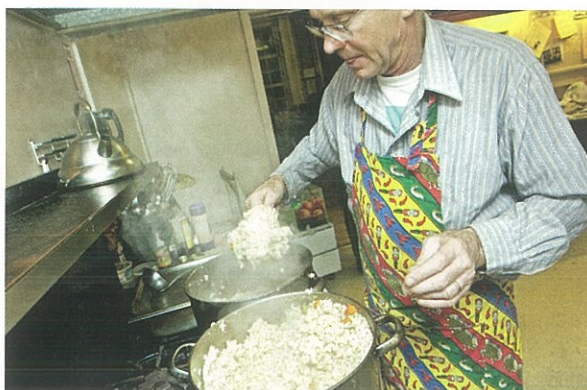


macrobiotics

Eating for balance and vitality // BY RHEA MAZE



At a Palo Alto dinner hosted by the Peninsula Macrobiotic Community, guests help themselves to plates of red cabbage, nutty apple pear cake, and split pea soup, while the chef prepares brown rice pilaf.



I devoured the delicious meal of minestrone soup, artichoke tofu frittata, quinoa salad, roast cauliflower and summer squash, chiffonade kale salad, and millet cookies. As I washed it down with red roobios tea, I listened to the stories being shared around the table at a dinner hosted by the Peninsula Macrobiotic Community (peninsulamacro.org). The conversation's common thread was a desire to eat and live healthfully.

Popularized by celebrities like Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow, and Sting, the modern macrobiotic diet was founded in Japan in the early 20th century. A typical macrobiotic meal consists of a complex carbohydrate base made up of whole grains, beans, and a variety of vegetables, complemented with a modicum of fish, fruit, and nuts. Japanese foods such as miso, soy sauce, sea vegetables, and brown rice vinegar are considered "healing foods" and are common elements in the macrobiotic diet.

Dr. Amy Solomon, a board-certified family physician and founder of Balance Health Medical Center in the Santa Cruz Mountains, says, "The macrobiotic diet may be a great choice for those afflicted with the stressors and ailments of modern society. Nutritionally, the emphasis is on local whole grains and produce, which is an ideal change from greasy fast food or a diet full of preservatives."

Macrobiotic eaters have the freedom to experiment with different combinations of foods in order to find an optimum balance. Meat, poultry, dairy, refined sugar, and processed foods are generally avoided, but otherwise, the macrobiotic eater has many options.

"There are as many ways of eating macrobiotically as there are people," says macrobiotic teacher Michelle Nemer. "It's a grain- and vegetable-based way of eating... It is made up of food that is organic, naturally crafted, and minimally processed."

The fiber-rich macrobiotic diet is thought to support the body's ability to cleanse and heal itself. Solomon says, "[Macrobiotic eating] can only enhance the management of diabetes, heart disease, anxiety, and many other chronic conditions."

However, the larger idea behind macrobiotic eating is that it ultimately leads to the pursuit of a more healthful, balanced life.

"It's a philosophy for living a full life physically, mentally, and spiritually," says chef, author, and food educator Laura Stec. "We don't just consume food; we also consume certain lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs, and jobs." Stec says that macrobiotics starts out with a focus on balancing the yin (expansive) and yang (contractive) life forces through food, then gradually expands into a consideration of where one works and lives, and what one does on a daily basis in order to achieve a more holistic sense of balance.

Award-winning cookbook author and food educator Meredith McCarty has been a macrobiotic eater for 40 years. She recommends that beginners start out with basic macrobiotic food principles and add on the philosophical layers as they go.

"The biggest misconception people have is that [macrobiotics] is a restrictive and complicated way of living. It's very natural and not that mysterious," McCarty says. "It's knowing yourself and taking the time to understand how foods make you feel." ■