RAW FOOD DIETS

There is a growing interest in raw food diets. Strong claims are being made for their health promoting value and there are associated environmental advantages.

For most people, cooking adds greatly to the palatability of meals. Although this may be due largely to habit, we tend to like what we are used to. Hot food in cold weather certainly has psychological value. Cooked food is so ingrained in the dominant cultures that the social difficulties of a strict adherence to an all raw food diet could be considerable.

It is said that cooking renders certain nutrients more available for use by the body, e.g. the pro-vitamin A in carrots and the niacin in cereals. It can make grains and other starchy foods more digestible by causing the cell walls to burst open and release the contents.

Cooking kills dangerous pathogens and destroys some harmful chemicals, in beans for example. It decreases the bulk of food and therefore makes a higher intake possible. This is important for young children whose stomachs may not be able to deal with sufficient bulk of uncooked food. It can make coarse outer leaves and tough roots edible.

However cooking destroys certain important nutrients, especially vitamin C and also folic acid, a B vitamin particularly important for pregnant women.

There is evidence that the sprouting of beans can deal with the poisons in them and sprouting grains can improve their digestibility,so that there is no need to cook them. Thorough washing can remove pathogens. Nuts and seeds are a concentrated source of the proteins and fats children require and they are more easily dealt with if made into milks by grating and blending with water.

Coarse, tough parts of vegetables are needed for compost to maintain the health of the soil.

Doubtless sufficient nourishment can be had from an all raw food diet providing that a wide variety of nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables are taken - several different ones at the same meal. Thus one food supplements another. Variety is important for all diets, especially vegan ones.

Serious deficiency symptoms could arise if there is no source of vitamin B_{12} in the diet. For most vegans this is supplied by processed foods such as yeast extracts.

Raw food takes less time to prepare and cooking requires the use of energy, mostly from non-renewable, polluting fossil fuels, nuclear power or wood. Burning fuels adds to the CO_2 of the atmosphere and hence to global warming. Nuclear power production is seriously hazardous and polluting. In the undeveloped parts of the world, the constant demand of wood for cooking is dangerously reducing tree cover. The preservation and restoration of tree cover is urgently necessary. Trees maintain the water cycle, drawing up great quantities of water that passes out through their leaves to become available as rain. They check both wind and rain erosion. They check global warming by taking in CO_2 and storing the carbon in their wood.

A raw food diet mainly dependent on the nuts and fruit yielded abundantly by trees could encourage the planting of trees but it could involve dependence on imports from tropical regions where the land is required to grow food for local people. However if sufficient prestige was given to the diet, such as is now accorded to the wasteful, cruel, meat-based diets, for it to become popular, especially in the tropics among the poor, the health and environmental advantages could be great.

SUGGESTED MENUS

BREAKFAST	Oatmeal soaked overnight. Mixed dried fruits. Grated nuts or seeds.
LUNCH	Mixed nuts and raw fruits.
SUPPER *or* DINNER	Sprouted grains and beans. Large salad with a variety of plant parts: roots, stems, fruits and leaves, especially dark green ones, and always some red items, especially carrots. Raw fruit salad and nut cream.

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