

Health benefits of a plant-based diet

Vegans are generally closer to their ideal weight.

The American Dietetic Association states that vegans have a lower risk of breast cancer, colon cancer, diabetes mellitus, gallstones, heart disease, hypertension, kidney stones, obesity, osteoporosis, and stroke. The vast majority of all cancers, cardiovascular diseases, and other forms of degenerative illnesses can be prevented simply by adopting a plant-based diet.

According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, a vegetarian diet can prevent 97 percent of coronary occlusions. Dr. Dean Ornish, a well-known cardiologist from Harvard, proved that heart disease can be halted and even reversed by prescribing a vegetarian diet, and regular exercise.

A major study conducted at Harvard University concludes that 68 percent of all diseases in the U.S. are diet related. (1997) Today, the average American male eating a meat-based diet has a 50 percent chance of dying from heart disease. His risk drops to 15 percent if he cuts out meat; it goes to 4 percent if he cuts out meat, dairy, and eggs.

The rate of colon cancer is highest in regions of the world where meat eating is high and lowest where meat eating is uncommon. A similar pattern is evident for breast, cervical, uterine, ovarian, prostate, and lung cancers. Chinese people who eat the least amount of fat and animal products have the lowest risks of cancer and other degenerative diseases.

(China Health Project - the largest population study on diet and health to date)

Cholesterol

The number one cause of death in the U.S. is cholesterol and saturated fat blocking the arteries and causing heart attacks and strokes. Plant foods contain no cholesterol, whereas meat, eggs, and dairy products contain large amounts of cholesterol, saturated fats, and concentrated protein, all harmful substances.

Meat, dairy products, and eggs are completely devoid of fiber and complex carbohydrates, the nutrients that we're supposed to be consuming more of, and are laden with saturated fat and cholesterol, which make us fat and lethargic in the short term and lead to clogged arteries in the long term.

Serving up just one egg for breakfast each morning can raise your cholesterol level by as much as 10 points! The human body makes all the cholesterol it needs, and when extra cholesterol is eaten, only 100 mg per day can be eliminated-the rest begins clogging arteries.

Breast cancer

Women who eat meat every day are nearly four times more likely to get breast cancer than those who don't. (National Cancer Institute)

Women who consume at least one serving of vegetables a day reduce their risk of breast cancer by

20 percent to 30 percent. (Harvard Nurses Health Study)

Protein

In Western countries, our problem is too much protein, not too little. Most Americans get at least twice as much protein as they need. The typical meat-eating American is eating about five times as much protein as needed. According to the U.S. recommended daily allowance (RDA), people should get 8-10% of their calories from protein. Most plant foods greatly exceed this amount of protein per calorie: potatoes 11%, wheat 15%, tomatoes 20%, beans 20-35%, broccoli 45%, and spinach 49%. It's nearly impossible to eat as many calories as you need for good health, without getting enough protein.

Too much protein, especially animal protein, can cause calcium excretion through the urine and increase the risk of osteoporosis. Too much protein can also strain the kidneys, leading to kidney disease.

High protein foods, such as meat, eggs, and dairy products, leach calcium from the body as excess protein is processed by the liver and passed through the kidneys, making the kidneys work harder and causing the loss of minerals such as calcium. Osteoporosis is bone loss due to calcium resorption.

Other Nutrients

Calcium: can be obtained from many different vegetables, nuts, and beans, as well as fortified orange juice and soy milk. The average bone loss for a vegetarian woman at age 65 is 18 percent; for non-

vegetarian women, it's double that. (Vegetarian Times, April 1999)

Iron: garbanzo beans, kidney beans, dried apricots, raisins, figs, spinach, broccoli, kale, watermelon

Vitamin D: produced by sunshine on skin, 15-20 minutes, 2-3 times a week (extra amounts are stored for months, fortified foods).

Vitamin B12: fortified cereals and beverages. Most people have bacteria producing B12 in their throats and intestines. The body needs only miniscule amounts of B12 and vegans rarely show clinical symptoms of B12 deficiency.

In the words of Michael Klaper, MD, "Your body has absolutely no nutritional requirements for the flesh or milk of other animals" All requirements can be obtained through non-animal sources.

It's never too late to change your habits for the better. Changing your diet isn't nearly as inconvenient as enduring a heart bypass operation, suffering paralysis from a stroke, or facing chemotherapy and radiation treatments for cancer!

Going vegan is the single best thing you can do for your health.