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Raw power

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On a green campaign: Lisa believes that eating plant-based food leaves you more energetic and healthy
Photo: Bhagya Prakash K.

Raw food chef and vegan activist Lisa Pitman tells that one need not be apologetic about one's food choices. What you really need to be, is excited

Myth 1: Eating raw food means living off salad. Only salad.

False

Myth 2: If you're vegan, leave alone vegetarian, your choices of food at a restaurant wiggle down to two.

False

Myth 3: You can't live an entire day off food that is uncooked.

False

Meet Lisa Pitman and she'll bust these and many more myths for you. A certified raw chef from Canada, Lisa is on a new age crusade across India,

Thailand, Bali, Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii convincing people of the "The Healing Power of Plants" and converting them to "Eating Without Heating". "It's a growing movement and Toronto alone has six raw food restaurants now," says the petite Lisa, twinkle in the eye.

It's so difficult to believe that you can go on, day after day, eating raw food, so I ask Lisa for a plate-by-plate account of one day in her life in terms of what she eats. Lisa first reminds me that she's a runner, a ballet dancer and has a full-time government job as a social worker. "So I do eat a lot of calories!" she warns me. You can't believe it one bit. She starts her day with a smoothie made of kale (a variety of greens), banana, coconut milk, and oats (for texture). The snack she carries to work is either fruit or vegetables. "Lunch is a really big salad with greens, avocado, shredded beets, sauces, dry fruits and a pinch of sea salt." She snacks in the evening on a raw energy bar she makes and dinner is a veggie wrap. And hold it...she loves dessert — frozen banana whipped in a blender to ice-creamy perfection and topped with berries. "I never ever crave fried food," she declares, morphing into a goddess in my eyes.

We butt in on her lunch, which is papaya! "I love the papayas here and this morning, I tasted red-rice idlis. I've tried drumstick and the vegetable chow-chow over the last few days in Auroville," says Lisa. (While travelling, she's had to give in to some cooked food; in fact people in India have been coaxing her to "eat properly" she shrugs.) She's in India in association with SHARAN — Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature — and held two workshops at Bangalore's In The Pink Organic Bazaar and Restaurant.

Lisa's been a vegan (one who does not use animal products, including dairy) for the last 27 years, starting out as early as age 6. "There was something about eating animals that made me sick; doctors later figured I couldn't digest animal protein. That's when I turned vegan and it's brought about a dramatic change in my life. It gives me great energy and I don't have to be sick... in fact, I can't remember when I last missed a work day because I was ill," she grins.

She got interested in the growing movement in uncooked plant-based food — "It's so fast and flavourful, and you can really play around with ingredients. It's in an inventive phase. You can taste along as you cook, because the final product tastes the same as it does while you're making it," she offers the many

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Of course, to make pancakes and the like, she uses a dehydrator that sucks out only the water content (not the food's enzymes) at much less than 65 degrees celsius. She admits that raw food cuts down costs, and points out that it takes one-twentieth of the resources to feed a vegan as compared to someone on a standard American diet.

"I can make cookies in five minutes," she says with pride. "Of course there are recipes you can make over three days for special occasions, making the person feel special," she laughs. "You can marinate vegetables to soften them without cooking," she adds a tip.

Lisa's mother turned vegan when she was 50 and Lisa talks about how she was able to reverse her diabetes with the switch. Two of her brothers and their families, including her nephews and nieces have turned vegan.

There are two groups of people that usually turn to veganism, says Lisa. "Young people between 15 and 25 who are at university, are conscious about what they eat, and are making choices for the first time without parents around."

The second, is people between 55 and 75, who are battling health issues.

Does she eat out at restaurants, go to parties? "Rather than worry about my being vegan, I'm excited about sharing it. I go to regular restaurants, look at menus, talk to them and ask them to make something specific for me. You are their customer and it's their business to make sure you leave happy. Instead of apologising, get excited!" If she's going to a party, she tells them it's fine if they just set aside some fruits and vegetables for her; or she takes some ingredients along, "and then we make something together".

When she turned vegan, there were no protests in her family, but different food choices are not something families accept easily.

"Families can have challenges. Food is an intimate and important part of our lives. Parents feel that kids are rejecting the family's culture by rejecting their food. But if you make an alternate food and share it with your family, it can become fun." It has helped that celebrities like Bill Clinton, Ozzy Osbourne, Alicia Silverstone, and many Olympic athletes are talking about the benefits of turning vegan.

For details check www.veganculinarycrusade.com

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