

## **Vegetarianism**

As people become more conscious of their health problems, they are looking for newer, less pharmaceutical means of preserving and maintaining their health. A vegetarian diet which contains foods such as grains, beans, nuts, vegetables and fruit, is an important means to maintain one's health. Vegetarians, people whose diet does not include any meat products, eggs, poultry, or fish, are living proofs of the fact that vegetarian diet is healthier than non-vegetarian diet.

Further, scientific research shows that meat is not essential for healthy living. So many people are switching to vegetarianism. Everyone knows that proteins are necessary for good health. Proteins are needed daily to grow and repair tissues to maintain bodily functions. However, many people think that vegetarian diet is protein deficient. It may make people weak, sick and anemic. They do not know that there is a multitude of vegetable protein sources. The National Research Council recommended that the average male should consume nine percent of calories in the form of protein. It should be noted that nine percent is more than double the minimum requirements established by the World Health Organization.

**(1)** Inspection of published food tables reveals that grains, legumes,

nuts, seeds, and vegetables provide more than nine percent calories in the form of proteins. Although vegetarians eat less protein than do meat eaters, they readily get as much as they need from non-flesh sources. Even vegans, who eat only plant foods, get more protein than the recommended level. This is true in view of the fact that non-vegetarian diet contains more non-essential proteins than vegetarian diet. Some people have the wrong belief that a lot of protein in diet can make them strong so they can do hard work. However, sports records show that vegetarian athletes surpass or at least do as well as other athletes in events that require strength and endurance, such as running, swimming and tennis. For instance, Pierreo Verot, a vegetarian, holds the world record for downhill endurance skiing. The world record for distance butterfly swimming is held by vegetarians James and Jonathan deDonato.

**(2)** Furthermore, vegetarians are more readily able to attain physical balance, mental clarity, and spiritual harmony ? factors that are critical in maintaining optimal health. Formerly, vegetable proteins were classified as second-class, and regarded as inferior to first-class proteins of animal origin, but this distinction has now been generally discarded.

**(3)** Now it has been found that excessive amount of protein found in meat products is not only nonessential but it is actually hazardous to

our health. For example, osteoporosis and kidney stones have been linked to over-consumption of proteins. Researchers at University of Michigan and other universities have shown that the more protein a person consumes, the more calcium his or her body loses, resulting in osteoporosis. The high-protein (meat-based) diets result in gradual decrease in bone density and cause osteoporosis. The results of the study indicate that vegetarian men have an average bone loss of three percent while non-vegetarian men, seven percent. Vegetarian women have an average bone loss of eighteen percent and non-vegetarian women, thirty-five percent. The study also shows that by the time a non-vegetarian woman reaches the age of sixty-five, she has lost over one-third of her skeletal structure. On the contrary, vegetarian women tend to remain active, maintain their skeletal structure, and are less likely to fracture or break their bones.

**(4)** Another problem caused by excessive protein is the formation of kidney stones. Kidney stones are caused by crystallization of calcium that is lost from the bones in digesting excessive amounts of protein. There is some evidence that excessive protein consumption can result in destruction of kidney tissue and the deterioration of kidneys. This is because kidneys have to work harder to de-aminize and excrete the excess protein out of the body.

**(5)** Besides proteins, saturated fats, such as animal fats, and

cholesterol play an important role in a person's health. Although some fats are necessary in a balanced diet for body maintenance, saturated fats can be hazardous to one's health if they are taken in excess amounts. Animal fats are heavier and stickier than vegetable fats. The heavier the fat, the more it agglutinates blood cells, thus increasing the viscosity of blood, restricting blood flow and raising blood pressure. If the blood stops moving freely, it can cause a clot in the artery. These clots can lead to heart disease. Similarly, cholesterol, which is found in large amounts in non-vegetarian food, deposits in artery walls and causes the arteries to clog, resulting in angina and other problems.

'Although absent in plant foods, cholesterol is present in meat, poultry, seafood, dairy products, and eggs. Cholesterol is the main component of the plaque that builds up in arteries, causing atherosclerosis (disease of arteries).' All of these foods, with the exception of seafood, are also high in saturated fat. Diets high in saturated fats and cholesterol increase cholesterol level in blood and produce atherosclerosis, which leads to heart disease and stroke. Diets low in saturated fat and cholesterol keep cholesterol level low and thus lower the probability of heart disease and stroke. Nutritional studies show that vegetarians consumes less cholesterol and

saturated fats and have lower levels of cholesterol. Studies also show that meat eaters have higher rates of atherosclerosis and fatal heart disease. In a study, the risk of fatal coronary heart disease among the non-vegetarian members of a group was found to be three times

greater than that for the vegetarian members of the group.

