetarian, is not well balanced?**

*Sproutman:* I think that a raw diet and also a vegan diet both require more nutrition education, kitchen time, and effort in order to achieve a balanced diet. Let’s face it, this diet is counter-cultural. There is very little support for it in our society. So anyone with dreams of a raw diet has an uphill climb. Of course, if you were to drop out of society, move to a tropical island, and hang in a hammock surrounded by fruit trees, you might think this diet is not so hard. But if you wish to live and work in modern society, you must be prepared for the extra time and effort it takes as also the questions, doubts, and teases from friends and family.

I am sure you realize that balanced health is not only a function of diet. Exercise, sleep, meditation, stress are all part of health. But as far as diet goes, all that is necessary for complete nutrition can be found growing on trees, bushes, on and below the soil, and in the lakes. A diet of nuts, seeds, grains, beans, vegetables, sea vegetables, and fruits provides our richest source of nutrients. Animals have been surviving on these foods in raw, uncooked form for thousands of years. Only man cooks his food. Raw foodists need to sprout their grains and beans, but that makes them even more nutritious. So whether or not you create a successfully balanced raw diet is not that different from the hard work required to achieve a balanced vegan, vegetarian, macrobiotic, low-carb, or religious diet. All the nutrition you need is available in the raw world. Whether or not you are successful in putting it together in a balanced way is up to you.

**How can you satisfy your daily need of protein on a raw foods diet?**

*Sproutman:* First, I need to tell you that I believe a low protein diet is healthier than a high protein one and that protein has been over promoted in our society.

Why? Perhaps it serves the meat and poultry industry to promote themselves as high protein. But even so, these foods are not our best protein sources, neither in quantity nor in quality. Actually, if you



subscribe to the more-protein-is-better philosophy, then you would be eating more raw foods.

Raw sunflower seeds are 23% protein, almonds are 21%, raw green soybeans 13%, and spirulina (a dried seaweed-algae) is nearly 48% protein. Compare this to eggs 13%, meat 16%, and chicken 18% protein. Know that every natural food, every plant, and vegetable provides protein. So we are always acquiring protein in a healthy plant based diet. The reason peoples of developing countries experience protein deficiency is because they are not getting enough total food. Protein deficiency in the developed world, on the other hand, is extremely rare. In fact, I have more concern about us consuming too much protein. Excess protein needs to be broken down by the liver into ammonia and then to urea that is excreted by the kidneys. Protein broken down by animals is organized into amino acid combinations that are ideal for those animals. I believe humans are better off sourcing their own proteins from plant foods rather than second hand from other animals. Eating lower on the food chain provides better quality, purity, and is less work for our digestion system.

### **Can pregnant women and children practice a raw foods diet?**

*Sproutman:* There is nothing inherently dangerous about raw foods. But as with any diet, we need to choose what we eat according to our bodies needs. The success of any diet is largely up to the individual and that goes for any state of health or stage of life. Pregnant women and infants have very specific needs that should to be addressed no matter which diet is practiced. Nutrition deficiencies are sadly much too common for this group when they eat a conventional diet. Raw foods, on the other hand, are the most nutritious foods we have. A well balanced raw food diet can be ideal for pregnant women and infants.



A big issue for pregnant women and infants is food safety. Conventional diets have many hazardous ingredients that present serious risks to the health of the pregnant mother and the developing fetus. The worst offenders are pesticides and fungicides that affect the new nervous system and endocrine (hormone) development. Don't forget that the majority of these chemicals are also proven carcinogens. They are designed to kill living organisms—insects, fungi, and

plants. Although low level amounts of these poisons may not produce immediate effects in adults, they are much more potent and dangerous to fetuses and infants. Such things as alcohol, smoking, caffeine, high fat foods, and fried foods can all negatively influence the biochemistry of a fetus, infant, and mother. A young immune system is less able to inactivate the toxic byproducts of these foods and cannot protect itself at such a critical time in its development. So, a diet rich in raw, natural, and organic foods is best in terms of safety and nutrition.

### **Many people say adopting a raw food diet for a short period can help them detoxify, but in the long run, this diet can lead to some deficiencies. What do you think?**

*Sproutman:* Many have been inspired to practice raw foods and later left the diet. But this happens with all diets. Whether it is raw food, vegan, macrobiotic, Kosher, Islamic, blood type, Atkins, South Beach, or Zone diet, most people practice the diet for a limited period of time. As for deficiencies, as I mentioned earlier, the secret to a healthy, balanced diet is how you practice it. Any diet can be executed poorly. The most successful raw foodists spend more time in the kitchen, read books and attend classes, and generally adopt a low stress lifestyle. How much time and effort you apply to your diet will determine your success.

There is nothing wrong with adopting this diet or any other, for a period of time—no matter if that's one year, five years, or more. But the question is: Are you trying to cure something? A diet of raw, sprouted, and living foods is the most therapeutic diet I know. But once your health has improved, perhaps you will be inclined to expand your diet. Or maybe you will continue it because you are comfortable, feel great, and believe in the diet for such things as longevity and disease prevention. It all depends on how comfortable and confident you are.

Truly, as our bodies change our diets change. The diet you had in your twenties is not the same as you have in your fifties. Your body is not the same. Your health issues are not the same. We must adapt our diet to match our needs. Explore your motivation. Are you facing a health challenge? Examine your lifestyle. Can you successfully practice this diet? Do you have a support system amongst friends and family for such a diet? Stir all these ingredients in the big recipe of life and ingest for as long as it remains delicious.

*This Interview was originally made for the Italian magazine "Salute Oggi" (Health Today). Salute Oggi interviews Steve Meyerowitz, Sproutman.*

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