

Eat Raw for

Energy

By Sally Andersen

A little coffee here and there certainly isn't bad for you – and some even argue that it can enhance your fitness routine – but there is no denying that caffeine is addictive and that a little can quickly turn into a lot. When it comes to increasing energy without getting the jitters, there is one group of eaters that is a step ahead of caffeine addicts: raw vegans.



Raw vegans, or raw aaaaaa"foodies," follow the standard vegan diet of no animal products but also avoid any food cooked or processed above 118 degrees Fahrenheit. Cutting out all animal and cooked products may sound restricting, but raw foodies incorporate foods that most Americans have never heard of, let alone tried, such as the protein-dense chia seeds and hemp products that contain essential amino and fatty acids. Raw foodies have also learned to prepare common foods in unique, interesting ways, such as turning vegetables into filling pates.

Part of the philosophy behind eating raw vegan food has to do with your body's ability to absorb and use the food that you eat. Enzymes, a requirement for digestion, are killed when food is cooked. Your body must compensate by providing enzymes to help with digestion. Unfortunately, your enzyme-producing organs – the liver, pancreas, stomach and intestines – get worn down with use, especially with a standard American diet. Although a healthy body can continue to make enzymes throughout its lifetime, the more it has to make, the faster it wears down.

Enzymes are what make food live. Sprouts, for example, are one of the richest forms of enzymes. Because they are essentially life, science cannot duplicate them and put them into pill form. Eating raw food is the only way to give your organs a break. By giving your organs this much needed break, you save energy. Thus, raw food helps maintain your stored energy levels.

Even if you have never heard of someone eating only raw food, you can probably think of a few examples of what they might eat

such as fruits and vegetables. But there are so many more options out there. Raw vegans also incorporate non-roasted nuts, seeds, seaweeds and soaked grains and beans.

As a raw food diet becomes more popular, there are also more options available that mimic cooked food. You can buy or prepare raw crackers, breads, soups, desserts and more. You may have to expand your grocery store repertoire to include a natural foods store, but the energy that these raw foods supply you with will be worth the extra trip.

Try adding some energy to your diet by incorporating more raw foods, especially complete raw meals. Make smoothies with fresh fruits and vegetables (spinach blends well and doesn't add flavor), adding a protein source such as raw nuts or hemp seeds, for a delicious, healthy post-workout snack. For a filling pasta-like dish, shred zucchini into spaghetti noodle-shaped pieces and toss with diced tomatoes, peppers, onions, spices and oil. And don't forget dessert – most raw desserts are healthy enough to be eaten as a meal! Use a food processor or blender to combine raisins, coconut, carob chips and nuts for surprisingly sweet raw cookie dough.

For more great raw food recipes and ideas, check out www.living-foods.com/recipes online, or "The Complete Book of Raw Food" by Lori Baird and Julie Rodwell, available through the Philadelphia Free Library. Contact Julie at Julie@phillyfitmagazine.com