**(6)** Thus AHA advises avoiding foods that have a lot of saturated fat

and cholesterol, which are found mainly in animal products and

recommends that people should use beans, lentils, tofu, and other

plant foods instead of meat in their meals. A vegetarian diet with

lower saturated fat content helps to reverse heart disease. Dr. Dean

Ornish has been prescribing vegetarian diet to people with heart

disease. It is found that a significantly low fat content in diet is the key

ingredient in restoring health. Dr. Ornish, the head of heart disease

reversal studies, says, 'If everyone in the country was eating a low fat

vegetarian diet, heart disease could be as rare as malaria.'

Recently, Harvard University and Michio Kushi completed a study to

discern the effects of macrobiotic on blood and cardiovascular

strength and overall condition. People who normally maintained

vegetarian diet were asked to change to a more standard American

diet, containing meat, heavy sauces, sweets, and processed foods.

After a few weeks, the results showed that their cardiovascular

systems were affected adversely by the American diet.

**(7)** In addition to heart disease, colon and breast cancers are also linked to consumption of excessive saturated fat and cholesterol. The Association for the Advancement of Science states that 'populations on high meat, high fat diet are more likely to develop colon cancer than people on vegetarian diet.'

**(8)** Evidence from a study conducted in Stockholm, Sweden, reports that the greater the fat intake of a person, the higher the risk he or she has of contracting colon cancer. Similarly, the more fat a woman consumes in her lifetime, the more likely she is to get breast cancer. In a study conducted at the National Cancer Research Institute in Tokyo by Dr. Hirayama and his coworkers, the results show that women who consume meat daily face an almost four times greater risk of getting breast cancer than those who eat no meat.

**(9)** Avoiding meats and substituting plant proteins can have amazing effects on general health and well-being. Not only that, but a vegetarian diet can, in many cases, actually reverses diseases. Many miraculous cancer remissions effected by adopting a vegetarian diet have been reported. One instance is the case of Dr. Anthony Sattilaro who was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1978. He underwent traditional medical

therapy but the cancer spread to his lungs. When he had only six months to live, he discovered the benefits of a vegetarian diet. Eighteen months after Dr. Satlilaro had switched to a vegetarian diet, a CAT scan performed on him showed that he was completely rid of both cancers.

**(10)** As mentioned above, some non-vegetarians believe that vegetarians are weak, skinny, and anemic. However, it is seen that most vegetarians experience better than average health and typically live physically active and demanding lives. People who have adopted a vegetarian diet experience many benefits. They sleep better, though for fewer hours. But they wake up feeling more refreshed and energetic than they did before. Many new vegetarians feel 'they are now able to participate in life more than they thought possible.'

**(11)** In addition to these physical benefits, a vegetarian can enjoy his or her meals without guilt and without considering the meals to be a form of punishment. Vegetarian meals can be prepared in many different ways to suit different tastes. Some vegetarians feel that they can eat more foods with fewer calories, fat and cholesterol. A vegetarian diet can have some shortcomings if it is not prepared properly. For example, some foods may have too much salt. They cause water to be drawn out of blood cells, creating dehydration of tissues and result in the problem of water retention in the body.

Excessive sodium overburdens the kidneys and forces the heart to work twice as hard. This leads to hypertension ? increased blood pressure. Another problem with a vegetarian diet is that some people may not consume dark green and leafy vegetables, which are a major source of essential vitamins A and E. A proper combination of grains, beans and vegetables is essential to develop an ideal amino acid pattern for the body. For example, combination of corn tortilla and beans, wheat bread and lentils, or beans and rice are good sources of protein.

The foods that were once believed to be the foundation of good health in some parts of the world are actually detrimental to one's health and cause diseases like cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis and kidney stones. On the other hand, those foods that were once looked upon by some people as nutritionally deficient have now been proven to be healthy and helpful in maintaining our health and reversing diseases. Now it has been established that a balanced vegetarian diet is the healthier choice for the well-being of people all over the world. There are two important reasons for adopting vegetarianism. Many people are vegetarians because of their religious beliefs. Others are vegetarians because a vegetarian diet is good for health. Jains are vegetarians because they believe in nonviolence. Violence means to kill or injure, to be angry or be greedy, to engage in self-torture, to be intolerant, not listening to what other people are saying,

etc. If we do not take proper care of our body and mind, we are committing violence of self. A vegetarian diet is natural and better for our health as described below. Thus vegetarianism helps us avoid violence of self.

Vegetarians do not eat meat, poultry or fish. There are three kinds of vegetarians, based on their attitude to milk and eggs. Vegans do not take eggs or milk. Lacto's do not eat eggs but they do drink milk.

