

### *Vegetarianism—Terms, Types, and Myths*

A VEGETARIAN  
A “STRICT” VEGETARIAN  
AN OVO-LACTO VEGETARIAN  
A LACTO-VEGETARIAN  
A POLLO VEGETARIAN  
A PESCO VEGETARIAN  
VEGAN

**E**ACH OF THE ABOVE terms describes a vegetarian, so why the different names? A vegetarian is a person who doesn't eat meat, right?

Well, sort of. In fact, we use several different names to describe people who have a meatless diet. That's because the distinctions between vegetarians begin right after saying that a vegetarian diet doesn't include meat.

Why the different terms? Largely, it helps those of us who haven't learned the benefits of a vegetarian diet avoid offending our friends who have by serving inappropriate foods to someone who is a vegan as opposed to a ovo-lacto vegetarian. Plus, just as those who do eat meat can have vastly different diets, so do those who choose, for a variety of reasons, not to eat meat

So, what do these terms mean?

**OVO-LACTO VEGETARIAN.** This refers to someone who doesn't eat meat—no beef, pork, lamb, poultry, or fish—but who does choose to eat some animal products. An ovo-lacto vegetarian eats eggs (ovo), milk, and cheese (lacto) and possibly bee products such as honey.

**LACTO VEGETARIAN.** This is the next step in “strictness,” because lacto vegetarians have elimi-



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nated eggs from their diet.

**VEGAN.** This is what we think of when we say a “strict” vegetarian. A vegan does not eat meat or meat products. In our society, that's easier said than done. For example, if you go to a fast food restaurant and order a hamburger and take out the meat, you still haven't avoided all animal products. Most fast food restaurants use buns made with lard—an animal fat.

**PESCO AND POLLO VEGETARIAN.** A pesco vegetarian is someone who eats only fish, and a pollo vegetarian is someone who eats only chicken. The problem is both of these terms violate the basic definition of vegetarian which means a diet devoid of meat. A “pesco-pollo vegetarian” is more descriptive of people who have eliminated red meat from their diets for health reasons.

#### WHY BECOME A VEGETARIAN?

There are probably as many reasons to adopt a vegetarian diet as there are people.

Some people abstain from eating meat for religious reasons. For example, Jains and some



Buddhists and Hindus believe that the killing and eating of animals violates the ethical precept of *ahimsa* or nonviolence. Other people adopt a vegetarian diet for environmental reasons: Because raising fruits, vegetables, and grains requires less land, water, and food than to raise livestock. Still others adopt a vegetarian diet because of concerns about the way livestock is raised and treated. Most chickens, pigs, and veal calves are raised in closed quarters with chemical additives in their feed.

Each of these reasons provide motivation for people to adopt a vegetarian diet. They also foster myths about what type of person decides to become a vegetarian. These stereotypes include blanket statements such as: All vegetarians are animal-rights activists; Vegetarians are leftover hippies from the 60's; or Most vegetarians are women. The fact is, vegetarians stretch across the entire spectrum of society: from ex-Beetle Paul McCartney and his wife and children to Mr. Rogers of Mr. Roger's Neighborhood to world-class bodybuilder Andreas Cahling. The only statement that has any merit is that "most vegetarians are women." This is true—the majority of vegetarians are women.

#### THE HEALTH ADVANTAGE

The common thread between all vegetarians is that they enjoy significant health benefits because of their diet. Vegetarians have much lower risks for society's most prevalent and deadly diseases, including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. They tend to have lower blood pressure and less chance of developing osteoporosis.

#### THE BENEFITS OF A VEGGIE DIET

Members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church are often called "the healthiest people in America." They are generally vegetarians. Here are some statistics from studies done on members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Male Seventh Day Adventist lives 8.9 years longer than the average American male, and Adventist females live 7.5 years longer than the average female.

Church members have lower incidence of breast, prostate, pancreatic, bladder, and ovarian cancer than the general population.

Vegan Adventists have an expected coronary heart disease rate that is only 12 percent of that experienced by the general population.

The vegetarian diet practiced by Seventh Day Adventists provides a number of substantial benefits. We must point out, though, that while whole grains, fresh fruits, and vegetables play a key role in the diet of church members, they also advocate a number of other healthful practices, such as avoiding smoking, alcohol, and processed sugar, as well as exercising regularly.

Most fruits, vegetables, and grains are low in fat, contributing to the vegetarian's low-fat diet. Usually, the fat in fruits and vegetables is unsaturated, which maintains healthier levels of fat in the blood stream. Also, plants do not contain cholesterol.

