

# **Vegetarian Diet and Longevity**

**“Animals are my friends,  
and I don’t eat my friends.”**

George Bernard Shaw

There is no question that diet plays a very important role in the development of cardiovascular diseases and some forms of cancer, especially of the gastrointestinal tract. One particular diet --- one high in saturated fat and cholesterol, and low in fiber --- consisting mainly of red meats (pork, beef, non-skim dairy products, etc) and eggs, has been branded as unhealthy. Voluminous clinical studies have shown beyond a reasonable doubt that excess serum cholesterol, specifically chronically elevated HDL (the bad cholesterol) and triglycerides, is the culprit in the more than half a million deaths from heart attack each year in the United States alone. This translates to one person dying from a cardiovascular illness every 60 seconds. And this does not even include the mortality from cancer.

## **The Culprit**

Cholesterol is a sterol, a complex alcohol constituent of animal fats and oils. If abnormally high in the blood stream, this substance forms plaques which adhere to the inner wall of arteries causing hardening of the arteries and stenoses (blockages), many leading to heart attacks, strokes, or poor leg circulation.

## **The Good Cholesterol**

Cholesterol, in normal level, is essential to health. The good cholesterol is called High Density Lipoprotein (HDL), and the bad cholesterol is called the Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL). For better health, a person should have Total Cholesterol no higher than 150, HDL above 60, LDL below 100, and Triglyceride level below 150. To be accurate and significant, the cholesterol study should include these four, in a blood test called Lipid Profile.

## **Sources of Cholesterol**

While our liver produces (endogenous) cholesterol, the main source of (exogenous) cholesterol in our body and the blood is from the food we eat. Some of the food that are high in cholesterol include: egg yolk, pork, duck, chicken skin, lamb, beef (and other red meats), butter, lard, and other non-skim dairy products.

## **Omega-3 Fatty Acids**

The good fats come from fish and is called Fish Oil or Omega-3 fatty acids. These substances are a natural blood thinner that prevents blood clot formation and minimizes hardening of the arteries. Thus, eating fish daily reduces the risk of heart attack and stroke, even among those who are diabetics and hypertensives (those with high blood pressure), provided these conditions are treated and well-controlled.

## **The Cholesterol Factor**

Everything else being similar, diabetics and hypertensives respond better to treatment, have fewer complications from their illness, and have a better prognosis if their total cholesterol, HDL, LDL and triglycerides are normal, compared to those whose lipid profile is out of whack.

## **Diet and Longevity**

The proponents of the vegetarian diet argue that studies have shown that the longest-lived animals had low-calorie vegetarian diet, and that rats fed high protein, high fat diet had the shortest life span. The studies of Dr. Paul Dudley on the Hunzas of Pakistan, who have amazing longevity, showed that they subsist on spartan and vegetarian diet of nuts, grains, fruits, vegetables, and a little goat milk. Fresh and/or dried apricots are their staple food. The Hunzas' lifespan is 140 years. While the inference is clearly there, more extensive controlled clinical studies on human subjects are needed to find out with certainty if vegetarian diet, although already proven to be healthy, really improves longevity.

## **Vegetables and Fruits**

Vegetables and fruits have phytochemicals that are good for our body. Twenty three epidemiological studies have shown that diet rich in grains and vegetables reduces the risk of colon cancer by 40%, and breast cancer by 25%. Some of the hundreds of phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables are: lycophene, ellagic acid, lutein, flavanoids, saponins, monoterpenes, phthalides, phenols, ajoene, cassaicin, coumestrol, genistein, sulforaphane, zeaxanthin. Our mothers were right in cajoling us to eat vegetables and fruits while we were growing up. Too bad, most of us didn't listen. But since we are now wiser and know better, let's educate our own children and persuade them to eat more vegetables and fruits—and less animal meat---for better health. The incidence of cancers, heart and kidney diseases, diabetes, hypertension, and obesity among vegetarians is much lower than among meat-eaters.

## **Types of Vegetarians**

Vegetarians come in three forms: (1) Lacto-ovo vegetarians, whose diet consists of vegetables, dairy products and eggs, no meat or flesh of any kind (pork, beef, lamb, etc., poultry, fish and seafoods); (2) Lacto-vegetarians who do not eat eggs, but eat vegetables, fruits and milk; and, (3) Vegans or pure vegetarians, who do not eat any food or food products of animal origin, including milk and eggs, and subsist on vegetables, grains, nuts and fruits only. Most vegans also do not buy or use animal products, such as those made of leather, fur, feather, ivory, etc., all of which involves the killing of animals.