Lacto-ovo's eat eggs and drink milk. Jains are lacto's.

**Here are some health reasons why some people don't eat**

**meat:**

**1) To protect their heart.**

Animal fat and high cholesterol diet may set a stage for heart disease. In some places where very little fat is eaten, the death rate from heart disease is lower than in other places.

**2) To reduce the risk of cancer.**

Animal fat and cholesterol have been linked to some forms of cancer such as the cancer of colon, breast and uterus. The National Academy of Sciences reported in 1983 that 'people may be able to prevent many common cancers by eating less fatty meats and more vegetables and grains.' A vegetarian diet also reduces the risk of kidney trouble.

**3) To control their weight.**

Vegetarian diet is bulky and filling. The caloric value of a six-ounce steak (with its fat) equals that of a whole pound of cooked noodles. Thus most people lose weight when they go on a vegetarian diet. This

also reduces the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes and back troubles.

Man is vegetarian by nature. Vegetarian food is more suited to the human body. We do not require animal proteins for strength and energy. A physiological comparison of meat-eater, herbivore and man proves this statement. A meat-eater has claws, has no skin pores and perspires through the tongue. A meat-eater has sharp front teeth for tearing and no flat molars for grinding. The intestinal tract of a meat eater is only three times his body length so that rapidly decaying meat can pass out quickly. A meat-eater has strong hydrochloric acid in stomach to digest meat. A herbivore has no claws and perspires through skin pores. He does not have sharp front teeth and has flat rear molars. His intestinal tract is about ten times the body length, and stomach acid, twenty times less strong than meat-eaters. A man has no claws, perspires through skin pores, has no sharp front teeth and has flat rear molars. The intestinal tract of a man is twelve times his body length, and stomach acid, twenty times less strong than meat-eaters. Once within the stomach, meat requires digestive juices high in hydrochloric acid. A man's stomach does not have it. Another important fact is that our intestinal tract is too long where food is further digested and nutrients are passed into the blood. The

putrefaction of meat in our long intestinal tract produces poisonous wastes . That is why meat must be eliminated from our diet. The basic foods in a vegetarian diet are: cereals, grains, bread, nuts, beans, seeds, fruits and vegetables. Most vegetable proteins are incomplete and most animal proteins are complete. Our bodies require complete proteins to function properly. So vegetarians combine vegetable proteins in a way that makes them complete. Two or more vegetables and grains, nuts,etc., having incomplete proteins, can be combined in a meal to form complete proteins. Here are three simple ways to do it:

**1.** Combine legumes (dried peas, beans, lentils) with grains (barley, wheat, rice, rye).

**2.** Combine legumes with nuts and seeds.

**3.** Combine milk products with any vegetable protein.

If we practice vegetarianism, we will be able to satisfy our religious

beliefs and also maintain our health

**'At work and at parties, Americans are drinking less and enjoying it more '**, is the subheading of the cover story of the Time Magazine of May 20, 1985. The article points towards the growing

trend towards temperance in the U. S. A. The author writes:  
The temperate mood is transforming the ways in which the nation

works, plays and socializes. New attitudes towards careers, fitness and the very image of what we are and wish to become are being altered. Americans are tackling the entrenched social problems of

abusive drinking with new rigor. The neo-temperance has already inspired tough drunk-driving laws to combat highway bloodshed. Basic to it all: people are drinking lighter. Only 67% of the nation's 170 million adults over 18 said that they drink at all.<sup>1</sup> We Jains can easily remain with the 33% who don't drink at all. The writer has further remarked:  
For the fitness-conscious, alcohol has joined sodium and cholesterol as a substance devoutly to be avoided. The active ingredient in alcohol is ethanol, a depressant closely akin to ether. It dulls perception, slows reaction and contains 'empty' carbohydrate calories, that is, with no nutritional value.

Jainism says that the dulling of perception and slowing of reaction is violence toward the self because it is, in fact, partially obstructing one's life processes unnecessarily. It can also lead to other kinds of violence. Therefore consumption of alcohol and of other such drugs is prohibited in Jainism.

Some people may say that alcohol relieves stress by releasing endorphins, chemicals that calm the nervous system. However, studies have shown that endorphins are released by physical exercise just as well. Righteous meditation can also cause the release of endorphins. Thus it is not necessary to take alcohol for the purpose of relieving tension. Moreover, in the case of alcohol and other habit forming drugs, there is the potential risk of going overboard. Alcohol is

the most widely abused drug.

Rationalism entails that we do not succumb to peer pressure and that we avoid situations that may lead to ill-health dependence on unnecessary substances, conflicts and violence. Thus we should stay away from alcohol and drugs.