A vegetarian suffers much less from overweight and obesity than the average person. This is because fruit and vegetables contain less calories. For example, an entire honeydew melon or half a cantaloupe has the same calories as 1 teaspoon of sugar. Two honeydew melons have as many calories as 1 gram of fat. Because fruits and vegetables tend to be low calorie, vegetarians can consume more food, by weight, without risking excessive weight gain.

Finally, a vegetarian diet may provide added

protection against cancer. A number of recent research studies have identified plant chemicals, called phytochemicals, that appear to have the ability to either repair damaged cells or prevent pre-cancerous damage from occurring in the first place. For example, an enzyme found in oranges may prevent breast cancer. Another found in soybeans may help neutralize cancerous cells.

Seeing the benefits of a vegetarian diet and then actually making the necessary dietary changes are two different things. Some people can make the switch overnight. Most people make the change by eliminating certain foods gradually.

Over the years, a number of myths have surrounded vegetarian diets and those who adopt them. Most of these are misconceptions. What are some of these vegetarian myths and what is the reality? Let's see:

**MYTH #1.** All vegetarians are animal rights activists.

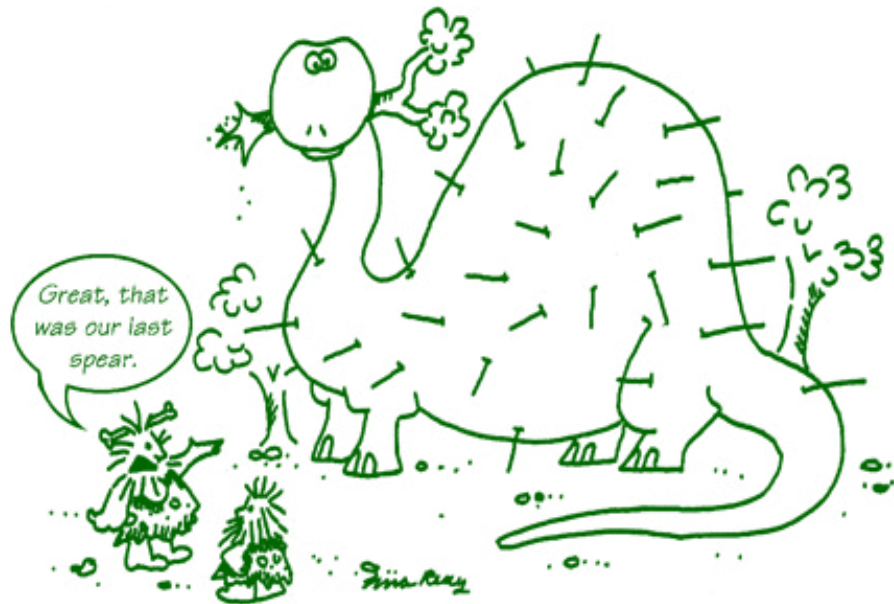
Research shows that most people adopt a vegetarian diet for the health benefits. The second most cited reason is animal rights. Even the people who mentioned animal rights say that health is the number one reason they follow a vegetarian diet.

**MYTH #2.** Vegetarians don't get enough protein.

There was a time when nutritionists and dietitians even said this—but no longer. Now we know that vegetarians get plenty of protein. What they don't get is the excessive amount of protein found in the typical modern diet. If you eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, then getting enough protein is not an issue.

**MYTH #3.** Vegetarians don't get enough calcium.

This myth is applied, in particular, to vegans—vegetarians who have eliminated meat and milk products from their diets. Somehow, the notion got started that the only good source of calcium is milk and cheese.



### The First Vegetarians

Granted, milk does have a good supply of calcium, but so do many vegetables—especially green, leafy veggies. The truth is, vegetarians suffer less from osteoporosis (a deficiency of calcium that leads to weak bones) because the body assimilates the calcium they eat more easily during digestion.

**MYTH #4.** Vegetarian diets aren't balanced, so vegetarians are risking their health for their principles.

First of all, a vegetarian diet isn't out of balance. It has a good proportion of complex carbohydrates, protein, and fat—the three macronutrients that are the cornerstone of any diet. Plus, vegetarian food sources (plants) tend to be higher sources of most of the micronutrients. Another way to look at it is this: The average meat eater consumes one or fewer servings of vegetables a day and no servings of fruit. If a meat eater does eat a vegetable, chances are it's a fried potato. "Out of balance" depends on your perspective.

**MYTH #5.** A vegetarian diet is all right for an adult, but kids need meat to develop properly.

This misguided notion assumes that protein from plants isn't as good as protein from meat. The truth is, protein is protein. It is all made from amino acids. Children need 10 essential amino acids to grow and develop properly. These amino acids are as readily available in plants as they are in meat. □

—Partners