

Macrobiotic Diet

The macrobiotic diet is based on ancient Eastern spiritual traditions that seek to balance the two opposing forces of Yin and Yang. This vegetarian diet claims to promote spiritual and physical well-being. By correcting what is perceived as energy imbalance, adherents of this diet claim it can prevent and cure disease.

Macrobiotic methodology was brought to Europe from Japan by George Ohsawa in the early 1900s. Proponents of the diet claim it is better to choose food that is less processed, more natural, locally grown, organically grown and to use more traditional methods of cooking.

The essential components of the diet are: whole grain cereals, pulses (legumes), vegetables (mostly green leafy vegetables), some fruit (2-3 portions per week), sea vegetables and fermented soy products, combined into meals according to the principle of balance between Yin and Yang. Cereals (and in particular, rice), which are seen as being naturally balanced in terms of Yin and Yang make up the main part of the diet.

Foods which are either extremely Yin in nature (e.g. coffee, tropical fruit, sugar, some dairy products, alcohol and honey) or extremely Yang in nature (e.g. poultry, meat, dairy products, eggs, refined sea salt) are eaten very rarely if at all.

Fish, nuts and seeds can be eaten occasionally. Other animal products, like meat, milk, cheese and eggs are not eaten. Two or three portions of non-oily fish per week with an additional limit on other protein-rich foods like seeds and nuts is a risk to health and deficiencies may occur.

The following fluids are listed in the 'use sparingly or avoid' list: artificial beverages, carbonated water, cold drinks, iced drinks, coffee, distilled water, hard liquor, regular tea, stimulant beverages and tap water. These sorts of exclusions make staying hydrated very difficult; above all else, staying hydrated is vital to remain healthy.

Many of the principles of the macrobiotic diet are environmentally, ethically and morally sound: choosing locally grown seasonal foods, using less processed foods and cooking from scratch. However the total exclusion of animal products, the limited use of suitable substitutes, wide ranging restrictions on types of fluids and a restriction on fruit intake means strict adherence to this diet may cause health problems. Deficiencies in protein, essential fats, vitamins B12 and D, zinc, calcium and iron may occur. This is particularly significant for people with increased nutritional needs, such as children, people who are ill, the elderly, athletes and pregnant women.