



Crespo, H. (2013). Epicureanism and the live foods lifestyle. *Society of Friends of Epicurus Journal*, 1, pp. 8-11.

## Epicureanism and the Live Foods Lifestyle

By **Hiram Crespo**, editor.

When someone or something attacks an ant-hill, soldier ants will swarm in a matter of seconds around the threat and keep it contained. Similarly, when we are scarred due to violence or due to an accident, or when a virus or foreign bacteria enters our bodies, some of our blood cells behave like soldier ants swarming around the threat, containing it, coagulating blood in order to ensure that the precious resource is not lost, and a vast concerted effort by the immune system is carried out without any conscious effort on our part.

Nature, evolution, and natural selection, have given us the means to defend ourselves from threats and to survive. There is a dietary lifestyle, made famous in part by Max Gerson (who elaborated a natural cancer therapy that bears his name) and by natural health pioneer [Ann Wigmore](#), known as the live foods lifestyle. You may have read or heard of the 'raw foodies', or 'live foodists' online or during your visits to health stores. The philosophy behind live foods is that the body already has the wisdom to cure itself, that we simply have to optimize its potential by eating food that does not tax the immune system.

Live foodists believe that if one cooks food over a certain temperature (for most foods, generally over 118 degrees F), the enzymes (which help our bodies to assimilate and convert the foods to energy) begin to die and the nutritional value of the food is lost.

*[Let food be your medicine and let medicine be your food.](#)* - Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine

In recent years, a new field known as gastro-neurology has emerged. Research demonstrates that humans have what's being called a second brain in the stomach, which is about the size of a cat's brain. I am more tempted to call it the first brain, having evolved earlier. Our main brain could have only grown out of a less complex, more primal organ. [This Scientific American article](#) states:

*Cutting-edge research is currently investigating how the second brain mediates the body's immune response; after all, at least 70 percent of our immune system is aimed at the gut to expel and kill foreign invaders.*

*UCLA's Mayer is doing work on how the trillions of bacteria in the gut "communicate" with enteric nervous system cells (which they greatly outnumber). His work with the gut's nervous system has led him to think that in coming years psychiatry will need to expand to treat the second brain in addition to the one atop the shoulders.*

Just as the soldier ants use chemicals to communicate with each other, the neurons in our stomach also coordinate communication throughout our bodies in order to heal and protect us.

My own experiments with live foods took place mainly during 2009, after I went to the emergency room twice with heart palpitations and was forced by my doctor (and by my body) to overcome caffeine addiction. I read that one is encouraged to drink lots of water during this process and that the body was detoxing.

As I delved into the healing process, I decided to experience a full live-foods detox, including colon hydrotherapy to fully cleanse my colon. Immediately after the colon cleanse, I felt more calm, alive, in control of my body and mind, and alert. I even noticed aromas from flowers in my neighborhood that I had never noticed prior to this experience, although I had been living in this neighborhood for about five years. My senses of sight and smell got more acute as a result of the colon cleanse.

This was very unexpected and naturally, although I'm not entirely a raw-foodist, I still incorporate much of the wisdom from that time into my lifestyle and I've encouraged some of my friends to learn about it.

My live foods experiments were a major learning experience for me and changed my relationship with food forever. After this, I began brewing my own kombucha, I've experimented with sea weeds, superfoods like raw cacao and maca, and all-natural mood boosters like yerba maté, durian and kava.

### **Epicureanism and the Live Foods Lifestyle**

I am sharing all of this here because it was Epicurus who said: *The beginning and root of every good is the pleasure of the stomach.* He also encouraged a simple life, and as far as simple living, it does not get simpler than the live foods lifestyle: a vegan diet of fruits, uncooked vegetables, nuts, seeds, greens, and fermented foods with healthy gut bacteria like kombucha, kim chee, etc.

But also, Epicurus taught that what is good is pleasurable and that what is pleasurable is good: that body and mind have the wisdom to recognize that which is good for us. I very strongly believe this, but I also believe that for the last 100 years, humans have been eating an unnatural, unhealthy, processed diet that has damaged our natural responses to food and devolved into addictions to sugar, caffeine, and other evils. Modern man oftentimes is led by bad bacteria in his gut, or by addictions in his brain, to think that foods that are bad for him are good and vice versa.

The connection between the stomach and the emotional life, and our sense of well-being, is very deep and it probably goes back to the early days of our lives, when we were breast fed by our mothers and felt entirely safe, complete, in the state of pure pleasure, of primal ataraxia that newborn babies experience.

