

Frederic Patenaude - Challenged on the High-Fruit Raw Diet

I was recently interviewed by the Fresh Network for a special event they are doing for their magazine, where they are interviewing different raw food expert and challenging them with important questions about the raw-food lifestyle that are often left unanswered.

I'm publishing below a part of the interview. Each expert got a slightly different set of questions. As you'll see, mine featured a lot of questions on the fruit-based diet and the concerns that many people have about it.

Q. How much fruit do you think we should consume for optimal health, and why?

A. For optimal health on a raw vegan diet, we should consume enough fruit to provide us with the bulk of our calories. The reason is quite simple: no other food that can be eaten raw can provide us with sufficient calories, vitamins and other nutrients while at the same time be low in fat. Fruits are packed with vitamins, minerals, and contain enough calories to maintain our weight. One pound of lettuce only yields 63 calories, while one pound of bananas yields 400. To this fruit-based diet, we add 1 to 4 pounds of vegetables and non-sweet fruits per day, which will provide additional mineral density, such as sodium, which may be lacking in fruit.

Q. Please comment on the following: "Although it is clear from our anatomy and physiology that we are frugivores, the fruit that is commercially available today is so different from the fruit our earliest ancestors ate that it is no longer an ideal food for us. Specifically, it is much lower in minerals and much higher in sugar. Therefore, is it not wise to consume sweet fruit in moderation and favour non-sweet fruits, and vegetables, as those foods are likely closer to the fruits on which our ancestors based their diets?"

A. I don't believe there's any evidence for the sugar content of fruits that our "earliest ancestors" ate. If so, I would be interested to see it. We're talking millions of years, so I don't think it's possible to know what the sugar content was back then.

From having traveled the world, I know that the sugar content of wild fruits varies greatly. Some wild fruits are not very sweet and others are extremely sweet. I believe it would have been the same for foods grown millions of years ago.

Let's compare two raw vegan diets of 2000 calories. Let's say that someone follows the advice of eating fewer sweet fruits and more non-sweet fruits and vegetables. Because there are not enough calories in the diet, the person will invariably be drawn to eat more fatty foods such as avocados. The result will be an unhealthy diet containing too much fat, even more than what is traditionally recommended as the upper limit.

On the other hand, a person eating mostly fruits grown today can eat the same quantity of vegetables and non-sweet fruits as the person described above, but will avoid the problem of excess fat. So the diet will be more nutritious, contain more minerals from vegetables and less fat.

Q. Do you believe it is advisable to eat seasonally and locally? And if so, aren't those living in cold climates where no fruit grows for 6+ months of the year better off focusing on foods that do grow in their locality, and enjoying local fruits when they are in season, rather than eating imported fruit year round?

A. Yes, I believe it's a good thing to eat seasonally and locally as much as possible. However, it's not advisable to make it a religion and avoid imported fruits when local fruits are scarce and not sufficient to provide enough calories in the diet. If not, you will be forced to eat other things such as cooked grains, which are not as healthy.

Q. It is very difficult to get ripe fruit these days. Most commercially available fruit is picked 1-2 months before it's ripe. What are the consequences of consuming unripe fruit?

A. Yes, fruits are picked unripe but they ripen after they've been picked and should be fairly ripe when you eat them.

There would be negative consequences to eating a truly unripe fruit, such as a green banana, which could lead to indigestion. But no one eats them that way.

What I believe people should do is seek the best quality fruit they can. It doesn't matter that it's been picked a few weeks earlier, as long as it has had the right conditions to continue ripening properly. Even in the tropics, bananas are picked green, otherwise they would get eaten by monkeys and other animals!

Q. Sugar consumption is known to accelerate the aging process as it contributes to cross-linking of collagen in the skin and also the formation of Advanced Glycation End-products (AGEs), both externally and internally. Given the link between sugar and aging is it not wise to consume sweet fruit in moderation or not at all and to favour low-sugar plant foods instead?

A. I did some research and found this from <http://longevity.about.com/od/researchandmedicine/p/crosslinking.htm>

"Researchers believe that if the concentration of sugar in the blood is high, then more cross-linking occurs. Everyone could benefit from keeping their blood sugar from spiking."

If you read the above statement, you will understand that it's not sugar per se that is the problem (after all, our cells need sugar), but high levels of blood sugar, which is completely different. **One of the main factors resulting in high blood sugar is the over consumption of fat** (for proof, see the works of Dr. Joel Fuhrman, Dr. Neal Barnard, Dr. John McDougall, Dr. Michael Klaper, Dr. Doug Graham, Dr. Dean Ornish).

By trying to avoid sugar in fruit, a person will invariably consume more fat, which will lead to the very problem they were trying to avoid in the first place: high blood sugar. On a low fat diet, consuming large amounts of fruit only results in normal, not high blood sugar.

On a personal note, I have tested on myself and with many people using a blood sugar monitor the sugar response from eating fruit. I have found that even after eating a large quantity of bananas (as many as 15), blood sugar doesn't spike, is extremely stable and in the healthy range, and that for hours.

The author Steve Pavlina also did similar experiments and came to the same conclusions: <http://www.stevpavlina.com/blog/2008/02/raw-food-diet/>

Q. Since it is known that sugar feeds cancer cells, and that cancer cells have more insulin receptors than normal cells and therefore will get fed first when sugar is consumed, is it wise for someone with cancer to cut down on all sugars, including those found in fruit?

A. Again, I believe here the key is to avoid high blood sugar, rather than sugar itself. The only way to keep your blood sugar stable and avoid the spikes and crashes is to eat a low fat diet and keep your body fat at reasonable levels. Other factors such as exercise will improve your insulin sensitivity.

It's not possible to avoid sugar completely. If no simple sugars are consumed, complex carbs will be broken down into simple sugars. If no carbs are consumed, the body is forced to convert fat into fatty acids and ketone bodies for survival during a state referred to as "ketosis", which is essentially what happens during fasting. The body needs a source of energy, and simple sugars are its preferred source.

The consumption of fruit in the context of a low fat diet promotes a stable sugar, which could be key in recovering from cancer.

It is good to note that the American Cancer Society recommends plenty of fresh fruits. ((REF: <http://tinyurl.com/8a3e3>)