

Rachel Dozier

Potty Mouth Fall '09

The Facts of Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is on the rise. A 2003 National Harris Interactive Survey Question sponsored by the Vegetarian Resource Group estimated that 30-40% of the country's consumers are "a good market for meatless items;" however, four to ten percent of Americans "call themselves vegetarians."

Out of those polled only 2.8% said that they never eat meat, poultry, and fish/seafood. Are they vegetarians? Yes and no. There are multiple types of vegetarians ("How Many Vegetarians Are There?," 2003).

Total vegetarians or vegans only eat plant food. Their diet includes fruits, vegetables, legumes (dried beans and peas), grains, seeds, and nuts. Vegans do not include other animal products or by-products (eggs, dairy products, honey) in their diet. The majority of vegans chose their diet to directly oppose the meat industry and its treatment of animals ("Veganism in a Nutshell," 2009).

The next type of vegetarian is the lacto-vegetarian. Lacto vegetarians include plant products as well as cheese and other dairy products.

Lacto-ovo-vegetarians follow the same guidelines as lacto vegetarians with the addition of eggs. This type of vegetarianism is another step away from the extreme form of veganism ("Vegetarian Frequently Asked Questions," 2008).

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Pesco-vegetarians do not eat beef or poultry but include fish in their diets. The final type of vegetarian is the semi-vegetarian. Semi-vegetarians eat chicken, fish, plant foods, dairy products, and eggs, but no red meat.

No matter what type of vegetarian one chooses to be, it's important to maintain a healthy diet. Due to the lack of animal products in most vegetarian diets, it is necessary to recreate that protein with other sources. Many plant proteins can provide the appropriate amount of essential and non-essential amino acids. Whole grains, legumes, vegetables, seeds, soy, and nuts are all good sources of protein. Vegetarians' diets also require alternate sources of iron. Dried beans, spinach, enriched products, brewer's yeast, and dried fruits are all good plant sources for iron.

Being a vegetarian can be beneficial to your health. Studies have shown that vegetarians consume more calcium and are at a lower risk of obesity, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus, and some forms of cancer, than nonvegetarians ("Vegetarian Diets," 2009).

Becoming a vegetarian can benefit not only your own health but the world around you. Global warming, overexploitation of natural resources, deforestation, wasted land, and water and air pollution have all been directly linked to eating meat. A 2006 report by the United Nations summarized the devastation caused by the meat industry as "one of the top two or three most significant contributors to the

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most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global” (“Meat and the Environment,” 2007).

So to benefit your own body and the world around you, do your part, become a vegetarian. Even if you chose to eat one vegetarian meal a day it can make a difference.

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