

RAW. ONE'S A HIT

By MITALI PAREKH | Nov 19, 2011, 12.57 PM IST



Do you feel uneasy after eating certain kinds of food? Anything oily sparks acidity, milk products make your tummy uncomfortable, wheat gives you hives and meat stations you on the pot too frequently?

One thinks that allergy to processed food is a Western malady. But our diet has large amounts of maida, white rice and fried foods — all of which are processed foods. Bringing in sizeable amounts of nuts, fruits and raw vegetables into the diet could help ease your pain.

Make a start

“The traditional Indian diet is great,” says Lisa Pitman, a certified Canadian raw food chef who is in the city currently.

“With lots of vegetables, lentils, greens, whole grains, raw chutneys and katchumber. But not everyone eats a traditional thali every day. I am seeing fast food everywhere.” Pizzas and pao bhajis are our staples now. Not to forget our reliance on packaged juices and instant noodles. “Modern Indian meals contain a lot of grains and less fruits and vegetables. Salads are rare to find on menus,” she says. “Even making 20 per cent of your diet, raw-food based would be a start.” All you need to be careful about is that you’re cleaning what you eat well.

Plus, a city like Mumbai is hot and raw foods are cool, easy to digest and light. They hydrate our body better, because of the higher natural water content of fruits and vegetables, than cooked food. A happy by-product of preparing delicious food with raw ingredients is that it makes you conscious of what you are eating. Raw foods are full of vitamins and phytonutrients, many of which are destroyed by cooking. With this change, one can expect reversal of symptoms of diseases such as diabetes and heart conditions. “I have heard that India is experiencing quite an epidemic of both,” adds Pitman.

She made a choice

Pitman found she could eat very little processed food very early in life. “When I was little, less than two years old, I fell sick quite frequently,” says the author who is conducting a series of talks and cooking workshops across the city. “Almost every day, I had stomach pain and problem with my digestion. My mom began to see the connection between what I ate and how I felt. Meat made me ill immediately; consuming eggs and dairy caused me hours of pain. After lots of tests, doctors discovered that I can’t digest animal protein.”

When the doctors discovered that little Pitman could not digest most foods, she was asked to take medication every day, for the rest of her life. But she opted to change her diet instead. The results were immediate and significant. “I was suddenly feeling healthy and the pain disappeared,” she says.

Going raw

As she grew older, she learned more about the connection between diet and health. Doctors and dieticians had reported that a plant-based diet could prevent and reverse heart disease, cancer, osteoporosis, and diabetes. “The research pushed me to take a closer look at my own diet.”

The best results for me seem to come from eating whole-foods. Other than excluding animal products, avoiding refined foods such as white sugar, flour and oils, has provided me with powerful protection against many diseases.” It’s been 27 years since she’s eaten any animal products.

At the same time, her mother — who was in her late 40s — suffered from diabetes and severe asthma. She and could barely walk for more than five minutes without taking rest. In the hope to become better, she agreed to experiment and go on a vegan diet for 30 days. During her trial month, Pitman removed all the refined foods from their diet. “We shifted to eating big salads, smoothies and lots of fresh fruit,” she says.

After a year, she lost well over a hundred pounds, reversed her diabetes and stopped needing asthma medication. Seven years later, she’s not only healthier, but recently completed her second 5-km marathon run. After her mother’s illness Pitman realised that though she was healthy and active before removing refined foods from her diet, her vitality soared in bounds just a couple of weeks after removing them.

Eating raw food has brought about changes in Pitman’s energy levels. Unlike other people, she doesn’t feel drowsy or tired after eating a meal in the afternoon. “I feel fresh during after noon meetings, while others are struggling to keep their eyes open or relying on another tea or another cookie to push through. I think it’s so easy to remain positive when you are feeling well. Pain and discomfort is quite depressing and difficult to cope with on a regular basis,” she says.

Adding flavour to it

Removing flours and oils from her diet pushed her to experiment with vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. She enrolled in 105 Academy — a raw food culinary school — in the United States and learnt that majority of the vitamins and minerals in our food get destroyed by heat when the food is cooked. However, Pitman states, to enjoy the nutritional benefits of the food it doesn’t need to be 100 per cent raw. It can be cooked a little to add to the taste.

Raw plant food has also proven to be beneficial for those suffering from cancer. “American biochemist, T. Colin Campbell’s research on diet and lifestyle diseases shows that the growth of cancer cells could be turned on and off by the percentage of animal protein in our diets,” says Pitman. “Medication has not been able to produce similar effects. The fibre content of plants also supports healthy weight management and good digestion — two strong predictors of long-term wellness.”

Pitman’s main preventive arsenal is greens. “I toss them into a fruit smoothie for an extra nutritional boost,” she says. “When I’m not feeling well, I crave ginger. It calms my digestive system. I add ginger to smoothies, steep it like a tea and prepare a ginger dressing to toss with my salads,” she says.

Raw food Recipes

Pitman believes that raw food offers you healthy food choices without the high costs and negative side-effects of traditional medical treatments. Here’s how you can make the best of it:

◆ Immuno blast

Ingredients: 1 banana (peeled and frozen), ½ medium lemon (peeled), 1-inch ginger (peeled), 1-2 medium dates (pitted), 1 cup water
Preparation: Blend until smooth.

◆ Carrot & Beet Slaw with Spicy Orange Tahini Dressing

Ingredients: 3 carrots, 3 beets, ¼ cup dried apricot (chopped fine. Can be replaced with raisins or dates), ¼ cup sesame seeds

◆ Sauce

3 Tbsp raw tahini, 3 tbsp orange juice, 1/2 tsp curry powder, 1/2 tsp cinnamon, 1/4 tsp salt, 1/4 tsp black pepper. In a food processor shred the carrots and beets. Toss together in a large bowl with the apricots.

Preparation: Whisk the sauce ingredients together. Toss the salad with the sauce in the large bowl and garnish with sesame seeds.

◆ **Banana Sorbet**

Ingredients: 2 bananas (peeled and frozen), pinch of cinnamon

Preparation: In a blender or food processor, blend the bananas until a creamy, ice cream like consistency is achieved. Add a pinch of cinnamon and pulse to combine.

GALLERIES

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