

# VEGETARIANISM a healthy choice

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Vegetarianism has become a contentious and popular choice for many people all over the world. But parents may wonder whether their kids can safely follow a vegetarian diet and still get all necessary nutrients. Most dietary and medical experts agree that a well-planned vegetarian diet can actually be a very healthy way to eat. Vegetarianism is a general term used to describe people who exclude meat, poultry, fish, or other animal-derived foods from their diets. Vegetarians exhibit a wide diversity of dietary practices. It's worth to be aware of various types of vegetarian diets as that all vegetarian diets are not alike. Major vegetarian categories include:

**ovo-vegetarian:** eats eggs; no meat

**lacto-ovo vegetarian:** eats dairy and egg products; no meat

**lacto-vegetarian:** eats dairy products; no eggs or meat

**vegan:** eats only food from plant sources

**Pesco:** vegetarians who eat fish

There are many other different types of dietary practices such as, semi-vegetarians who have eliminated red meat, but may eat poultry or fish. One may practice vegetarianism for a variety of reasons. For example: religious, social or personal. Younger vegetarians are usually part of a family that eats vegetarian meals for health, cultural, or other reasons. In most cases, you shouldn't be alarmed if your child chooses vegetarianism. Discuss what it means and how to implement it, ensuring your child makes healthy and nutritious food choices.

Should one consider following vegetarian diets? Is it scientific? Then what is the evidence? You may find a rational answer as you scrutinize this chart which compares Carnivores, Herbivores with Humans. This testifies that humans are born vegetarians.

Comparison	Carnivores	Herbivores	Humans
Vision in the night	Excellent	poor	poor
Claw hand	present	absent	absent
Dentition	Sharp pointed front teeth and molars with cutting edges.	Front teeth with cutting edges and molars with grinding surface.	Front teeth with cutting edges and molars with grinding surface.
Tongue	Surface is very rough	Surface is rough	Surface is rough
Saliva	Contains no digestive enzymes	Contains digestive enzymes	Contains digestive enzymes
Eating pattern	Smell and engulf	Smell, taste and swallow	Smell, taste and swallow
PH in Stomach	Very acidic.PH< 1	acidic	acidic
Length of the Gut	Not more than 2 to 2.5 times of the body length	5 to 6 times of the body length	5 to 6 times of the body length
Time to defecate following a meal	Less than 8 hours	24 to 36 hours	24 to 36 hours

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A well-planned vegetarian diet can meet day to day nutritional needs and has some health benefits. For example, a diet rich in fruits and veggies will be high in fiber and low in fat, factors known to improve cardiovascular health by reducing blood cholesterol and maintaining a healthy weight. However, young and adolescents on a vegetarian diet may need to be careful that they get an adequate amount of certain vitamins and minerals.

Here are nutrients that vegetarians should get and some of their best food sources:

**vitamin B12:** dairy products, and vitamin-fortified products, such as cereals, breads, and soy and rice drinks, and nutritional yeast

**vitamin D:** milk, vitamin D-fortified orange juice, and other vitamin D-fortified products

**calcium:** dairy products, dark green leafy vegetables, broccoli, dried beans, and calcium-fortified products, including orange juice, soy and rice drinks, and cereals

**protein:** dairy products, tofu and other soy products, dried beans, and nuts

**iron:** dried beans, dried fruits, whole grains, leafy green vegetables, and iron-fortified cereals and bread

**zinc:** wheat germ, nuts, fortified cereal, dried beans, and pumpkin seeds

A vegetarian diet can be a healthy choice for all, as long as it's properly planned. The principles of planning a vegetarian diet are the same as planning any healthy diet — provide a variety of foods and include foods from all of the food groups. A balanced diet will provide the right combinations to meet nutritional needs. But be aware of potential nutrient deficiencies in your child's diet and figure out how you'll account for them. With a little exploration, you may find more vegetarian options than you realized. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and Dietitians of Canada have stated that at all stages of life, a properly planned vegetarian diet is "healthful, nutritionally adequate, and provides health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases"(1).

Vegetarians tend to have lower body mass index,(2) lower levels of cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and less incidence of heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, renal disease, metabolic syndrome, dementias such as Alzheimer's disease, and obesity (3).

Furthermore certain cancers, osteoporosis, diverticular disease and gallstones are relatively low among vegetarians. Incidence of heart disease much lower as vegetarian's higher intake of fiber, antioxidants, vitamins,

phytochemicals, and fats. Large-scale studies have shown that mortality from ischaemic heart disease was 30% lower among vegetarian men and 20% lower among vegetarian women than in non-vegetarians (4,5)

The more restricted the vegetarian diet the greater the challenge to achieve a nutritionally adequate diet. The goal for the vegetarian in diet planning is the same as the omnivore: consume a variety of foods to obtain all of the needed nutrients.

## Summary

A vegetarian diet focuses on plants for food. These include fruits, vegetables, dried beans and peas, grains, seeds and nuts. There is no single type of vegetarian diet. Availability of various food ingredients are more or less the same in both plant origin and animal origin foods. People who follow vegetarian diets can get all the nutrients they need. However, they must be careful to eat a wide variety of foods to meet their nutritional needs (6),

## References;

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