
Meat

1. Isn't it natural for humans to eat meat?

Although humans are omnivorous, the human body is better suited to a vegetarian diet. The structure of our skin, teeth, stomach and bowel, the length of our digestive system, the composition of our saliva, stomach acids and urine etc. are more typical of a herbivorous animal than a carnivore.

Somewhere though, in our ancient history, we developed tools that overcame our physical limitations and enabled us to kill other animals and eat them. We became omnivorous in habit but our physiology, though resilient and adaptable enough to handle meat, has remained more suited to plant foods.

Stripped of our tools this becomes obvious. Imagine for example, the difficulty you would have first catching and then eating an animal raw - fur, bone, sinew and all, and compare that to the ease with which you could gather and eat raw fruit or vegetables.

Perhaps more importantly, ask yourself if, when you are hungry, you in any way feel an instinctive urge to hunt down, kill and eat another animal.

Despite our omnivorous habits human beings are designed for and thrive on a vegetarian diet. We can in fact maintain the very best in health without resorting to any animal products whatsoever. That is why vegetarianism is an ethical issue - how can we justify causing the suffering and death of millions upon millions of animals if it is unnecessary?

2. Haven't humans always eaten meat?

Meat eating is certainly among our most ancient practices, but then so are slavery, murder and war. (Although it is worth pointing out that most of the world's human population has always been, and still is, largely vegetarian.) The antiquity of a practice is neither a guarantee of its morality nor a justification for it.

3. Don't humans need some meat?

Despite the desperate brochures and advertisements put out by The Meat and Livestock Corporation this idea is obsolete. Numerous studies have found vegans and vegetarians to be not only healthy but generally healthier than people who eat meat.

4. Isn't meat good for you?

Vegetarians have lower rates of obesity, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, bowel disorders, gall-stones, osteoporosis, kidney stones, diabetes, gout, arthritis, appendicitis, angina, haemorrhoids, varicose veins and diverticular disease. Vegans enjoy the same benefits and some of them to a greater degree.

5. Can't humans eat meat and still be healthy?

The human digestive system is very resilient and adaptable. We can certainly eat moderate amounts of meat as part of a balanced diet and still be healthy.

The point is that we can maintain perfect health without any meat at all. Therefore, by eating meat we are causing the needless suffering and death of millions upon millions of animals every year for no better reasons than material profit and the taste of their flesh.

6. Animals kill other animals for food, so why can't we?

Most of the animals who kill for food could not survive if they didn't. That is not the case for us. We are better off not eating meat. Many other animals are vegetarians, including some of our closest primate relatives. Why don't we look to them as our example instead of to carnivores?

Milk

7. Isn't it natural for humans to drink cow's milk?

Human beings are the only animals on earth who drink the milk of another species (and drink it beyond weaning). This is not an ancient practice either, we thrived for hundreds of thousands of years without it.

8. Don't humans need some milk?

Milk contains some valuable nutrients for those who are able to digest it but these can all be better obtained on a vegan diet without risk of the unpleasant side effects associated with milk (see 9) and without the suffering and death involved in the dairy industry (see 11 and 13).

9. Isn't milk good for you?

A large percentage of the world's population is deficient in the enzyme lactase, which is necessary for the digestion of milk sugar (lactose). This natural deficiency is quite harmless unless you drink milk in which case you can suffer symptoms such as chronic or occasional diarrhoea, bloating, flatulence and abdominal pains.

Intolerance to milk is the most common food allergy. Symptoms include asthma, eczema, skin rashes, chronic nasal and sinus problems, tonsillitis, ulcerative colitis, bowel irregularity, hyperactivity, depression, migraines and some forms of arthritis.

Cow's milk can cause gastro-intestinal bleeding in infants leading to anaemia and there is a proven link between milk consumption and cataracts in older people. Dairy products can account for half our saturated fat intake, making them a high risk factor in heart disease - our biggest killer.

10. Don't we only take the milk the calf doesn't need?

This is a very naive view. Such idyllic farmyard scenes are a thing of the distant past. The modern dairy cow has its calf taken away from it when it is 1-3 days old.

11. What happens to the calves?

The least healthy calves are usually slaughtered at a few days old (after enduring a distressing trip to market) and then processed into meat products. The rennet from their stomach is also extracted and used for cheese making. Some of the females go on to become dairy herd replacements. Other calves are sold at market at 1-2 weeks old to be reared for beef production. A major proportion of our beef is a by-product of the dairy industry.

