

# Nutrition for Your Health

## Your guide to better living

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### Meat vs. Vegetarian

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#### **Diet Wars: Meat Eater or Vegetarian?**

For the past several decades we have been bombarded with saturated fat and cholesterol scares and claims that animal products are bad for us. Along with these scares has come the notion that vegetarianism is a healthier dietary option for all people. In beginning this article, it would be prudent to note there are several types of "vegetarians". There are "lacto-vegetarian diets" in which dairy products are included in the diet. There are "Lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets" in which dairy products and eggs are included. Lastly, there is the "vegan diet" in which no animal products are consumed.

#### **Is Meat REALLY the Culprit?**

A consideration to take in is that heart and kidney disease, cancer, obesity and osteoporosis are primarily 20th century occurrences, yet people have been eating meat and animal fat for thousands of years. The studies used to promote vegetarianism do not take into consideration other factors besides the animal foods that are at work in these diseases. These poorly done studies neglect to take into account other dietary factors such as the harmful effects of eating refined sugar, nutrient-poor "foods", trans-fats [hydrogenated fats] and vegetable oils. These are all 20th century foods and tend to get mixed in with animal fat consumption in studies promoting vegetarianism. It is also commonly believed that saturated fats and cholesterol "clog arteries". On the contrary, studies have shown that arterial plaque is primarily composed of Unsaturated fats, particularly polyunsaturated ones, and not the saturated fats of animals, palm and coconut. 1 Trans-fatty acids, as opposed to saturated fats, have been shown by researchers to be causative factors in atherosclerosis, coronary heart disease, cancer and other assorted diseases. 2

#### **Are Vegetarians Healthier?**

It is usually claimed that vegetarians have lower cancer rates, but a 1994 study of California Seventh Day Adventists [who are largely vegetarian] showed that, while they did have lower rates of some cancers [e.g. breast], they had significantly higher rates of several

others [brain, skin, uterine, and ovarian]. 3 The US Multiple Risk Factor Intervention Trial, sponsored by the National Heart and Lung Institute, compared mortality rates and eating habits of 12,000+ men. Those who ate less saturated fat and cholesterol showed a slightly reduced rate of coronary heart disease [CHD], but had an overall mortality rate much higher than the other men in the study. 4 The few studies that indicate a correlation between saturated fat reduction and a lower CHD rate also clearly document a sizeable increase in deaths from cancer, suicide, violence and brain hemorrhage. 4 Low fat/cholesterol diets, therefore, are decidedly not healthier for people. Studies have proven over and over that such diets are associated with depression, cancer, psychological problems, fatigue, violence, and suicide. 5 Remember about a decade ago when eggs were greatly discouraged because of their cholesterol content? This has since been detracted. I have always encouraged the consumption of good, quality free-range eggs because they are a great source of protein and numerous vitamins. You ladies who are experiencing depression, fatigue, and anxiety should consider incorporating more good quality fats and proteins in your diet such as eggs, avocados and clean, quality meats. Your skin and hair will thank you for it as well!

#### **Can A Vegetarian Diet Be Harmful?**

I have dealt with many [now] former vegans [total vegetarians] and I know full well the dangerous effects of diets devoid of good proteins and fats. Vegans who do not supplement their diet with vitamin B12 will eventually get anemia as well as severe nervous and digestive system damage. 6 Claims that B12 is present in certain algae, tempeh [a fermented soy product] and brewer's yeast are false. The B12 in algae and tempeh are not bioavailable [the body doesn't digest them very well]. Further, the ingestion of too much soy increases the body's need for B12. 7 There are many other reasons that I do not recommend soy products. See our newsletter archives for our previous newsletter on the adverse effects of soy. Brewer's yeast does not naturally contain B12; it is always fortified from an outside source. Vegetarians also tend to be deficient in the Omega 3 fatty acids. These are essential to life and must be obtained from food as the body cannot synthesize them. Omega 3 fats are found in very small amounts in whole grains and dark green leafy vegetables. It is principally found in

animal foods [especially fish and eggs], as well as flax seed oil. There is a very real danger from consuming too many omega-6 fatty acids, principally found in vegetables. The body requires both omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids however when the body's cells are overloaded with omega-6's, their ability to utilize the omega-3's is inhibited. 8 Clinically low levels of omega-3 fatty acids are associated with higher cancer rates and immune dysfunction. Excessive levels of omega-6's are also strongly correlated with a high incidence of cardiovascular disease. 9 The July 2002 issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition stated that Vegans had dietary intakes lower than the average requirements of Riboflavin, B12, Vitamin D, Calcium and Selenium. Even after the researchers included dietary supplements in their analysis, the vegans' intake of calcium and selenium remained low. Such deficiencies are of particular concern when it comes to growing teens.

## Conclusion

My purpose in doing this article is to dispel the notion that vegetarian diets as well as the hyped-up low-fat/cholesterol diet aren't the saviors they have been portrayed to be. Meat-eaters tend to have certain disease that vegetarians don't have. On the contrary, vegetarians have certain diseases that meat-eaters don't have. What I do encourage you to do is to have balance on both sides. For the meat-eaters, I encourage you to incorporate cleaner versions of the animal products you consume [i.e. organic, free-range, no animal by-products in the feed, no antibiotics, hormones, steroids, etc]. I also encourage you to eat more vegetables and increase the variety of vegetable that you eat. Don't eat the same ole' broccoli and carrots all the time. Mix it up a bit! For the vegetarians, if you are following a vegetarian diet for health reasons, don't believe the hype! I greatly encourage you to consume some animal products such as eggs and fish [again in their purest forms]. Avoid soy products. Soy was never meant to be a primary protein source. In order for soy to be digestible, it has to be processed with many chemicals. It is actually one of the highest processed foods on the market today with 62% of the soy crops being genetically modified! Vegetarians should incorporate a supplementation of B12, Folic Acid and EPA/DHA. The best way to know how much you need as well as determine any other nutrient deficiencies you may have is to get tested. You can contact my office for a more in-depth assessment.

For both sides, remove all refined carbohydrates [white sugar, white flour] and trans fats [hydrogenated fats] from your diet. So there it is, the war between meat-eaters and vegetarians needs to be over. Neither side can claim to be "healthier" than the other. Both have benefits and limitations. The main thing is balance between the two and getting back to eating foods in their most natural state. Furthermore, when in doubt, get tested. If you are truly committed to a vegetarian diet or a high protein diet, get tested to make sure you are getting the nutrients you need from your food and supplementation. This is truly the only way to know if you're on the right track!

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