

Vegetarian Diet: Food That Functions

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Abstract

Vegetarians are people who only consume plant foods and don't eat meat, egg or seafood. Some people choose to become vegetarian or vegan as a healthy lifestyle choice or for ethical reasons. There are also sound social reasons, political beliefs, and financial reasons to be a vegetarian. Compared to non-vegetarians, vegetarians usually eat fewer calories from fat (especially saturated fat), fewer overall calories, more fiber, potassium, and vitamin C. For children and adolescents, these diets need to be carefully planned for proper growth and development. Vegetarian diet is high in fiber. Pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as the elderly, should carefully monitor their vegetarian diet to reduce the risk of nutrient deficiencies. Also, vegetarian eating can support optimal sports performance. There are various myths associated with vegetarian diet such as one can't get enough protein as a vegetarian.

INTRODUCTION: VEGETARIAN DIET

Vegetarianism has traditionally been linked to the people of ancient India. Even today, Indians make up more than 70 percent of the world's vegetarian population. The first Vegetarian Society was formed in 1847 in England. The main aim of the members was to dispel the common belief that it's not possible to lead a healthy life without eating meat.

There are varying degrees of vegetarianism. People may also go the vegetarian route for religious reasons, economic and world hunger concerns, and compassion for animals or as a healthy lifestyle choice. People may become vegetarians for one reason, and then later on adopt some of the other reasons as well. The strictest of vegetarians not only steer clear of all forms of meat. They also avoid all animal products, including honey (bees are often killed in the production of honey), and foods which might contain traces of animal products, such as bread baked in buttered tins and sugar to which bone charcoal has been added. Such people are usually called Vegans.

In vegetarian diet, good sources of protein include whole grains, lentils, beans, tofu, low-fat dairy products, nuts, seeds, tempeh, eggs, and peas. . Vegetarians can meet their calcium needs if they consume adequate amounts of low-fat and fat-free dairy products such as milk, yogurt, and cheese. Iron-fortified breads and cereals, dark green vegetables (e.g. spinach and broccoli), dried fruits, prune juice, blackstrap molasses, pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds, and soybean nuts are good plant sources of iron. A healthy vegetarian diet is typically low in fat and high in fiber. Therefore, a vegetarian diet, like any healthy diet, must be well planned in order to help prevent and treat certain diseases.

BENEFITS OF VEGETARIAN DIET

Until few years ago, the benefits of vegetarianism were more anecdotal than clinically proven. However, over the last couple of decades several studies have indicated that a

well-planned, carefully monitored vegetarian diet can deliver good nutrition. Dietary recommendations vary with the type of vegetarian diet; vegetarian-style eating patterns have been associated with improved health body to glowing skin. While some cannot imagine a day without meat, there are number of people who swear by green vegetables.

There are numerous benefits of vegetarian diet. A diet that is rich in fruit and vegetables are considered to be helpful in preventing lung cancer and many other diseases. Vegans generally have a lower body mass index, lower levels of obesity, a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, and lower total mortality. Several clinical trials have documented that vegetarian eating patterns lowers blood pressure too. Researchers at Oxford University's Cancer Epidemiology Unit reported that a vegetarian diet could cut the risk of heart disease by one third.

Studies have shown that Non Vegetarians tends to put on more weight over a five year period, compared to those who switched over to vegetarianism. This diet consist of a combination of nuts (almonds), soy proteins, viscous fiber (high-fiber) foods such as oats and barley and a special margarine with plant sterols, found in leafy green vegetables and vegetable oils. A vegetarian diet made up of specific plant foods can lower cholesterol as effectively as a drug treatment. It can also reduce levels of LDL - the 'bad' cholesterol known to cause clogging in coronary arteries. Plant-based diets either reduce or completely eliminate people's genetic propensity to developing long-term diseases, including diabetes type 2, cardiovascular disease, and cancer. One can achieve a steady blood sugar with a nutritious vegetarian diet.

Vegetarian diet is also easily digested and thus boosts metabolism. This diet is full of fiber and hence prevents constipation along with keeping the body healthy and active. . There are several plant based foods that are good sources of protein, such as beans, peanuts, and soya.

