

Starting Off Right?

Carl Ferré

My name is Jennifer and I am 20 years old. I have just recently discovered this diet, or should I say way of life, on the internet and I have just a few questions. For one thing I live in an area of Alabama where there is not one health store to be found that has the fresh foods such as quality vegetables and whole grains. Also, since I am a student I do not have a fortune to spend. All the fresh food I can find or order is incredibly priced.

I want to make a life change and I am completely aware that it will take some time. I just want to have a clean, simple, and healthy life. Exercise (yoga) is my first step, but I have not really looked into nutrition all that much. So, what should I do to start off right? Is "Kashi" cereal okay to eat as a snack?

— Jennifer
Alabama

JENNIFER,

Thank you for your email and questions. You have already taken the first step correctly by deciding to make a change. Life is about making choices. Every day we decide what to wear, where to go, what to do, whom to associate with, what to eat, and so on. Each decision has consequences. Macrobiotics is a set of principles that one can use for making decisions that lead towards that clean, simple, and healthy life of which you write.

To me, the principles are much

more valuable than a diet. Following a macrobiotic diet such as the so-called Standard Macrobiotic Diet is a steppingstone used while one is studying and learning the principles and their applications. George Ohsawa, who brought macrobiotics back into prominence in the 1930s to 1960s, gave specific dietary suggestions only after realizing that people's judgment was so cloudy that they lacked the ability to comprehend the value of macrobiotic principles. Understanding the principles does take time and it is excellent that you know and accept this already. Still, I recommend starting to study the principles as soon as possible.

One of the most important requirements for obtaining maximum value out of whatever one eats is movement or activity. In this regard you also must be commended for choosing yoga. You will find that the two, yoga and macrobiotics, work well together. Another thing that can be done with little or no cost is to chew each mouthful of food better – say 30 to 50 times or more. While some argue that chewing one's food more doesn't add to the nutritional value, I have found it very beneficial, especially in times of sickness when the body's internal powers don't need the extra work of processing poorly chewed food, or foods that are filled with toxins.

At this point, I refer you to a few

books that are reasonably priced and that may be of help – my book *Pocket Guide to Macrobiotics*, Denny Waxman's *The Great Life Handbook*, or Michio Kushi's *Macrobiotic Way*.

Perhaps the most important principle to learn in macrobiotics is that every individual and every situation is unique and requires a unique response for maximum benefit. Over time, you will learn to use macrobiotic principles to make the best decisions to your daily choices. One word of caution however, keep a sense of proportion and don't worry if you make a choice that appears to you at the time to be a wrong one. In other words, don't be afraid to make mistakes because it is those mistakes from which you can learn the most.

I have known people who have become so concerned that each mouthful of food is "correct" or that each thing they do is "right" that they lose sight of their purpose. As I heard someone say once, "macrobiotics should empower us, not enslave us." One way to do this is to continually evaluate why you are practicing macrobiotics and to carefully and honestly monitor your condition daily.

My personal opinion is that everyone knows what is best for her or him; however, most of us are taught to believe others rather than to trust in our own judgment. Your specific question about Kashi cereal is one

that you can answer yourself. Look at the ingredients – are they all natural? Or, does it contain chemicals and preservatives that should be avoided? Does eating it contribute to a clean, simple, and healthy life? If so, without knowing anything else, I would say it is okay to try it and see. Your body will tell you as you chew it and after it is digested. I hope this helps to get you started.



Hello, my name is Karine and recently I picked up a book titled You Are All Sanpaku by Sakurazawa Nyoyi (George Ohsawa), English version by William Dufty and I must say that it had a great impact on me! It truly motivated me to think about going macrobiotic but there are some things I am still unsure of. I am still a growing teen but I wish to follow the macrobiotic diet but I am afraid of changing lifestyle drastically without knowing too much about this whole thing. My parents are unsure about the idea and my junkie friends say that I'm crazy but I am determined to become healthier. I was already considering going vegetarian but I wanted to go deeper than that. Macrobiotics really opened my eyes to something different than the latest trends here in Canada. I just wish I knew more about it. Is it even healthy for me to start this lifestyle or should I wait until I am older? Are there any books or any info I can be given on teens going on a macrobiotic diet? If so please send me the name and author of the book and I'll try to find out if it is possible to get it here in Canada. I would really appreciate any information given. Thank you.

– Karine
Canada

KARINE,

Thank you for your email and interest in macrobiotics. I don't

know of any books that specifically address the issue of teens starting a macrobiotic diet. Our teenage boys have been following a macrobiotic diet since birth and are doing well. One is a complete vegetarian and the other asks for animal food from time to time.

One of the most important principles of macrobiotics to learn is that every one is different. Your nutritional needs are different from mine, for example. I have heard nutritionists lecture on the adequacy of a macrobiotic diet as long as one eats a wide variety of foods and eats enough calories. Learning which foods are most appropriate for you takes study and experimentation.

As far as when to start, it seems to me that your attitude is most important. You sound positive and since you are initiating the idea, you should have the will to succeed. When parents change to a macrobiotic diet and try to force it on their teens, there can be problems. Here are some ideas to get you going.

1. Read and study at least one or more introductory books - my book, *Pocket Guide to Macrobiotics*, Denny Waxman's *The Great Life Handbook*, or Michio Kushi's *Macrobiotic Way*. The latter two books have recipes. At some point a cookbook such as Julia Ferré's *Basic Macrobiotic Cooking* would be helpful.

2. Understand the discharge process. This process is explained in my book at length. Basically, the macrobiotic approach is to eat foods, primarily whole grains and fresh vegetables that are as free from chemical processing as possible. After a period of time toxins that have been stored in the body come out. This discharge may be accompanied by a temporary worsening of one's condition, depending on the toxins being released and the length of time the body has been storing them.

3. Learn how to explain what you are doing without alienating family and friends. I have known

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people who became so excited and felt so good after a few weeks of macrobiotics that they tried to convert everyone in their family and all their friends. It rarely works this way. Again, every one is different and needs to be given the time and space to initiate a personal change. Just as it would be difficult for you to accept a junk-food diet, it may be difficult for your friends to accept your new diet.

4. Know your purpose. You mentioned wanting to become healthier, and this is one of the benefits that may occur as a result of a macrobiotic practice. However, over the years I have seen people who are relatively healthy eating a restricted macrobiotic diet designed for someone who is already extremely ill. Eventually they become sick as a result. In other words, always pay attention to your condition and honestly evaluate how you feel and how you are doing and relax or restrict your diet accordingly.

Lastly, I would recommend being completely open and honest with your parents so they can help you. Their uncertainty can be a stabilizing influence for you. Let them read this email and any other literature that you decide to study. A positive relationship with your family can have a profound effect on your overall health and happiness. Let me know if we can be of further help.