*The immune system, what it does is distinguish between me and the other, and when one falls in love, the loved one is not perceived as other by the body. – Amit Goswami*

In Epicureanism, all spirituality is embodied. The visceral, the guts, seem to be the location of much of our primal reactions and instincts. The emotional and existential aspects of consumption and diet, and the relationship between eating and associating with others, deserve further treatment within the Epicurean tradition. When we relate to others, and when we consume food, we are bringing into our bodies and experiences the other,

something external, and making it a part of us. Research demonstrates that this has physical and health repercussions.

Rather than propose an ideal Epicurean diet, what follows is a brief survey of the diet of ancient Greeks, which would have been Epicurus' diet, plus an invitation to consider experimenting with the live foods lifestyle and the consumption of mood-boosting superfoods in our culinary experiments.

### **What Epicurus Ate**

Ancient Greeks dined almost daily on bread (leavened and unleavened) and water. These were the two main features at Epicurus' table, according to sources. **Epicurus stayed hydrated daily.**

We also know that, from time to time, he enjoyed cheese. Goat cheese and cottage cheese were the main cheeses consumed in ancient Greece.

Milk was believed to be a barbaric food by the Greeks. However, in its fermented form (as yogurt or cheese), it was a delicacy. We know today that fermented foods such as these have the good bacteria that helps us to digest our food and to fight disease, and that most humans lack the enzymes to digest milk properly after a certain age. And so, the choice of consuming cheese as a major source of protein, which already contains within it the bacteria that helps to digest it, is wise indeed.

Epicurus' diet also incorporated other features of the now-famous Mediterranean diet: olives and olive oil, honey and honey cakes, lentils and peas, onions, cabbage, and greens. A little wine, which was diluted in water, was also consumed almost daily. In the mornings, a typical breakfast consisted in bread dipped in wine.

Beef and pork were only consumed rarely and during religious festivals by most Greeks. Fish was the main animal-derived protein consumed with some frequency: sardines, anchovies, tuna, octopus, and shellfish. It was cooked in olive oil and flavored with rosemary, bay leaf, and thyme. We know today that fish such as these contain Omega 3 oils, which act as mood-boosters, natural anti-depressants, and are excellent food for the brain.

To the many virtues of the now-popular Mediterranean diet, we must add the fact that ancient Greeks did not consume sugar as many do today. Instead, they sweetened their foods with figs, dates, raisins, apples, pomegranates, fruits, and honey. Anyone who has experimented with alternative sweeteners knows that it only takes a little honey to create a simple yet sumptuous meal, and that dates are usually so dense in flavor that a little goes a long way. This more natural, less processed, way of sweetening and flavoring food certainly contributes to the health benefits that the Mediterranean diet is today known for.

*Only wolves and lions eat alone. You should not eat, not even a snack, on your own. - Epicurus*

How one ate was just as important as what one ate. Epicurus' own conviction on this reflected Greek conventions. Ancient Greeks ate together without utensils, using their hands and using bread as a spoon just as Ethiopians do today. Whereas other apes groom each other in order to bond, Epicurus believed that civilized humans eat together: eating is a communal event in an Epicurean lifestyle.

### **Live Foods and Superfoods**

The world of live foods is as vast as nature itself. If you're curious about live foods, my advise is that you learn at your own pace and treat each experiment as a learning process. I have friends that do month-long live foods experiments.

Some people are 100 % into live foods and even go through periods of fruitarianism. However, most raw-foodists do an 80-20% or a 60-40% combination of cooked and live foods. While these lifestyles are not as austere as one might think, and in fact most of our ancestors fully lived these lifestyles for hundreds of millenia and the foods enjoyed are quite pleasant, it's usually not good to be an extremist and temporary experiments with live foods are probably the ideal.

Most of us need to reacquaint ourselves with the simple pleasure of eating an apple, greens, a pineapple, an avocado, or a tomato in its natural state. THIS is what live foods are about. It's also what Epicureanism is about: the desire to eat is a necessary pleasure, and we're advised to fully nurture and enjoy it.

Even if you incorporate live foods as a small percentage of your dietary lifestyle, you will not only recognize the benefits in your body and mind but you will also receive valuable education from nature itself and you will find yourself enriched by the experience.

**Links:**

Understand Epicurean influence in early Greek medicine: [Hippocrates of Kos, the Father of Clinical Medicine, and Asclepiades of Bithynia, the Father of Molecular Medicine](#), by Christos Yapijakis, of the Epicurean Garden in Athens

[Can Raw Foods Help with Depression?](#), from The Renegade Health Show