

LE Magazine November 2007

REPORT

Carol Alt

The Raw Revolution

By Donna Caruso



Is it really possible to radically improve your life simply by changing your diet and taking the right supplements?

Ask Carol Alt. Her face is so familiar, you probably think you know her. Widely acknowledged as the first supermodel, dubbed “the most beautiful woman in the world,” by *Playboy*, “the next million dollar face,” by *Life* magazine, and famous at 18 as the first American face of Lancôme, Alt went on to stun the world at 21 with her breathtaking cover for *Sports Illustrated’s* annual swimsuit issue, an assignment any model would kill for.

By the time she was 34, Alt seemed to have it all: money, fame, beauty, and an enviable lifestyle. But inside, it was a different story. Inside, supermodel Carol Alt was a mess.

THE TRANSITION

“There I was,” says Alt, “taking Nyquil® to fall asleep, coffee to wake up, sinus medicine for my breathing problems, eight Tums® at a time for my stomach pain, Sudafed® for my allergies, and wondering why this was happening to me.” Alt was also gaining weight while starving herself to try to stay competitive, suffering from frequent headaches, and continually battling colds and the flu. She had sinus problems, sudden mood swings, dry, itchy skin, and little wrinkles threatening to reveal that she wasn’t 18 anymore.

“Everybody kept saying, ‘Listen, you’re just getting old, deal with it,’ but I kept thinking, ‘This doesn’t feel right.’ If I was this way at 34, taking all these over-the-counter meds, I wondered what I was going to be like at 40 or 50 or 80. I kept seeing myself as one big walking pot of pills.”

The crisis came to a head during a photo shoot in South America, where a new 19-year-old model captured everyone’s attention with her energy and tight, youthful body, while Alt, bloated and overweight, was trying to hide behind a rock and figure out what had happened to her 19-year-old self.

“I asked myself, what happens between her age and my age that this body just loses its sparkle? This can’t be right,” says Alt. There’s got to be something. What’s the key?

“I felt depressed, moody, and upset, because I realized that with all that was going on in my life and how my body was degenerating, I might not be able to have a career anymore.”

Afraid her career was over, she felt lost. Help came through an unexpected phone call from a friend, who told her how his 22-year-old girlfriend had overcome cancer through the guidance of a Los Angeles doctor who used alternative therapies, including a raw food diet, fresh juices, and supplements.

GOING RAW

That phone call was the start of Alt’s new life, a life that has led to the publication of her two books, *Eating In The Raw* (Clarkson Potter, 2004) and the recent follow-up, *The Raw 50* (Clarkson Potter, 2007). In these books, Alt details exactly how she changed her life and turned her health problems around, using a combination of raw foods, a wide variety of supplements and a new outlook on life. Just a glance at her photo on the cover of *The Raw 50* is proof enough. Her face glows with a genuine beauty that comes from within, from being totally healthy, vibrant and happy with her life.

The books, especially the most recent, are filled with mouth-watering recipes for a banquet table of raw dishes, including everything you crave, such as ice cream (temptingly pictured on the cover), pizza, macaroons, chili, ravioli, lemon cream pie, lasagna, and cheesecake, along with appealing salads, energy drinks, and breakfast cereals. Together, they belie the idea that raw food means chomping on carrot sticks all day. Or, as Alt remarks, "People think I go to a barn and rip a leg off a cow and nosh on it!"

But in the beginning, Alt was one of those people herself. At first, she didn't even write down the phone number for the doctor her friend recommended. But not long after hanging up, she decided to call, somehow remembering the number. Within moments, Dr. Timothy Brantley was asking her what she ate.

"I thought, that's an odd question to ask," comments Alt. " Why do you want to know what I eat?" And he said, 'Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you what's bothering you.' So I started telling him and within seconds he named my top six health problems. I couldn't believe it. And then, over the phone, he told me what caused my problems, which the best doctors on Park Avenue in New York couldn't figure out. I thought, 'this guy is amazing.' "



Dr. Brantley began to teach Alt how to eat raw foods, foods that have not been cooked at high heat and therefore have their essential enzymes intact. He took her shopping and showed her how to find ingredients which, twelve years ago, were not as available as they are today. She also discovered raw food restaurants, adopting some of their recipes for her books and her life. She learned she could have seared fish or meat, which still retains its enzymes.

