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# IS THE VEGETARIAN DIET THE BEST METHOD FOR HEALTH IN A GLOBAL SOCIETY?

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## Is the vegetarian diet the best method for health in a global society?

In a world overrun with pollution and animals with zero rights what so ever, a vegetarian diet can be the turning point of it all. The vegetarian diet is the best method for health in a global society because it has been proven to have aided in the reducing of illnesses, and also it has tremendous environmental benefits. Although, it can be argued that the vegetarian diet is not the best method for health because if followed poorly, you don't get all your nutrients from just a vegetarian diet. This topic interested me because I am a vegetarian and I wanted to know just why there are so few vegetarians where I live if there so many benefits to this diet.

The vegetarian diet can be considered the best method for health in a global society due to the findings that it aids in the reducing of illnesses. As researched by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a highly informative website that gives cerebral information pertaining to the topic researched, because this website was created only to inform, the information given is purely research done by physicians apart of the committee. On their website they do have a disclaimer saying the site is for informational use only, obtaining information from this site does not constitute a physician-patient or attorney-client relationship, aside from that their research states,

Vegetarian diets have been shown to reduce one's chances of forming kidney stones and gallstones. Diets that are high in protein, especially animal protein, tend to cause the body to excrete more calcium, oxalate, and uric acid. These three substances are the main components of urinary tract stones. British researchers have advised that persons with a tendency to form kidney stones should follow a vegetarian diet. The American Academy of Family Physicians notes that high animal protein intake is largely responsible for the high prevalence of kidney stones in the United States and other developed countries and recommends protein restriction for the prevention of recurrent kidney stones. (Vegetarian Foods: Powerful for Health, 2010)

The article from where this quote was taken from then goes on to talk about other illnesses than can be prevented with the adoption of a vegetarian diet, although this quote stood out to me not only because it had good data but because the data was easy to follow and also because the author goes into great detail about why eating animal meat that is high in animal protein causes the body to overproduce certain substances. It also touches briefly on what types of countries and persons should either stay away from or try to limit their protein intake.

Another example of the vegetarian diet being the best method for health comes from an article published by the Vegetarian Society on how a vegetarian diet can help in the reduction of heart disease. Vegetarian society is a NGO that was founded in the UK to help promote vegetarianism, their current work is to help spread public education on the benefits of eating healthy, and the organization's website is a hotspot for information on the vegetarian diet and all its benefits, along with other useful resources. However this organization has been proven to be partial towards companies that are pro animal rights and have endorsed them publically, the website itself stays fairly neutral with information. The article states,

The largest study ever conducted in the UK (EPIC-Oxford study) comparing rates of heart disease between vegetarians and non-vegetarians found that vegetarianism can reduce the risk of heart disease

by 32%. This study also showed that meat eaters had a 47% increased risk of heart disease if an inverse hazard ratio was applied to the statistics.” (Vegetarian diet and heart problems, 2013)

I can infer that with these findings the scientists conducting this study had a similar hypothesis to my question and due to the positive results they were proven right. This data gives a good example of a vegetarian diet helping prevent disease due to the actual presence of numerical data, unlike my first example, which I used to explain how a vegetarian diet can be used for good health. I think for these reasons the quotes complement each other by one presenting qualitative data and the other presenting quantitative data which benefits the reader by explaining how the diet prevents diseases and to what extent.

My second reason as to why a vegetarian diet is the best method for health in a global society is it promotes a healthy Earth. An article written by Christopher Matthews covered the UN’s recent finding of the environmental risks the livestock sector has on the environment. Christopher Matthews is a writer for the Agriculture and Consumer Protection department of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, which was founded in 1943 when forty-four governments committed themselves to founding a permanent organization for food and agriculture. The headquarters is now located in Rome with region offices spread out worldwide. Although I have not found any information on the author to be able to determine if they are experts in this particular field, the information I am using from the author comes from a report published from the world renowned organization UN FAO. His article reads,

According to a new report published by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions as measured in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent – 18 percent – than transport. It is also a major source of land and water degradation. (Christopher Matthews, 2006)

This excerpt clarifies the environmental effects that having such a large and global meat industry has on the planet. Prior to this research I already knew that meat came from industrialized factories and that the cattle, pork and chicken livestock’s were held in confined, tiny chambers. I already knew that was bad for the environment because I had learned about water contamination due to pesticide and fertilizer runoff from farms close to water sources, add in the chemical effects of greenhouse gas emissions, land and water degradation and personally I think those few factors alone should be enough to get the public to start wondering if all those environmental costs are worth hassle of eating meat.