Some calves are also raised for veal in appalling and depriving conditions. They are kept in stalls in which they are unable even to turn around. They are given no bedding (in case they try to eat it) and are fed only on a liquid diet devoid of iron and fibre to keep their flesh pale and anaemic. After 3-5 months they are slaughtered.

12. Don't dairy cows need to be milked?

In the natural order of things, the cow's calf would drink its milk (eliminating the need to be milked by humans). But the calves of dairy cows are taken away within a few days of birth so that humans can have the milk.

13. Surely dairy farming doesn't harm the cows?

The current high demand for dairy products requires that cows be pushed beyond their natural limits, genetically engineered and fed growth hormones in order to produce huge quantities of milk.

From about 2 years of age the modern dairy cow spends 9 months of every year pregnant. This is in order to keep up a steady supply of milk. Its calf is taken away at 1-3 days old causing them both terrible distress. It is then milked for 10 months during which time it is forced to produce 10 times the amount of milk its calf would have taken. It is not surprising that every year a third of our dairy cows suffer from mastitis - a painful inflammation of the udder.

To increase the milk yield the cow is fed a high protein diet but this is often not enough and it may be forced to break down its own body tissues to keep up with the continual demand ("milking off her back"). This commonly leads to a condition called acidosis which can make it lame - lameness can affect up to 25 percent of our dairy cows every year.

At about 5 years old, spent and exhausted, dairy cows are slaughtered. Their natural life span is around 20 years.

14. Won't cows only produce milk if they're content?

Cows cannot help producing milk any more than they can help producing urine. Since the 1950s the dairy cow has been subjected to ever more intensive farming methods. Its suffering now is greater than it has ever been, and in that same period its yield has doubled.

Eggs

15. Isn't it natural for humans to eat eggs?

Early humans certainly did eat eggs but we must clearly distinguish between the opportunistic stone age gatherer and the modern intensive egg farmers who keep millions of hens in tiny cages, without room even to spread their wings, and who kill millions of male chicks every year simply because they have no use for them.

The point is that we do not need eggs and can therefore maintain perfect health without them. We therefore cannot justify the suffering and death we cause in obtaining them (see 20 and 21).

16. Aren't eggs good for you?

Eggs are nutritious but they also contain a large amount of cholesterol and can carry salmonella. All their nutrients can easily be obtained on a vegan diet without the health risks, and without the enormous cruelty involved in their production (see 20 and 21).

17. Hens don't mind their eggs being taken, do they?

In the wild a hen will build itself a nest and lay up to 6 eggs in as many days. If any of these are lost it is usually able to replace them, provided it has access to enough food. It is this ability to keep laying that the modern egg farmer exploits but in doing so frustrates one of the hen's most fundamental instincts: to reproduce.

18. Isn't it okay to eat eggs because chickens lay them naturally anyway?

This is true, but the real cruelty of egg production lies in the treatment of the "layer hens" themselves, who are perhaps the most abused of all factory-farmed animals. Each egg from today's factory farms represents 22 hours of misery for a hen crammed into a battery cage. Cages are stacked many tiers high, and faeces from cages above fall onto the chickens below.

At just two years old, most hens are "spent" and they are sent to the slaughterhouse.

Also, egg-laying hatcheries don't have any use for male chicks; they are killed as soon as their sex has been determined.

19. Won't hens only lay eggs if they're content?

A hen's ovaries are controlled by light which on a battery farm is carefully regulated to simulate continuous summertime. It is this, combined with selective breeding and a carefully controlled diet that results in the modern battery hen's high egg output.

Conditions on a battery farm are appalling. Hens have the top section of their beak cut off ("de-beaking") so that it is more difficult for them to attack each other in the stressful conditions. They are crammed into cages and their feet often become deformed from continuous standing on a sloping wire mesh. They can never perch, ground-scratch, dust bathe or nest, and are unable to stretch their wings. Lack of exercise leads to fatty liver syndrome and brittle bones. These birds are not "content" and yet they still lay. They will even continue to lay when seriously injured -- they simply cannot help it.

