In the Raw

Can’t stand the heat? Don’t clear out of the kitchen. Instead, try this cool healthy-eating technique.

March 1, 2007 By Sara Lomax-Reese

Chef Khadijah Smith’s signature raw food dishes of marinated collards, seaweed salad and sprouted sunflower pâté are a feast for the eyes, nose and palate. But Smith’s culinary passion is not just about creating delicious food. It’s about healing the body, mind and spirit naturally.

Three years ago, Smith’s sister, Juanita Howard, 63, was beset by Alzheimer’s disease, weighed 270 pounds, wore a size 24½ and was heavily medicated. Howard had not only lost her ability to feed herself, she was prone to violent outbursts. After studying raw food nutrition, Smith switched Howard to a 90% raw diet. Today, Howard takes no medications, weighs 120 pounds and wears a size 8. “I don’t know if she’ll ever be able to take care of herself,” says Smith, 69. “But I do know that she doesn’t need to be hospitalized. [The disease] is not getting worse. She’s like a little dove, so calm and peaceful. The complete opposite of when she was medicated.”

Across the country, a growing movement heralds raw food’s healing power. Ardent fans claim it can cure devastating illness, encourage weight loss, increase energy and generally improve health. Raw foodists believe that heating food above 118 degrees kills many vital nutrients, making it less potent. Conversely, eating raw means consuming “live,” optimally fortified food. Raw food vegetarians consume a diet comprising at least 80% uncooked and unprocessed organic fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, sprouts, grains, beans, dried fruit and seaweed. “When you’re on a raw foods lifestyle,” says Smith, “you’re going with God’s natural law.”

“Every animal on the planet [except humans] eats its food raw,” says Frederick Douglas Burton, MD, a Philadelphia-area physician whose internal medicine practice focuses on holistic approaches to healing. “Primarily, we are designed to eat raw. The only downside is it’s not as convenient. Healthwise, it’s a strict positive.”

But some nutrition experts say that a completely raw diet should include a warning label. “It can be healthful, but it has to be appropriately done and monitored,” says Joel Edman, DSc, director of integrative nutrition at the Jefferson-Myrna Brind Center of Integrative Medicine in Philadelphia. “If you’re feeling better [on a raw foods diet], good, but if you’re not feeling well, there may be some issues.”

Some doctors warn that pregnant women, children and anyone with an immune deficiency should steer clear of a mostly raw diet. And according to some research, cooking may actually enhance the body's ability to absorb certain foods. Absorption of beta-carotene, a potent antioxidant found in carrots, sweet potatoes and other colorful vegetables, which has been shown to protect against cancer, increases when the vegetable is cooked.

But including salads, fresh fruits, nuts and seeds in your meals is a healthy compromise. Dr. Burton recommends that 50% of every meal be raw. And there's no better time to increase your raw consumption than in the spring, when nature makes it easier to adopt a lighter, plant-based diet. Eating lots of greens, sprouts, seeds and berries will help you shed winter weight and increase your energy and vitality.

Try these recipes to add more raw foods to your diet:

Kale Salad
1 large bunch (4 cups) kale
1 medium red bell pepper
¾ cup kalamata olives
1 small sweet onion
½ lemon
2 tbsps extra virgin olive oil
2 tbsps Bragg Liquid Aminos (available in grocery or health food stores)
1 tsp Spike seasoning (available in grocery or health food stores)

Clean and cut kale into strips. Cut red pepper into strips. Chop onion.
Mix all ingredients. Serves four. Recipe by Johnetta Frazier

Per 8-ounce serving: 140 calories, 4 grams protein, 6 grams fat, < 1 gram saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 140 milligrams sodium

"Fried" Rice
1 cup red bell pepper, chopped
1 cup carrots, sliced
½ cup green onions, chopped
½ cup red beets, julienned
¼ cup purple cabbage, julienned
½ cup peas
½ cup yams, julienned
1 cup water chestnuts, peeled and chopped
1 cup sprouted brown rice (see instructions, below)
1 tbsp ginger, minced
1 tbsp garlic, minced
1 tsp jalapeño, minced
¼ cup Nama Shoyu (raw unpasteurized soy sauce)

¼ cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
½ cup olive oil
2 tsps orange rind, grated

Combine the above ingredients (except orange rind) in a serving bowl. Mix. Sprinkle rind on top. Serves two.

