
What is Macrobiotics?

Beginning Series, Part 2

Julia Ferré



These days, most people who have heard of macrobiotics associate it with a diet. A diet that is similar to vegetarianism. A diet that uses Japanese foods. A diet that is high in complex carbohydrates and low in fat. A diet that helps prevent cancer. A diet that defines a lifestyle, where a person eats certain things on a regular basis; as opposed to “dieting,” where a person eats certain things and avoids others to achieve a goal—such as weight loss—and then returns to whatever was eaten before.

A macrobiotic diet is a diet a person can adopt for a long time—for some people, a lifetime—as a means to improve quality of life. One of the underlying premises is that quality food creates health, health creates vitality, and vitality creates freedom—freedom from disease, freedom from pain, freedom to have peace of mind.

Quality food = physical health = emotional stability = mental clarity = spiritual consciousness—this sort of equation.

Macrobiotics is more than diet though. Information is available on nutrition, yin and yang, the five-element theory, the twelve theorems, the unique principle, and other philosophical ideas. Of course, there is no requirement that a person has to study but why not? These subjects are fun, they are enlightening, and what is not to like about recognizing why humans do such and such or why life happens the way it does? Macrobiotic theory is fascinating.

Nevertheless, I am jumping ahead—these are topics for another installment in this series. Most people start macrobiotics with food, so here is a brief listing of items commonly consumed and avoided.

A Macrobiotic approach to diet includes:

- Whole cereal grains such as brown rice, rolled oats, buckwheat or kasha, millet, whole wheat, corn as in tortillas, and other varieties of grains.
- Whole beans such as pintos, black beans, garbanzos, adukis, lentils, and bean products like tofu and tempeh.
- Fresh vegetables such as carrots, onions, winter squashes, cabbages, greens such as kale or collards, and pretty much all others.
- Soups made of above ingredients and seasoned with soy sauce and/or miso.
- Fresh fruit such as apples, pears, strawberries, peaches, and others, in season.
- Quality fats from nuts, seeds, and selected oils.
- Miscellaneous foods such as fish, sea vegetables, and beverages as individually desired.
- Quality seasonings from sea salt, soy sauce, miso, brown rice or umeboshi vinegar, and others.

A Macrobiotic approach to diet recommends strict avoidance of these items:

- Hard liquor.

- Refined sugar, artificial sweeteners, and excess amounts of honey, maple syrup, and other natural sweeteners.

- Transfats, hydrogenated oils, and partially hydrogenated oils.

- Packaged foods that include dyes, MSG, or artificial ingredients.

- Commercially processed refined grains, refined flours, and refined oils.

- Conventionally grown animal products: beef, pork, and dairy products. Many practitioners choose to avoid all animal products completely.

- For those in compromised health, avoidance of specific foods, as recommended by counselors or determined by oneself. See notes below.

There are other items that some people use and others avoid. Here is another list.

- Beer and/or wine, in moderation.

- Herbs and spices in cooking and/or in healing teas.

- Vitamins and supplements.

- Some refined grains and products such as couscous, organic white flour, pastas, and tahini.

- Coconut oil, flax seed oil, and hemp seed oil. As products change and as newer information is discovered, recommendations change.

- Animal products. Many macrobiotic practitioners eat fish. Some include organic chicken, butter, cheese, yogurt, or other items.

- Vegetables such as spinach and Swiss chard that contain oxalic acid.
- Vegetables such as potatoes and tomatoes from the nightshade family.
- Tropical fruits such as bananas and pineapple, especially for those who live in temperate climates.
- Packaged snacks, baked goods, and fried foods.

Some macrobiotic practitioners are strict vegans. Others are strict for ethical reasons. Others eat almost anything as long as it is organic. There is quite a range. Many macrobiotic practitioners utilize information from Chinese medicine, Ayurveda, the blood-type diet, the McDougal diet, and other sources that encourage consumption of healthy food.

To learn more about what constitutes a macrobiotic diet, check out these cookbooks. Each contains delicious and satisfying recipes and advice, just waiting to be utilized.

Christina Pirello. *Cooking the Whole Foods Way*; 1997; 525 pp. *Cook Your Way to the Life You Want*; 1999; 303 pp. *Glow*; 2001; 331 pp. *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Whole Foods*; 2004; 308 pp.