20. Don't farmers have to treat their animals well for them to produce milk and lay eggs?

Animals on factory farms do not gain weight, lay eggs, and produce milk because they are comfortable, content, or well cared for, but rather, because they have been manipulated specifically to do these things through genetics, medications, hormones, and management techniques. In addition, animals raised for food today are slaughtered at extremely young ages, usually before disease and misery have decimated them.

Such huge numbers of animals are raised for food that it is less expensive for farmers to absorb some losses than it is to provide humane conditions.

21. What's wrong with free-range eggs?

Like most animals, chickens produce equal numbers of male and female offspring. But even the most conscientious free-range egg farmer has no use for the males so they are killed.

The hens are kept for about 2 years until their productivity declines. They are then sent for slaughter. Their natural life span would have been 5-7 years.

22. Don't hens lay unfertilized eggs that would otherwise be wasted?

Wild hens rarely lay unfertilized eggs. Modern egg-producing hens only do so because they have been manipulated by humans. The point is not that the eggs may go to waste but that in manipulating the hens to produce these eggs we inflict cruelty on them (see 20 and 21).

Fish

23. Fish don't feel pain, do they?

Fish have a complex nervous system and all the sensory organs necessary for the sensation of pain. It is therefore logical to assume that they do feel pain.

A three year investigation by a panel of scientists and representatives from angling and shooting organisations (the Medway Report) concluded that fish, like other vertebrates, are capable of suffering.

24. Aren't fish free-range?

Why should a free-range animal be any more deserving of an unnecessary death than any other animal? The suggestion that individuals should pay for their freedom with their lives is moral nonsense. All animals should be free and we have no right to deprive them of that freedom or their lives for such reasons as money, the taste of their flesh or the pursuit of 'sport'.

25. Aren't there regulations controlling fish slaughter?

Fishing vessels catch thousands of tons of fish every year and there are no specific regulations governing their slaughter. They die of shock, asphyxiation, crushing by the weight of the catch and freezing on ice bedding.

Nutrition

26. Do vegetarians get an adequate amount of protein?

Protein deficiency is almost unheard of in the West. (In fact, our problem is that we get too much protein, not too little.) Unless you eat a great deal of junk food, it's almost impossible to eat as many calories as we need for good health without getting enough protein. With a bit of planning a vegetarian or vegan diet can quite easily fulfill daily protein recommendations.

One of the problems with animal proteins is that they usually come with saturated fats and so are a major risk factor in heart disease - our biggest killer.

Plant proteins on the other hand are associated with dietary fibre which is a very important component of a healthy diet. In fact vegans as a dietary group have been found to be the most likely of all to achieve their daily fibre requirement.

The proteins in animal products are very highly concentrated and most people who eat meat take in far more protein than their bodies can cope with. A high protein diet puts enormous strain on the pancreas - an organ that produces enzymes for the digestion of proteins but also for fighting cancer. Too much

protein is also a major cause of osteoporosis and contributes to kidney failure.

It is not widely known that most vegetables contain useful amounts of protein. Particularly rich sources include nuts, legumes, grains, seeds, green leafy vegetables and potatoes.

27. Do vegetarians get an adequate amount of iron?

Vegetarian and vegan diets can not only supply sufficient amounts of iron, but they can also supply up to three times the daily requirement of vitamin C. Vitamin C is important because it enhances the absorption of iron in the body. Studies have shown the incidence of anaemia in vegetarians and meat eaters to be roughly the same. Rich plant sources of iron include dried fruits, whole grains, nuts, green leafy vegetables, seeds, legumes, and molasses. Using iron pots and pans can also contribute to a dietary intake.

28. Do vegans get an adequate amount of calcium?

There have been no reports of calcium deficiencies in vegans. It has been shown that animal protein causes the body to excrete calcium more quickly than plant protein does. This may be one reason why vegans and vegetarians are less at risk from osteoporosis.

Rich plant sources of calcium include tofu processed with calcium sulfate, dark green vegetables (e.g. broccoli), dried fruit, almonds, soybeans, tahini, sesame seeds, molasses and soymilk (fortified). In Australia, fortified soymilks provide similar quantities of calcium to cow's milk.

29. Do vegetarians and vegans get an adequate amount of vitamin D?

Vitamin D is produced by the action of the sunlight on the skin. Although it is available in fortified foods like margarine, a little natural light every day (even if it's cloudy) is all you need.

