

## **Strictly Speaking** by Lisa Marie Lindenschmidt

Have you ever had someone comment on your diet as “strict” because of what you're *not* eating? I love this! I taught an introductory raw foods class recently. At the beginning of these classes, I give the definition of raw foods as centering around fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and sprouted grains... and then I pause to check reactions. They're always the same: a little glazed-over stare and then the mumbled, Um, OK. That's it...? I love this part of class because I can see people's minds spinning. They're about to go into panic and rejection mode: This diet has too many restrictions. Forget it!

Well, I wish my students were here now. I am typing this article while eating my Top Secret Recipe Raw Vegan Chocolate Candy while drinking yerba mate tea with honey... for breakfast. Help me! I'm suffering over here because of my restricted diet! (Note: That was sarcasm.)

But, seriously, let's look at this idea of restriction. When I became vegetarian, almost everyone I told said the same thing, “Oh, man. I don't know if I could live without meat.” When I became vegan, people bemoaned that perceived loss as well: “No dairy, eggs, *or* refined sugar? Not me!” Raw vegan? “No bread?!?” What's happening here? Why did no one comment on how good I must be feeling? Why did no one say, “That's awesome! I couldn't imagine living without my green juices!”

American society seems to be focused on choice – having choice, having a *myriad* of choices, and ensuring that we always have the freedom *to* choose. When those choices are threatened or perceived as being threatened, we get defiant, we rebel, we puff up and defend our “freedoms.” But my challenge to my students – and to you – is to look at this on its head. What if we turned it around?

Many people I encounter are not happy with their health, their weight, or their food choices and they're trying to find ways to change. Inevitably people list off their “sins”: pizza, cigarettes, alcohol, coffee, candy. I am then regaled with all the things they “know they should be doing”: exercise, greens, herbal teas, smaller portions. Sound familiar? Ever wondered why it doesn't work? Who wants to take away all the things that give them pleasure... to find health and happiness? Doesn't this seem a little counter-intuitive? When I was transitioning over to a raw vegan diet, I found myself eating mostly raw and vegan... and then ordering pizza in. At first, I really struggled with the hypocrisy of it. Then, I realized that, at the time, I associated pizza and a movie with my family as something that brought me joy. Over the next few months, those pizza orders got further and further apart as I began to work on my emotions around food and incorporate healthier foods into my diet. We haven't ordered pizza in months and, more

importantly, I don't crave it. I couldn't start from a place of subtraction and denial; I had to start with adding and accepting and working *with*.

I remember telling a student once, “I don't care if you eat steak or not, if you're enjoying it – but you have to define enjoyment for yourself. Where does it start for you? Is it in the eating of the food? How the food was produced? How was it packaged? What your emotions were when you were preparing it? Who you were eating it with?” What's really missing in our health is not some magickal cure-all pill or goji berries or green smoothies. What's really missing is joy, intention, and appreciation.

If we can start thinking in terms of *adding* things back into our lives and, hence, our diets, then we'll begin to understand that the real restriction was our separation of ourselves from our experiences and our food. The more you begin to *add* healthier options and attitudes to your diet, the less room you will have for the unhealthier ones.

So, when people ask me now if I feel like I'm missing out on certain foods because of my dietary choices, I always say, “Dude, I have *candy* for breakfast. Are you *kidding*?!”

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