

IT'S CRUNCH TIME, PEOPLE. THE ONLY RULE? RAW IS LAW. AND (SHOCK) IT'S NOT ALL RABBIT FOOD, SAYS HELEN WHITAKER

ACTRESS Amanda Seyfried caused controversy recently when comments about her "intense" and "sort of awful" raw food diet hit headlines. Of course, a starlet dieting to stay slim is nothing new in Hollywood, but her brutal honesty about what it takes to maintain an A-list figure was enough to make people sit up and take notice. "Yesterday for lunch?" she told *Esquire* magazine. "Spinach. Just spinach. Spinach and some seeds."

Despite Amanda's derisive comments, it also drew attention to another rising trend. Whereas raw foodism was once associated with hemp and hippies, the movement has increasingly been attracting beauty junkies in their 20s and 30s. The reason this demographic is switching to raw is because it's what Ani Phyo, celebrity raw food chef and author of *Ari's Raw Food Essentials* (available June; pre-order at www.amazon.com), calls the "ultimate anti-ageing diet".

"When done right, raw meals are packed with antioxidants," Phyo says. "Every ingredient I use is on the [approved] superfood list – broccoli, blueberries, strawberries, and lots of nuts, seeds and essential fatty acids like hempseed and flaxseed. Nuts and seeds are high in 'beauty vitamins' A, C and E, which along with essential fatty acids feed the collagen in our skin to keep it plump, elastic and looking youthful." Other aesthetic benefits include shinier hair and stronger nails.

There are various strains of raw foodism

(including fruitarian and sproutarian) but the most common type is vegan. It's all about removing processed foods from the diet and eating a variety of fruit, vegetables (including sprouts and beans), seeds, nuts and grains, and also avoiding heating food above 46°C, which is thought to destroy the "live" enzymes found in raw food that aid digestion (although critics argue we don't need these enzymes because our body produces its own enzymes that digest food).

The other big benefit is that a raw diet is effective for losing weight and maintaining weight loss. "In the long run you don't eat as much food, because the body is satisfied much sooner," says Phyo, who has created raw menus for celebrities like Adam Levine and Adrian Grenier, and twice been voted Sexiest Raw Vegan Woman of the Year.

"If you eliminate empty kilojoules and eat dense, nutrient-rich food, then you're going to lose weight."

Angela Stokes-Monarch, 31, agrees. In 2002, she was morbidly obese, but after going raw she went from 133kg to 61kg in two years, and has kept the weight off. "When we stop polluting our bodies with processed foods we're not designed to run on, and instead eat simple foods straight from the earth, our bodies naturally release excess weight and balance out to a 'normal' size," she explains, adding the switch to raw food has boosted her immune system, energy levels and concentration.

And contrary to the, let's face it, tedious image of endless plates of veggie sticks,

The raw food revolution



DETOXING CAN GO ONE OF TWO WAYS – EUPHORIA OR CLEANSING CRISIS. PACE YOURSELF.

"raw" is no longer synonymous with tasteless food. Hip restaurants such as Santa Monica's Planet Raw are popping up to cater for the new upscale following, and the luxury Six Senses Destination Spa Phuket in Thailand has opened a dedicated raw restaurant. Executive chef Bryan Burger prepares adventurous dishes like coconut crepes filled with mushroom, and mango and lime tart with lavender ice-cream.

"Last year my husband and I enjoyed a fully raw wedding with astounding gourmet raw creations, including a triple-layer wedding cake," Angela says. "Even those not accustomed to eating raw were coming back for more."

The main criticism of the diet is that by so strictly limiting what they consume, raw foodies risk nutritional deficiencies (such as iron and calcium) and osteoporosis, but advocates argue all essential vitamins and minerals can be found in raw food – if you look for them. For example, osteoporosis can be counteracted by eating bone-building foods such as pumpkin seeds, spinach, kale, almonds and figs.

Converts can also expect to experience initial detox symptoms, such as fatigue and headaches, as their body gets used to the lifestyle. "The Raw Food Coach" Karen Knowler, author of *50 Quick, Easy, Healthy & Delicious Raw Food Recipes* (www.therawfoodcoach.com), explains: "Detoxing can go one of two ways – euphoria or 'cleansing crisis'. I don't think anyone escapes either at various stages of the transition, but pacing yourself is the best way to detox."

Phyo agrees. "The easiest way to go raw is to add a salad that's at least as big as your usual main meal. Have the salad first, and you'll probably be too full to finish the other meal. Slowly increase the raw food and decrease the cooked."

But you don't have to go totally raw to enjoy the benefits. Phyo describes herself as around 80-90 per cent raw, and former Spice Girl Mel B eats raw during the day and cooked food at night. "Many women find a good balance between eating raw at home and eating whatever they want when they go out," says Knowler.

Amanda Seyfried take note: there's more to raw than plates of spinach...