Per 8-oz serving: 845.6 calories, 9.6 grams protein, 55.7 grams fat, 7.5 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 1,298 milligrams sodium. To reduce calories to 607, reduce olive oil to 2 tablespoons; to reduce calories to 369, eliminate olive oil. To reduce sodium by up to 50%, use low-sodium soy sauce.

How to sprout rice: Place rice in a large bowl, and cover with filtered water. Let soak for nine hours. Place a colander over the bowl and drain all the water. Leave the rice in the colander overnight. The next day, rinse the rice in a bowl filled with water and swirl grains by hand. Return the rice to the colander until the next rinsing, one day later. Rinse once daily until your rice sprouts a "tail" about a quarter-inch long (takes about three to five days). Next, place the sprouts in a container in the refrigerator; this helps to slow the growing process and preserve the sprouts. The longer the tail grows, the more water it retains; sprouts with longer tails have less flavor and tend to be watery. To maximize freshness, prepare and eat within three days. *From Raw: The Uncook Book* by Juliano Brotman with Erika Lenkert (Regan Books).

Nut Meat Chili
1 lb Brazil nuts
1 tbsp cumin
1 tbsp chili powder
3 chopped tomatoes
1 8-oz jar salsa
1 scallion
1 clove garlic
8 large lettuce leaves

Grind Brazil nuts in a food processor. Add remaining ingredients (except lettuce), and mix in food processor. Spread each lettuce leaf with guacamole (see following recipe), add chili and roll into wraps. Serve immediately. Serves four. Recipe from www.soulvegetarian.com.

Per 8-ounce serving: 801 calories, 19.2 grams protein, 75.8 grams fat, 18.4 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 436 milligrams sodium. To reduce calories to 615, use three ounces of Brazil nuts.

Guacamole
2 ripe avocados
½ medium onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, finely minced

2 tbsp green pepper, diced
1 medium tomato, diced
½ tsp salt
1 tbsp cilantro, finely chopped (optional)
Juice of 1 lime

Mash avocados. Add all ingredients, and blend well. Serves four. Recipe by Sara Lomax-Reese.

Per four-ounce serving: 212 calories, 4 grams protein, 13.7 grams fat, 2.7 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 29.9 milligrams sodium

New Moon Fruit Stew
½ cup plantains, sliced
½ cup apple, diced
½ cup avocado, diced
½ cup pitted dates, diced
½ cup kiwi, diced
½ cup fresh strawberries, diced
½ cup pineapple, diced (optional)
½ cup berries of your choice, diced
1 tsp jalapeño, minced (optional)
2 cups fresh-squeezed orange juice
2/3 cup fresh-squeezed lemon juice
1 cup dates, whole
1¼ cups frozen strawberries or other berries.

In a large serving bowl, combine plantains, apple, avocado, diced dates, kiwi, fresh strawberries, pineapple, other berries and ½ tsp jalapeño. Set aside. In a blender, combine orange juice, lemon juice, whole dates, frozen strawberries or other berries and the remaining ½ tsp of jalapeño. Blend the frozen fruit until sauce has a creamy consistency. Pour the contents of the blender over the bowl of fruit, and serve immediately. Serves four. *From Raw: The Uncook Book* by Juliano Brotman with Erika Lenkert (Regan Books).

Per 10-ounce serving: 328 calories, 3.5 grams protein, 3.5 grams fat, < 1 gram saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 7.8 milligrams sodium

Sara Lomax-Reese is certified as a holistic health and nutrition counselor by the American Academy of Drugless Practitioners.

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