



BY CAMILLA RANKIN

# food diet

A midwife's tips for eating raw during pregnancy

**E**ating healthily during pregnancy is the first decision you will make that acknowledges that you are now a parent and are responsible for the health of another person. More and more research is showing that eating a healthy, balanced diet during pregnancy is not only essential for the healthy development of your child, it also helps your own body cope with the rigours of pregnancy and birth and has a long-lasting impact on your child's eating habits and therefore health.

So upping your fruit and vegetable intake, making sure you don't skip meals and drinking lots of water are all good steps to take, but Johannesburg-based midwife Sr Sharon Marsay recommends taking your pregnancy diet one step further: going raw – eating only unprocessed, uncooked foods – for the last four weeks of your pregnancy.

## BASIC BIOLOGY

Sharon explains the biology behind it: your cells are responsible for every one of your body's functions, and for optimum cell and therefore body functioning, you need specific enzymes and sugars.

Heating food over 40 degrees changes food's chemical make-up; the heating process destroys the significant benefits of the enzymes and sugars that occur naturally in food and makes them much more difficult to digest. "This is particularly important for pregnancy and labour," Sharon says, "as you want your body to be functioning at its absolute optimum. On average, my first time

mothers' labours last six hours!" Why? "Because they have slowly, over the course of their pregnancy, changed their diet to include a lot more raw food and finally followed a complete raw food diet for the last four weeks of their pregnancy.

"This means that these mothers' uteruses are able to work most effectively, as they are not tired and swollen but elastic, stretchy and able to dilate swiftly. Eating raw leading up to birth also helps reduce blood loss after birth and speeds up healing."

## GOING RAW

The first piece of advice is not to rush into it and overwhelm your system. You can't wake up at 36 weeks and change your diet entirely – even if you weren't pregnant this would not be advisable. "From about 12 weeks, when the hormones are settling and you are less likely to be suffering from morning sickness, start to include more raw food in your diet, increase your water intake and cut out highly processed foods," Sharon suggests.

"This gentle transition is like a detox. Between 24 and 28 weeks you will find it hard to digest three big meals a day, not just because your baby is taking up space, but also because your digestive system slows down so that it has more chance to absorb every nutrient it can from the food you eat. So if you have not already, then start to graze on small meals throughout the day, increasing the percentage of raw foods in your daily diet. Finally, try to go completely raw for the final stretch".

## ALL OR NOTHING?

It is not an all or nothing way of eating; you will still feel many of the benefits by simply increasing the amount of raw food you eat without completely eliminating cooked meals. Homeopath Dr Heidi van Loggerenberg says, "You don't have to eat 100 percent raw food. You can eat whatever percentage you feel amazing on, but do try and aim for a raw percentage of between 60 and 80 percent." Increase your intake of plant-based foods, especially leaves such as kale, spinach, parsley and lettuce. A variety of leaves is best, the darker green the better. Green smoothies, green juices and savoury green soups are an ideal way of getting in four to six cups of greens in per day.

"Eating raw does not mean you have to be a vegetarian or vegan, although many raw foodists are," adds Heidi. Pregnancy is not a time to restrict your diet, and many people worry that they won't get enough proteins or omegas if opt for all-vegetable diets. Eating seared meat and fish will ensure that you still get protein, essential omegas and enzymes into your system. "Also take a full spectrum probiotic, especially during the last three months of pregnancy and especially if you eliminate yoghurt from your diet," Heidi advises. "It's essential for your baby to start its life with its gastro-intestinal tract well stocked with beneficial bacteria."

Sharon suggests that those mothers who want to try should go at least 80 percent raw. This means eating raw food the whole day and then eating a cooked meal for dinner, for example. **YP**



## It's not just carrot sticks

To give you some inspiration here are some delicious recipes from a Jo'burg vegan and raw food restaurant: Fresh Earth ([www.freshearth.co.za](http://www.freshearth.co.za)). Raw food is not just celery sticks and shredded beetroot.

Raw can be decadent and healthy at the same time. This recipe was originally created by Peter and Berwyn Daniels from Rawlicious and is a must if you want to spoil yourself without the guilt.

### RAW CHOCOLATE MOUSSE CAKE

#### CRUST INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup pitted dates.
- 1 cup hazelnuts.
- ½ cup coconut.
- 1 tbsp. apple juice.

#### FILLING INGREDIENTS

- 4 avocados.
- 1 cup raw cacao powder.
- ¼ cup coconut butter.
- ½ cup agave nectar.
- 1 tbsp. orange juice.
- 1 tsp. orange peel, chopped.

#### METHOD FOR THE CRUST

- ✓ Chop the pitted dates into small pieces.
- ✓ Add the hazelnuts, coconut and

apple juice.

- ✓ Turn on the electronic mixer and slowly add the ingredients while the machine is running.
- ✓ Blend all the ingredients until they are mashed up.
- ✓ Press into the mould and then place into the freezer to set.

#### METHOD FOR THE FILLING

- ✓ Halve the avocado and scoop into the mixer.
- ✓ Add the coconut butter, cacao powder and agave nectar.
- ✓ Blend until very smooth.
- ✓ Add the orange rind and the orange juice and blend further until smooth.
- ✓ Remove the mould from the freezer and fill with the chocolate mousse.
- ✓ Place back into the freezer to set.

### GREEN SMOOTHIE

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 kale leaves
- 1 mango: washed, peeled, pip removed.

#### METHOD

- ✓ Place in blender.
- ✓ Add water to reach your desired consistency.

Blend until smooth but don't over blend as the friction and heat generated can

## WORD OF WARNING

IT IS NEVER RECOMMENDED TO EAT COMPLETELY RAW MEAT AND FISH OR UNPASTEURISED DAIRY PRODUCTS IN PREGNANCY BECAUSE OF THE POTENTIALLY HARMFUL BACTERIA THEY COULD CONTAIN, WHICH IS WHY SUSHI, BILTONG AND BLUE CHEESE ARE ON THE NO-NO LIST. BEFORE EMBARKING ON ANY KIND OF DIET OR EATING PLAN DURING PREGNANCY SPEAK TO YOUR DOCTOR OR MIDWIFE ABOUT IT

destroy the nutrients and enzymes. Kale has the added benefit of being from the brassica family so it helps with oestrogen detox and so maintain healthy oestrogen levels. If you can't find kale in shops, plant your own. Otherwise use spinach, rocket, or any other edible dark green leaf. Don't use lettuce – it's bitter in a smoothie.

Apples, pears, bananas (frozen bananas are divine), peaches, apricots, or frozen berries – all these fruits can be frozen in chunks in ziplock bags so that you have some even when it's not the season for them.

Resources: [www.bodygrace.co.za](http://www.bodygrace.co.za); [www.rawfoodandjuice.com](http://www.rawfoodandjuice.com); [www.kanyekanye.co.za](http://www.kanyekanye.co.za); The raw vegan world in SA; [www.leafygreens.co.za](http://www.leafygreens.co.za); [www.joziuncooked.com](http://www.joziuncooked.com); [www.healthmakers.co.za](http://www.healthmakers.co.za).