Everything Christina writes is full of flair, flavor, and fun. Christina is from a vibrant Italian family and her food reflects a bounty of taste, texture, and color. She provides vegan recipes that would please any palate and her books provide a lot of information. *Glow* is half text/ half cookbook—the text is devoted to oriental diagnosis. As far as I can tell recipes are not duplicated from book to book. If you are brand new to macrobiotics and cooking in general, her books will teach you a lot. If you are a seasoned cook, her recipes will satisfy the gourmand in you.

Aveline Kushi. *Complete Guide to Macrobiotic Cooking*; 1985; 414 pp.

This is a macrobiotic primer from a grand woman. Her book includes original haiku and drawings with many personal anecdotes. Many

consider this book as the definitive macrobiotic cookbook—Kushi style.

Aveline Kushi and Wendy Esko. *Changing Seasons Macrobiotic Cookbook*; 1985; 288 pp. *Quick and Natural Macrobiotic Cookbook*; 1989; 306 pp.

Wendy Esko has taught macrobiotic cooking since 1976 and has written many cookbooks since then. These two are the current titles authored with Aveline Kushi. *Changing Seasons* features recipes organized by the season. *Quick and Natural* is a guide on how to change to a macrobiotic diet.

Meredith McCarty. *American Macrobiotic Cuisine*; 1986; 110 pp. *Sweet and Natural*; 1999; 260 pp.

Meredith is a long-time macrobiotic educator and chef, having served meals to hundreds of people over the years. *American Macrobiotic Cuisine* takes the mystique out of macrobiotic cooking. *Sweet and Natural* won the Best Vegetarian Cookbook, World Cookbook Award.

Lenore Baum. *Lenore's Natural Cuisine*; 2000; 255 pp. *Sublime Soups*; 2002; 172 pp.

These two books offer tasty recipes that are easy to prepare and oh-so-satisfying.

Marcea Weber. *Naturally Sweet Desserts*; 1990; 248 pp.

This classic dessert cookbook has stayed in print for many years. Recipes range from simple cookies to elaborate cake decorating techniques.

Mark Hanna and Sandy Pukel. *Greens and Grains on the Deep Blue Sea*; 2007; 137 pp.

This cookbook hails from the macrobiotic/vegetarian cruise by master chef Mark Hanna and cruise-organizer Sandy Pukel and contains festive, doable recipes.

This is but a sampling of the many macrobiotic cookbooks available in print, out of print, and online. Here are a few additional topical cookbooks worth checking out:

Natural Healthy Gourmet; Margaret Lawson with Tom Monte; 1994;

232 pp. This book features quality macrobiotic dishes prepared Southwestern style.

Cooking with Rachel; Rachel Albert; 1989; 328 pp. This comprehensive vegetarian macrobiotic cookbook includes 70 pages of delicious desserts.

Valley of Maize; Natalie Buckley Rowland; 1998; 144 pp. This book lists an impressive number of cornbread recipes.

As Easy as 1, 2, 3. Pamela Henkel and Lee Koch; 1990; 176 pp. This cookbook offers recipes in easy steps—great for families and/or traveling.

A Man in the Kitchen; Warren S. Wepman; 2000; 160 pp. This cookbook is a beginner's cookbook written with a southern gentleman's charm.

Practically Macrobiotic; Keith Mitchell; 1987; 240 pp. This gorgeous cookbook covers all the basics and includes animal foods such as chicken and shrimp.

Miscellaneous cookbooks are available online as PDF downloads, and wherever used books are sold. Consider authors such as Susan Marque, Ilanit Tof, and Sheldon and Ginat Rice who offer new releases online. Also look for out of print titles by Lima Ohsawa, Cornelia Aihara, Annemarie Colbin, Michel Abehsera, Mary Estella, Lenny and Barbara Jacobs, and Eunice Farmillant. In addition, there are titles by authors from countries other than the USA. Titles by Rebecca Wood, Jessica Porter, and John and Jan Belleme will be featured in other installments and are also recommended. So many cookbooks, only a few meals each day...

Julia Ferré is author of Basic Macrobiotic Cooking: 20th Anniversary Edition and plans the menus at the French Meadows camp.

