

# Vegetarianism Part 1

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## Introduction

Many people wonder whether they should try a vegetarian diet. Are you thinking of joining the 12 million people in the United States and countless millions around the world who are vegetarian? If so, learning about the diet and lifestyle are important so that you can enjoy the best health possible and avoid any pitfalls of not having a balanced diet. In the past, vegetarians were often thought of as strange or eccentric but now, many people are finding that this diet is not only being promoted by certain religious groups but is becoming a way to improve health.

## What is a vegetarian? What different types of vegetarians are there?

vegetarian (n) (1). Someone who eats no meat and often no animal products of any kind. There are several sub-classifications according to Perspectives in Nutrition by Wardlaw:(2)

Fruitarian - a person who primarily eats fruits, nuts, honey, and vegetable oils

Lacto-vegetarian - a person who consumes plant products and dairy products

Lacto-ovo-vegetarian - a person who consumes plant products, dairy products and eggs

Vegan - a person who eats only plant foods

(Webster's unabridged dictionary, 2nd edition (1).

There are also other definitions from other sources, including Dorland's Medical Dictionary (4) which lists vegetarians as those who eat exclusively a diet of vegetable origin, and other dictionaries that have slightly different classifications. There are other loose classifications that list semi-vegetarians or partial vegetarians that include people who eat little or no red meat. It is therefore important to clarify which group you are talking about. ***It is also important to understand that not all vegetarian diets are necessarily healthful if the diet is full of sugar and fats or lacking in necessary ingredients to keep a person healthy.***

## Why do people become vegetarians?

People become vegetarian or are raised as vegetarians for a variety of reasons. Some persons are against the killing of animals from an ethical standpoint. Many of these persons believe that animals are just as important in the world as people, and that we should not use them for food, or use products from them such as their fur, or skin for leather, which require the killing of the animals.

Some people believe that it is a waste of resources to use land to grow grain or other crops that are fed to animals. They believe that we could feed many more people in the world by using the land to grow crops to feed people nutritious food.

Some groups believe in vegetarianism for purely religious reasons.

Some groups believe vegetarianism is the healthiest lifestyle.

Some people believe that a vegetarian or plant based diet supplies them with a higher amount of carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables to help protect them against many diseases including cancers and heart disease.

Many people are vegetarian for a combination of these reasons.

Seventh-day Adventists promote a vegetarian diet because they believe it to be the most healthful lifestyle, one that is recommended in the Bible as the original diet for humans, and one that will be eventually given again to man in heaven and in an earth made new. They affirm and encourage an increasingly plant based diet and careful planning that avoids extremes and is nutritionally balanced.

### **Are there real advantages to becoming a vegetarian?**

There are a number of real advantages to becoming vegetarian:

Lower death rates for some chronic diseases

Improved quality of life because of lower incidence of some chronic diseases.

Increased energy

Less expensive food source

More humane treatment for animals

More food resources and food growing space

### **Are there any health risks to becoming a vegetarian?**

The most important health risks are related to a lack of certain vitamins and minerals, especially vitamin B12. This is why it is very important to learn everything you can about a vegetarian diet and how to make it adequate. Some people think that the main risk is a lack of protein, but this is rarely the case if a person eats a well balanced diet of grains, nuts, fruits, and vegetables. For strict vegetarians, there must be care in finding sources for vitamin B12 from supplements or other sources. See also the article on the ABCs of Nutrition at [www.power4health.org](http://www.power4health.org).

### *Are vegetarian diets safe for children?*

Vegetarian diets are safe for babies, children, and growing teenagers if the diet is carefully planned. It is easiest if dairy products are included, but for those who desire a complete vegetarian or vegan menu, it is important that supplements of vitamin B12 are used. Mothers who are strict vegetarian or who have poor diets may even have low vitamin B12 in breast milk,

and their babies may be deficient in this vitamin. Using a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes is the best way to have a healthy vegetarian diet for both adults and children.

### *Important points to keep in mind*

Find as much good information as possible.

Plan well-balanced meals with a wide variety of foods.

Consult with a dietician who knows about vegetarian diets, or with persons who have practiced this lifestyle for many years and have a balanced approach.

### *Children's Nutrition - Dangers to Avoid*

Children need a wide variety of nutrients and enough calories for proper growth and development, and if their diet is extreme, they may be at risk. This includes restricting diets to only raw foods or only herbs and fruits, for example.