"All of a sudden the blinders came off," Alt notes. "I went from deprivation to such abundance. It was like a raw food explosion." And deprivation is something very familiar to Alt.

THE MODEL'S LIFE BEFORE AND AFTER

"I tried everything to keep skinny," she explains. "I don't come from a long line of slim people. It was always a battle for me as a model to stay skinny and I did such damage to my body doing that, that it took me a long time to rebuild.

"But even in the first three months after I went raw, people were looking at me and saying, 'Why do you look so amazing?' And I would tell them, 'I'm eating raw foods!'"

After moving to New York, she was surprised to discover that her new home had raw food restaurants and plenty of stores where she could find most of the ingredients she needed for her recipes. Alt also found another guide, Dr. Nick Gonzalez, who continually advises her and monitors her health with regular hair and blood tests. The results of these tests determine if she is lacking any essential nutrients so that she can modify her supplement regimen accordingly. Alt still values supplementation to top off what may be missing in her diet even though she maintains a raw food way of life.

Today, Alt says that she has never been plagued by her previous health problems in the twelve years she's been eating raw. "Not a cough," she states. "I feel so much better. I can walk through a roomful of people who are sick with anything and not even blink an eye, because I know I'm not going to get sick the way I used to. I love being healthy. And believe me, I wasn't healthy before."

WHY RAW FOOD WORKS

Why does Alt believe eating raw food is the key to good health?

"Four things happen to food when you cook it," she explains. "You change the molecular structure, you kill the enzymes, you denature the vitamins and minerals, and you change the pH. Now what does that mean to the body?"

Alt likens the changes from raw to cooked food to the difference between putting gas or tea in your car as fuel. Tea looks like gas, it's liquid like gas, it's the same color as gas, but it doesn't make your car run. Why? "Because," Alt says, "the molecular structure of tea is not the same as the molecular structure of gas, and your car knows the difference and doesn't run." In the same way, the body knows the difference between the molecular structure of cooked food and raw food.

The enzymes, which every raw food has in order to digest itself, are chain links of proteins, essential to our health. Alt describes us as "a sack of enzymes as we go through life, blood enzymes, metabolic enzymes, digestive enzymes—we are enzymes from head to foot." Enzymes not only help digest food, they provide stimulation for the brain, energy for the body and help repair tissues, organs, and cells. Unfortunately, cooking destroys enzymes.

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"Every food we eat should have its enzymes intact so we can digest the food we just ate stress-free," she explains. "Your body doesn't have to do anything. How fabulous is that?" Since the body is able to use the raw food's own enzymes to break it down, it doesn't have to make more enzymes out of raw materials, a process that depletes the body's stores of vitamins and minerals.

Heat also destroys many vitamins in our food, which is how they are denatured. "When you heat them," Alt explains, "they aren't left in a form that is fully absorbable by the body." As an example, she cites the need for vitamin D in order for calcium to be absorbed. "Vitamin D is extremely volatile in heat," says Alt, "it loses its nature immediately. And once vitamin D is denatured, we can't absorb the calcium. So all these vitamins live in the world together in this vegetable or fruit, and they're connected, so that when some of them are destroyed or denatured by heat, our bodies can't absorb what we need and we end up with very few essential nutrients.

"Now here comes the biggie," Alt continues. "pH." A chemical term for measuring the amounts of acid or alkali, the pH balance in our bodies has a direct effect on our health. "The body is either acidic or alkaline," says Alt, "but the point is that we've got to keep a perfect balance of both." How?

Alt explains that the body is acidic by nature, since our bodies make a lot of acid. "We make lactic acid when we work out," she says, "and hydrochloric acid to digest our food.

"Our organs like to sit in a neutral pH," she continues. "We're an acid system, so how are we going to get the alkali to neutralize our bodies? Raw food! Raw food is alkaline, cooked food is acid. It's a brilliant plan. Eat raw, unprocessed foods, keep the pH balance, re-feed the vitamins and minerals, let the food digest itself with no stress, and presto! You have a healthy, happy organism that can live for a very long time disease-free. Because you know what disease is? It's the breakdown of the body. If we balance the body, it becomes the environment it was meant to be for our organs, our cells and our cell metabolism."

WHY SUPPLEMENTS?

