

Vegetarian Diet Goes Mainstream

A growing body of research shows a largely plant-based diet is nutritional and reduces the risk of several chronic diseases.

For several decades, the vegetarian diet has been gaining popularity in the United States. However, vegetarianism is not new. People have followed a plant-based diet in the U.S. and worldwide for centuries. A vegetarian diet consists primarily of plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds. Most people think of vegetarians only as individuals who don't eat meat. It is more useful, however, to consider vegetarians as people who consume a mostly *plant-based* diet.

Of course, while someone who eats only French fries, soda, and non-meat, processed foods could technically consider himself a vegetarian, the *health benefits* of the vegetarian diet are derived from a *varied* diet—rich with plant-based foods, prepared healthfully, and eaten in moderate portions.

Numerous scientific studies have demonstrated benefits of vegetarian diets in reducing the risk of several diseases. Evidence shows that vegetarians have lower total and LDL (*bad*) cholesterol, less hypertension and less risk of heart disease than people following a typical, American (meat-based) diet. Vegetarians are less likely to be obese, have Type 2 Diabetes, or certain cancers including colon, breast and lung cancer.

Because of these findings, the American Dietetic Association has taken an official position that vegetarian diets *are healthful and nutritionally adequate when appropriately planned*.

While some individuals choose not to make a full-time commitment to becoming vegetarian, practicing a semi-vegetarian lifestyle can be a step toward improving one's diet and reducing disease risk. It is helpful to consult a Registered Dietitian when considering major changes in diet.

References:

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