Studies have proved that when animal experiences fear, the adrenaline rush causes release of epinephrine, steroids and other stress hormones into the blood stream. These are then ingested by the meat eaters, along with the range of toxins that can accumulate in the blood streams.

Vegetarian diets have been shown to be helpful in the long-term for some people with rheumatoid arthritis. Vegan diets may also be helpful, possibly because of the 'good' polyunsaturated fatty acids in them, which help reduce inflammation. These fatty acids are found in high amounts in nuts, seeds and leafy greens.

Adults and children who follow a vegetarian diet are generally leaner than non-vegetarians. This may be because a vegetarian diet typically includes less saturated fat and emphasizes more on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and plant-based proteins i.e. foods that are more filling and less calorie dense.

FAMOUS VEGETARIAN QUOTES:

- **AlbertEinstein**
"Nothing will benefit human health and increase chances of survival for life on earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet."
- **GeorgeBernardShaw**
"If a group of beings from another planet were to land on Earth - beings who considered themselves as superior to you as you feel yourself to be to other animals - would you concede them the rights over you that you assume over other animals?"
- **LeoTolstoy**
"As long as there are slaughterhouses, there will be battlefields."
- **MahatmaGandhi**
*"The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."
"To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being."*
- **ThomasEdison**
"Non-violence leads to the highest ethics, which is the goal of all evolution. Until we stop harming all other living beings, we are still savages."

VEGETARIAN DIET AND SPORTS

Generally speaking, vegetarian eating can support optimal sports performance. Planned vegetarian diets can provide sufficient energy and an appropriate range of carbohydrate, fat and protein intakes to support performance and health. It can provide all known essential nutrients in adequate quantities for strength training. A vegetarian diet might be expected to provide for *better* nutrition, with the exception of iron and zinc status. Anecdotal reports suggest that many successful endurance athletes are vegetarians whereas few reports suggest that elite strength athletes follow a vegetarian diet. Studies have shown that a well-chosen vegetarian diet contains adequate energy (kilojoules) and protein and is high in carbohydrate and low in fat, thus making it ideal for athletes striving to meet the dietary guidelines encouraged for sport. Athletes may adopt a vegetarian or 'near-vegetarian' diet to meet increased carbohydrate requirements for training or to assist in weight management.

A growing number of sports stars are crediting a switch to veganism for enhancing their performance and helping themselves recover from joint injury or surgery. Some individuals, especially women, may switch to vegetarianism as a means of avoiding red meat and/or restricting energy intake to attain a lean body composition favored in some sports such as distance running. Tennis ace Venus Williams says her overall health has improved dramatically since she stopped eating animal products. She has an auto-immune illness that causes muscular pain and fatigue – and giving up meat, she says, has eradicated the worst symptoms, including joint pain and swelling.

One of the most-cited vegan athlete success stories is of Carl Lewis, who credits his outstanding 1991 results in part to the vegan diet he adopted in 1990. He says something

that is often quoted in vegan propaganda, “My best year of track competition was the first year I ate a vegan diet.”

MYTHS ABOUT A VEGETARIAN DIET:

Myth #1: You can't get enough protein as a vegetarian.

Myth #2: You can't be a serious athlete and be vegetarian.

Myth #3: Vegetarians mainly eat salads and tofu.

Myth #4: Being vegetarian will make you healthy and help you lose weight.

Myth #5: Going vegetarian involves “taking away” from your plate.

Myth #6: Vegetarian cooking involves a lot of fake meats and weird health foods.

Myth #7: As long as you're getting enough protein, you don't need to worry about anything else.

Myth #8: It isn't safe for infants, children, and teens to be vegetarians.

CONCLUSION:

Vegetarian foods are a major source of nutrition for most people in the world. Vegetarians have lower rates of heart disease and some forms of cancer than non-vegetarians and these diets can be simple and easy to prepare. A vegetarian menu is a powerful and pleasurable way to achieve good health. The vegetarian eating pattern is based on a wide variety of foods that are satisfying, delicious, and healthful. A vegetarian diet provides athletes with all the protein, complex carbohydrates, and other nutrients they need to get stronger and faster.

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