## **Imported From England**

The Rev. William Metcalfe of England, together with his friend, Sylvester Graham, a young Presbyterian minister and 40 other English church members, brought the vegetarian way of life to the United States in 1817. For thousands of years, being a vegetarians was a part of socio-cultural-religious practice around the globe, most notably in the Far East. Many people around the world today choose to be vegetarians for health reasons.

## **Vegetarian Who's Who**

If you are a vegetarian, you're in good company. Some of the famous vegetarians include Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Leonardo da Vinci, Buddha, Plutarch, John Milton, Sir Isaac Newton, Mahatma Gandhi, The Dalai Lama, Benjamin Franklin, Shakespeare, Vicent Van Gogh, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Voltaire, Albert Schweitzer, George Bernard Shaw, Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Rabindranath Tagore, Mark Twain, Robert Browning, Linda and Paul McCartney, John Denver, Richard Gere, Kim Bassinger, Steven Spielberg, Cameron Diaz, Josh Hartnett...etc.

## **Was Jesus a Vegetarian?**

Knowledge as recorded in the bible about how the Essenes, the Nazoreans and Ebionites, lived suggests that Christ was probably a vegetarian. He was vehemently against animal sacrifices. Matthew and Peter were said to be vegetarians. The brother of Jesus, James the Just, the first head of the church in Jerusalem after the death of Christ, was raised as a vegetarian. If Jesus's parents raised James as vegetarian then it would be likely that Jesus was also raised as one. The early Christian fathers adhered to a meatless regime. Many early Christian groups supported the meatless way of life. In fact, the writings of the early Church indicate that meat-eating was not officially allowed until the 4th century, when the Emperor Constantine decreed that the practice of vegetarianism was heresy and punishable by death.

## **Man: A Natural Herbivore?**

Was man supposed to be plant-eaters instead of meat-eaters? Yes, according to several investigations and books on the subject. A. D. Andrews, author of *Fit Food For Men*, made an anatomical and structural comparison between herbivores (plant-eating animals) and carnivores (meat-eating animals), and came to the conclusion that man's teeth, salivary glands, quality of saliva, long intestinal tract, absence of claws, are all similar to those of herbivores, very much unlike those of carnivores. Thus, he argues that man is a natural herbivore, and must eat what herbivores eat: vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains, and not meat or flesh, in order to stay healthy. Staying away from what herbivores should eat, and eating a lot of red meat, is unhealthy and is the cause of most, if not all, of man's ailments, is also a well-respected argument in the scientific community.

## **Strength, Vigor and Vitality**

The belief that vegetarians are weak and sickly is a myth. Elephants, bulls, cows, carabaos, and some dinosaurs (plateosaurus, brachiosaurus, etc.) are a few of the strongest animals known to man --- all herbivores. Various studies comparing athletes who are carnivores and herbivores revealed astonishing findings: Vegetarian athletes fared 2 to 3 times better, with greater endurance and better recovery time, compared to their meat-eating counterparts in similar sport activities.

## **Vegetables with Protein**

Vegetarians get their protein from soybeans, lentils, kidney beans, lima and pinto beans, black beans, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, peanuts, almonds, cashew, sunflower seeds, and other nuts, broccoli and other vegetables, wheat, grains, brown rice, potato, and eggs and dairy products. These sources easily meet the daily requirement of between 60-80 grams of protein, even for vegans. So, animal meat is not really essential for health and life.

## **Our Prescription**

A daily low-fat, low-cholesterol, high-fiber diet of fish and a lot of vegetables, fruits, nuts and grains (brown rice instead of white), with occasional red meat, if desired, coupled with abstinence from tobacco, doing daily exercises, maintaining proper weight, drinking a glass or two of red wine with dinner, taking a daily multivitamin-mineral supplement, taking time off with friends and/or family for rest and relaxation on weekends, visiting the doctor for check-up as advised, and adequately treating any existing medical condition (hypertension, diabetes, etc) is our prescription for health, peace, happiness, and better productivity.

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**Please add usual footnotes.**