Another serious risk is children or teenagers who suddenly decide to become the only vegetarian in their family, especially if the parents do not understand how to help them to plan a well-balanced diet. Resources are available to help you plan a well-balanced and safe vegetarian diet for babies, children and teens. Many hospitals and health plans have dieticians that can also give you advice. See also the article about children and vegetarian diets at [www.power4health.org](http://www.power4health.org).

### **Research:**

Over the past several decades, published research in vegetarianism has jumped from a few case reports, and less than 10 articles per year to more than 100,000 currently indexed articles by the largest national medical databases. The research has also become more sophisticated, and you can look up many articles by specific topics. You can look up the information under vegetarian, vegetarian diets, or vegetarianism. Several journals publish many quality scientific research articles about the adequacy of vegetarian diets or about the prevention of certain diseases or conditions using a dietary approach. We recommend *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* and *The Journal of Nutrition*. For a more easy-to-read style, choose the *Vegetarian Nutrition and Health Letter*, edited by a Loma Linda University dietetics professor, or the health journal *Vibrant Life*, published by the Seventh-day Adventist church.

### **Research regarding Adventists and vegetarianism; the Adventist Health Study:**

#### *Less Ischemic Heart Disease in Vegetarians*

In 1960 meat consumption was determined in 25,000 California Seventh-day Adventists by an extensive questionnaire. The participants were followed from 1960-1980. Meat consumption was positively associated with ischemic heart disease in both men and women. The study corrected for confounding by eggs and dairy products, obesity, marital status and cigarette smoking. The association was stronger for men than for women, and strongest in younger men. For 45-64 year old men, there was an approximately threefold difference between men who ate meat daily and those that did not eat meat. This was the first study to show a clear dose-response curve between

meat consumption and ischemic heart disease risk.  
Preventive Medicine, 1984, Sept. 13:(5) 490-500

***Less Diabetes in Vegetarians***

25,000 adult White Adventists studied in 1960 and followed for 21 years found that diabetes as an underlying or contributing cause of death was approximately 1/2 the risk as all US Whites. Within the group, the associations were stronger for males than for females. Vegetarians in the group had a substantial lower risk than did the non-vegetarians. The associations were not apparently confounded by over or under-weight or by other dietary factors or by physical activity.

American Journal of Public Health. 1985,May; 75 (5):507-12

***Vegetarians Have Less Mortality for all Diseases***

27,000 California Seventh-day Adventist adults were followed for 20 years between 1960-1980 . Meat consumption was positively associated with mortality of all causes in males, with heart disease in both males and females, and with cancers of the colon in both males and females. Milk consumption was positively associated with prostate cancer. Cheese did not appear to have any clear relationship with causes of death, but eggs were positively associated with all causes of mortality in females. There were no negative associations for any diseases with the consumption of meat, eggs, milk or cheese.

Am J. Clin. Nutr. 1988 Sept.; 48(3 Suppl.): 739-48

***Possibly Less Dementia in Vegetarians***

An evaluation of animal product consumption and evidence of dementia in two cohort subsets showed that in the matched cohort group of 272 persons matched for age, sex and zip code among California Seventh-day Adventists those who ate meat including poultry and fish were more than twice as likely to develop dementia as their vegetarian counterparts (Relative risk 2.18, and when past meat consumption was taken into account this risk rose to 2.99). In a second unmatched group of 2,984 persons residing in the Loma Linda area, there was no significant difference. There was no obvious explanation for this difference between the two subsets, although the power of the second group to detect a difference was unexpectedly limited. There was a trend in both groups to show a delay in the development of dementia in the vegetarian as compared to the heavy meat eaters.

Neuroepidemiology. 1993; 12 (1):28-36

***Less Pancreatic Cancer with Frequent Fruit/Vegetable Consumption***

Among 34,000 Adventists studied between 1976 and 1983, increasing consumption of vegetarian protein products, beans, lentils, and peas as well as dried fruits was highly significantly protective against pancreatic cancer risk. A prior history of diabetes as well as prior surgery for peptic or duodenal ulcers was associated with an increased risk for fatal pancreatic cancer. Frequent consumption of fruits and vegetables was more protective than the risk that might be associated with increased meat or other animal product consumption.

Cancer. 1988 Jun. 15; 61(12): 2578-85

***Less Prostate Cancer in Vegetarians***

In a study of 25,000 California Adventists, a 21 year follow up showed that those who used few

animal products (meat, milk, cheese, and eggs) the risk of fatal prostate cancer was one third that of Adventist men who heavily used animal products.

Plant Proteins: Application, Biological Effect, and Chemistry. 1986; pp 162

Many of the above discoveries are results of a long-term project known as the Adventist Health Study (<http://www.llu.edu/llu/health/abstracts.htm>).

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