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7 Real, Clean Eating Foods I Can't Live Without

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When I started eating clean (for the most part anyways, because who doesn't need a treat once in a while!?), I began feeling better, sleeping better and simply enjoying my health. I can't say I'd ever truly experienced ***enjoying my health*** before. Eating had been more about looking a certain way, reaching some socially defined goal or, well, falling off the wagon of over-indulging because I felt I deserved it after controlling my consumption for so long. Here's My Real Food Philosophy [1]

But, once I cleaned things up and revamped my diet with real foods I felt recharged. Of course, I still indulge and allow myself out-of-the-ordinary treats. But, my mentality on indulging is different now because it's not out of a raging craving, it's out of choice and without guilty ramifications.

Now at age 37, I can honestly say I feel physically better than I did at 21. Yeah, I have some other signs of aging and life certainly slows me down a bit. But my 21 year old body fought for energy and struggled with symptoms of overconsuming processed foods like headaches, bloating, irregularity (if you know what I mean) and even more trouble mustering up the energy for a good workout. Fast

forward to today and I can honestly say my 37 year old body doesn't struggle with ANY of those discomforts.

I am so thankful I can play energetically with my little girls, work, keep my house up (uhh…mostly), maintain the busy schedule of an only-parent and even manage to get out and have a little fun once in a while! I do believe taking a new approach to nourishing my body [2], along with surrendering old attitudes to God, made all the difference for me.

So, let's get to it. Here are my first seven real food staples I simply cannot live without!

1. **Butter:** The real kind that comes in a stick (not a tub) and from cows that eat GRASS, what they are meant to eat (and not soy or corn). While butter has been criticized for containing bad fats and contributing to high cholesterol, if you consume the right kind it actually helps your body by giving it all kinds of GOOD fats and balancing your hormones and cholesterol. Look for 'pastured' or 'grassfed' butter. Plus, I simply love the taste on my breads and veggies. I love using real butter (or ghee) for cooking unless I am using the next item on my list…..
2. **Coconut oil:** I use this stuff almost every day. Anytime I cook at high heats, I use unrefined coconut oil. That means sautéing, popping popcorn in the pan or melting it down to use it in baked goods. Like butter, it has an awesome fat profile and supports healthy cells. As a whole, we'd benefit from considering our brains and hormones more often when we consider health. They are our control centers and influence everything else. Many of us fear fat but let me assure you, FAT is not a four letter word! Consuming higher amounts of GOOD fats is incredibly important to our bodies, especially the neurological and endocrine systems. (Plus, any just rub any excess coconut oil on your hands. Slather it all over your skin. I love using it in my moisturizers!)

So, these next 5 items on the list are some that I have a tinsy little issue with. It's called 'addiction'. I cannot go a single day without raw almond butter, sweet potato/squash, berries, greens or sprouted grains! Call me crazy, but I AM SMITTEN. (I figure, there are worse things to be addicted to, right?!)

3. **Raw Nuts, particularly almonds:** While I am not a full-fledged vegetarian, I eat meat sparingly. So, I need to get my protein someplace and, actually, it's easier than you think in a plant based diet. For me, just about every morning includes almond butter [3] whether it's on bread or right from the spoon. YUM! I make my own and it is amazingly deliciously creamy and comforting. Nuts contain many minerals, good fats and protein. Not only do they fill you up with a small quantity, they nicely compliment salads and other vegetable dishes [4]. I try to choose raw, unpasteurized nuts whenever I can because the high heats of pasteurization kills many of the nutrients and beneficial enzymes

4. **Sweet Potatoes (and buttercup squash):** For me, I think it's a comforting texture thing along with the mildly sweet flavor of these orange fleshed vegetables that has me hooked. I can eat almost an entire buttercup squash in one evening! Fiber, flavor and phyto-nutrients (plant-based nutrients) sold me on these guys. Now, I make them all different ways from using them in patties [5], soups [6], roasting them, in enchiladas [7] or simply eating them with a little real, melted butter.

5. **Berries:** Berries of all kinds contain some of the highest ORAC ratings (meaning they are super nutrient dense), highest fiber content and lowest glycemic value (meaning they do not cause blood sugar to rise like other fruits). I mostly love eating them plain and fresh, but when they are out of season, I buy frozen. I also love putting them in baked goods (cakes [8], muffins [9]and breads [10]), plain yogurt and smoothies.

6. **Dark Greens:** Need I say any more than their name for you to know how incredibly important greens are to your health? Iron, folate, B vitamins, vitamin A and C, fiber and the list goes on and on.

A green smoothie is a part of my daily morning routine (see this member post [3]) and almost every day I eat a salad with lunch or dinner. In addition, I try to squeeze greens into most of my soups [11]and cooked meals [7]. Cooked greens are great about taking on the flavors of the dish they are in.

7. **Sprouted Grains:** To be more exact, I could never live without the products created with sprouted grains. And, yes, I DO eat wheat, only either when it is sprouted and now I am also experimenting more with un-hybridized, ancient wheat (this post explains more [12]). Sprouted grains have not been processed, the nutrients are alive and enzymes intact since the grain has literally been soaked and sprouted. Anyone who knows me, knows I adore my morning sprouted English muffin with almond butter!

So there you have it! I'm having a tough time stopping at seven! So, stay tuned for more real food staples in my kitchen.

For now, I'll stop here to get you started slowly in case you're just starting of your real-food transition. I suggest choosing a few from the list. If you're the researching type, look into your options and find recipes fitting to your palate. Then, as your body and tastes become accustomed to new real, unprocessed foods, I bet you'll actually begin to PREFER them! Before you know it, you'll naturally want to try more

If you're already deep into your real food journey, there's always room for more exploration. I never cease to enjoy trying new foods and combining fun flavors from the earth. Oh, how I do believe food is one of the pleasures God gave us. So, let's use it to His glory and enjoy His bounty as a blessing to nourish our beautiful bodies!



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