To expand more on the environmental impacts of livestock, here is an example given by a video from the production *Reveal*, which is produced by The Center for Investigative Reporting and features investigative journalism from around the world. From documentaries, animations, podcasts and more. Their award-winning journalists hold the powerful accountable and reveal government fraud and waste of taxpayer funds, human rights violations, environmental degradation and threats to public safety. From the San Francisco Bay Area epicenter of technological and creative innovation, their reporting ignites real-world change as evidenced by civil and criminal investigations, new laws and policies, the instigation of public discourse and

solutions-oriented community action. Founded in 1977, CIR is nationally respected for setting the highest journalistic standards, and for their signature approach to investigative reporting and collaboration. They partner with numerous other media organizations, prioritize impact over exclusivity, engage with the public and track results. The video states,

Cows are ruminants – meaning they create methane gas when they digest food. Chicken and pigs don't. Methane has 21 times more climate-changing power than CO<sub>2</sub>. In America, cows produce more greenhouse gas than 22 million cars per year. America's cows create about 500 million tons of manure in a year. That's three times as much as we humans do. Cow manure also creates nitrous oxide, which has 300 times the global warming effect of CO<sub>2</sub>. Cow manure is responsible for two-thirds of all the nitrous oxide pollution in the world. (The hidden costs of hamburgers, 2012)

This quantitative data shows expands more on the topic of greenhouse emissions coming from large livestock sectors that was already discussed on the prior example. This data however is more specific pertaining to one of the world's more economically developed country, the United States. Given that I do live in the U.S this data doesn't seem to be global but it does help to have an understanding of what kind of environmental effects are going on in my country. Another point to consider is that the information given only focuses on livestock environmental impacts, it doesn't talk about the other numerous effects of the factories processing and packaging this meat.

Although a vegetarian diet has its perks it also has a few risks if you take into consideration your own personal health background and what your body needs to survive efficiently. One reason a vegetarian diet wouldn't be the best method for health in a global society is due to people who choose the diet may not be getting all the nutrients they need. Two examples, one from the Vegan society and the other from WebMD state that a vegetarian diet can be as healthy as a tradition diet if balanced and followed correctly, if not though it can lead to malnutrition.

The Vegan Society is a world renowned NGO created to help spread awareness about the benefits of being vegan and informing ways live a healthy vegan lifestyle, The information obtain from the website was prepared by Stephen Walsh- a vegan society trustee- and other members of the International Vegetarian Union Science Group, although there is missing information as to who the other authors are. Their research states,

Clinical deficiency can cause anemia or nervous system damage. Most vegans consume enough B12 to avoid clinical deficiency. Two subgroups of vegans are at particular risk of B12 deficiency: long-term vegans who avoid common fortified foods (such as raw food vegans or macrobiotic vegans) and breastfed infants of vegan mothers whose own intake of B12 is low. (Stephen Walsh, 2001)

Sid Kirchheimer has been a health and medical writer and editor for two decades. A former newspaper reporter, he has written or edited 15 health books, including the 2 million-copy best-seller, *The Doctors Book of Home Remedies II*. He has launched two newsletters, and directed web sites for doctors and patients. In addition to working for WebMD since 2002, he has contributed to dozens of leading publications and web sites. WebMD is a nationwide recognized organization that has a staunch reputation with the public, has won numerous awards and

recognitions such as the Rx club award, American Society of health care publications Editors award and many more, nevertheless the published article can seem to be skewed the slightest towards vegans. He states,

In the July issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, German researchers tracked 174 apparently healthy people living in Germany and the Netherlands. They found that 92% of the vegans they studied -- those who ate the strictest vegetarian diet, which shuns all animal products, including milk and eggs -- had vitamin B12 deficiency. But two in three people who followed a vegetarian diet that included milk and eggs as their only animal foods also were deficient. Only 5% of those who consumed meats had vitamin B12 deficiency.” (Sid Kirchheimer, 2003)

A vegetarian diet, if followed correctly, can help lead a normal, healthy lifestyle. Just as any diet, if it is not followed correctly it can lead to malnutrition. A vegetarian diet can be easy to follow; you just don't eat meat. That however doesn't mean you are guaranteed a healthy life, to live a healthy life one would have to make up for the protein, calcium and other nutrients that are heavily gained from animal meat. Just as the examples given, there are two types of vegetarians- those who eat a healthy balanced diet and those who eat an unbalanced diet which is basically anything that doesn't have meat in it. It's a personal responsibility to track your health and diet to make sure you are getting all the nutrients you need, and if you don't you should seek medical advice.

Before conducting my research I had a basic knowledge of vegetarianism and honestly thought it was the best method for health in a global society. Throughout my research however I have considered the alternative perspectives of some who may think a vegetarian diet wouldn't be the best method for health in a global society and I can see where they are coming from. Due to my research one of my personal standpoints of it being the only healthy diet aside from veganism has been affected when new information on vitamin B12 deficiency was a huge phenomenon in vegetarians. Although now I can understand where many people are coming from when they object to a vegetarian diet being unhealthy to a certain extent, I however still stand strongly by the diet and will continue to follow, although I will be taking extra precautions such as tracking my nutrition. However what I would like to be done in the future is for there to be more education for people who think that just because they aren't getting their protein from meat their bones will break at the slightest breeze. I want there to be more vegetarian programs easily accessible at high schools and middle schools such like the ones at colleges. Also I want there to be an easier way to be able to detect if you are iron deficient other than having to wait days on blood tests, like at home pee tests such as pregnancy tests. To conclude on my research, I think with good personal responsibility by following a balanced diet, a vegetarian diet can be the best method for health in a global society.

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