

THINK A VEGETARIAN DIET IS UNHEALTHY? THINK AGAIN!

Have you noticed that many people around you are “going veggie” these days? They choose veg*n (vegetarian and vegan diets) for environmental, ethical, health and other reasons. A veg*n diet can meet all your nutritional needs and improve your overall health, but like any healthy diet, it needs proper planning. If you have considered becoming a veg*n but are concerned about your health and obtaining necessary nutrients, read on!

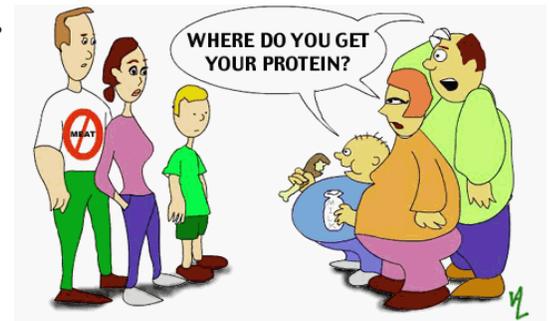
What are the health benefits of a veg*n diet?

- **Lower in fat and calories:** On average, people who follow a veg*n diet eat fewer calories and less fat. Veg*ns also tend to maintain a lower body weight than non-veg*ns.
- **Increased antioxidants and fibre:** Veg*ans tend to consume high amounts of fruits and vegetables which are rich in antioxidants and fibre. Research has demonstrated the importance of antioxidants and fibre in fighting diseases such as cancer.²
- **Avoiding hormones:** Meat and dairy animals are fed drug-laden food and are sometimes administered growth hormones.
- **Avoiding protein over-consumption:** People consuming “North American” diets typically get twice the amount of protein (and fat) that they need which overworks the kidneys. Excess protein also interferes with the absorption and retention of calcium and actually prompts the body to excrete calcium.⁵
- **Lower Cholesterol:** Cholesterol levels for vegetarians are about 14% lower for meat eaters.

Longer life-expectancy!
Vegetarians and vegans live, on average, six to 10 years longer than meat-eaters.¹

Like any diet it is important to pay attention that you are getting all the nutrients you need. Here are a few things that vegans and vegetarians should keep in mind.

- **Protein:** Some sources of protein include legumes, lentils, nuts, seeds, soy products, meat substitutes and whole grains. Eating a variety of these sources offers superior quality protein to that of meat and dairy protein as they are more easily absorbed in the body.
- **Calcium:** Dark green vegetables, such as spinach, turnip and collard greens, kale, and broccoli, are good sources of calcium. Tofu enriched with calcium and fortified soy milk and fruit juices are other options.
- **Vitamin B-12:** This vitamin is found almost exclusively in animal products. Vegans can get vitamin B-12 from some enriched cereals,



Research has shown that vegetarians are 50% less likely to develop heart disease, and they have 40% of the cancer rate of meat-eaters.^{3,4}

fortified soy products, and nutritional yeast.

- **Iron:** Dried beans and peas, lentils, pumpkin seeds, dark chocolate, enriched cereals, whole-grain products, dark leafy green vegetables, and dried fruit are good sources of iron. To help your body absorb non-animal sources of iron, eat foods rich in vitamin C — such as strawberries, citrus fruits, tomatoes, cabbage and broccoli — at the same time you consume iron-containing foods.³

The key to a healthy veg*n diet — or any diet for that matter — is to enjoy a wide variety of foods. Since no single food provides all of the nutrients that your body needs, eating a wide variety helps ensure that you get the necessary nutrients and other substances that promote good health.

If you already are vegan or vegetarian, power to you! If you're not, maybe it's time to consider it, or at least try it for a few days a week. Taking the animal-free plunge has never been easier or more essential than it is today. For more information, please see our Web site at www.ncva.ca.

Resources:

- 1 John Robbins, *The Food Revolution*, Conari Press: Boston, 2001, p. 14
- 2 Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.com>
- 3 Elizabeth Somer, "Eating Meat: A Little Doesn't Hurt," WebMD, 1999.
- 4 Neal Barnard, M.D., *The Power of Your Plate*, Book Publishing Co.: Summertown, Tenn., 1990, p. 26. Source: <http://www.vegsoc.org>
- 5 Barnard, Neil. *Food is a Wonder Medicine*. 1996.