If a raw food diet provides perfect nutrition, why does Alt also take supplements, sometimes close to 200 pills a day? With regular hair and blood tests, Alt has discovered her genetic body type (a moderate vegetarian, with some fish and occasional meat), and exactly what nutrients she needs at any given time.



In addition to modeling, Alt has been an actress for many years, appearing in over 60 films, often shot abroad. Depending on what she eats, especially when traveling, and her stress level, Alt's supplement regimen changes, all under the guidance of her physician.

"I take supplements," explains Alt, "because I believe that even raw foods today may not have everything we need. We live in the real world, and farmers may grow their food on land where they grew the same food last year and the years before that, or they may rotate the crops, but it's very rare that land gets to rest and rejuvenate itself." The result, says Alt, is soil depletion and food that may not have all the nutrients it was meant to have if grown in rich soil.

"Right now," says Alt, "I take 192 pills a day. But that can change, according to my next hair test."

At the time of this exclusive interview for Life Extension magazine, Alt was taking a dehydrated fruit and vegetable juice powder supplement, systemic and digestive enzymes, vitamins A, C, D, and E, kelp, chlorophyll, sea algae, amino acids, selenium, magnesium citrate, calcium, vegetarian vitamins and minerals, and potassium, among others.



"I take supplements because I believe that even raw foods today may not have everything we need."

"I get my hair and blood tested, and when I come up deficient in something, my supplement schedule can change," says Alt. "Even though I eat raw food and probably get more vitamins, minerals, and enzymes in my food than most people, I still take supplements and I think it's important. In this day and age, when you're getting your food from all over the place, who knows what the mineral content or vitamin content is, even in raw foods? So if the test shows I'm missing something, I just add it to my diet with supplements, based on my doctor's recommendations."

FROM STARVATION TO ABUNDANCE

How has twelve years on a raw food diet made a difference in Alt's eating and her life?

"With a malnourished body, you will sit at a table and eat and eat and eat and get filled up in your stomach until you want to explode. And then you will sit some more and pick," says Alt.

"I don't do that—ever. Once I'm done, I'm done. I could be mid-bite and when my body says, 'I'm nutritioned,' I'm finished. It has nothing to do with how full my stomach feels. Most of the time I don't feel any fullness in my stomach, I just feel satisfaction."



Alt says that she can eat all the food she wants all day long and what's even better, she never has to think about calories or gaining weight. In fact, she may even be concerned about losing weight, since now, she actually eats less, consuming only the food her body wants and stopping when she feels satisfied.

Something else she doesn't miss is the need for self-control. "I find this no discipline at all," she says, "but I sometimes feel guilty because I can eat anything I want and I'm healthy, while I see other people out there suffering from different health problems, starving themselves or eating food that I know is bad for them." While she's vocal about her belief in the benefits of raw foods, Alt says she is not recommending them for anyone else, just trying to provide information and encourage people to educate themselves and make their own decisions.

But with her family, Alt admits to applying some pressure, especially after the premature death of her brother. Determined not to lose another sibling, Alt convinced her sister Christine to adopt the raw food way of life and now she describes Christine as "crazy" about it, constantly devising new recipes, some of which are in Alt's books. Her mother has also changed her diet and awakened interest in her friends with her strikingly youthful demeanor.

Alt notes that she doesn't eat raw food 100% of the time, closer to 90 or 95% by her estimate, and she emphasizes that others who want to eat this way can do so gradually or partially and still receive benefits.

LIVING WELL, LIVING LONG

Carol Alt has completely turned her health around since she began eating a raw food diet twelve years ago. She looks great, feels great and says she has more energy than she did in her 20s.

"I don't have to go to the drug store and buy all those over-the-counter meds I needed before. I don't have headaches or allergies or acid indigestion or the flu.

"At 34, I was very sick and unhappy. Now I'm clear. I know the exact right way for me to eat and stay healthy. I make my choices out of education, not desperation. When you feed your body the best you can and your body is functioning optimally, it's able to defend itself against all kinds of aggressors, whether it's stress, bad air, bad food, bad water, or whatever it is. We can't control a lot of that. But the one thing we can absolutely control 100% of the time is the food we put into our bodies. Food is the key, because without it, you die."

Living this way, one day at a time, it's easy to believe that the beautiful Carol Alt will be with us, in optimal health, for an exceptionally long time.



For more information about Carol Alt visit www.carolalt.com

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