30. Do vegetarians get an adequate amount of vitamin B12?

The human body needs only minute amounts of vitamin B12. Although deficiency is rare, it is recommended that vegans regularly take a B12 supplement or regularly consume sufficient B12-fortified foods. Vegetarians obtain the vitamin from dairy products and eggs, although they still may be low in this vitamin. Deficiency is usually caused by an inability to absorb the vitamin rather than a dietary deficiency.

31. Don't vegetarians have to eat too much and too often?

Totally untrue as any vegan or vegetarian will tell you. Try it and see!

32. Aren't vegetarians unhealthy?

There are healthy and unhealthy vegetarians. Vegetarians who eat a very limited range of foods or who are very fussy eaters can have health problems just like a very fussy meat eater who eats a limited range of plant foods. It's not the vegetarian diet itself that is the problem, but the limited diet. No reputable scientific studies have concluded that a well balanced vegetarian diet cannot provide all essential nutrients required by the human body.

But what if we all turned Vegetarian/Vegan?...

33. ...what would we do with all those chickens, cows, sheep and pigs? Wouldn't we be overrun with livestock?

It's unrealistic to expect that everyone will stop eating meat overnight. As the demand for meat decreases, the number of animals bred will decrease. Farmers will stop breeding so many animals and will turn to other types of agriculture.

34. ...what would happen to all the farm animals?

See 33.

35. ...wouldn't there be fewer animals in the world?

A very large percentage of agricultural land is used either directly or indirectly to feed livestock. In an ideal world, if everyone was vegetarian it would free up vast areas of land that could be returned to the wild. All those millions of acres of grazing land and land dedicated to crops for livestock feed could revert to more natural and densely populated ecosystems.

36. ...wouldn't many customs and traditions be lost?

Other examples of customs and traditions include sexism, racism, torture, public executions and witch burning. For society to progress some customs and traditions have to be abandoned.

37. ...would there be enough food?

As mentioned, a very large percentage of agricultural land is used either directly or indirectly to produce feed for livestock. Only 5-10 percent of the food energy consumed by the livestock is converted to food energy obtainable by eating the livestock. In effect, we are wasting over 90 percent of the food energy simply because we like to eat meat. At the same time there are over 500 million severely malnourished people in the world with 50,000 dying of starvation every day.

Although political factors play a major role in feeding the starving of the world, no one can argue against the fact that it is much more efficient overall for us to eat lower on the food chain.

38. ...wouldn't a lot of people lose their jobs?

The move towards vegetarianism/veganism is a gradual process. As less and less people are employed in animal-based industries, more and more will find work in the industries that replace them.

Animals

39. Who's responsible for the death of the animals?

The people who buy meat are solely responsible for the deaths of billions of animals every year. The killing is done at their request and financed with their money. Their guilt is inescapable.

40. Aren't the animals killed humanely?

Very few people could watch animals be slaughtered at an abattoir, watch the carcass be skinned, gutted and carved up, then sit down straight away and enjoy a steak.

We challenge you to visit an abattoir, or see some of the cruelty involved in modern livestock production by checking out a copy of our FREE 'Meet Your Meat' CD. Then you will be able to make an informed decision about how humane and acceptable it is!

Most of us have an innate sense of compassion and concern about suffering, it is often just that what is out of sight is out of mind.

The conditions at slaughter are not the only issue anyway. Would we ever excuse a child murderer for killing his victims 'humanely'?

41. Aren't the animals bred for it?

Animals that are bred for food are just as capable of suffering as other animals, and being bred for meat does not justify their appalling treatment.

42. Aren't the animals here to be used?

Animals are not a means to a human end; they are independent, free-thinking and have their own needs and desires. Ethically, we have no need and therefore no right to cause them suffering and death.

43. If it wasn't for the meat industry, wouldn't the animals have never been born?

Life on factory farms is so miserable that it is hard to see how we are doing animals a favour by bringing them into that type of existence. Surely it is better for an animal to never be born at all, than be born into such a short miserable and painful life

ending in death at the slaughterhouse. Which would you prefer?

And how do you feel about young children born into a Third World country who die a miserable death from disease and starvation by two years of age? Is it a good thing that at least they've had this short life?

44. Isn't it ok to eat meat as the animals have never known anything better?

Not having known anything better does not alleviate the suffering of the animal. Its fundamental desires remain and it is the frustration of those desires that is a great part of its suffering. There are so many examples: the dairy cow who is never allowed to raise its young, the battery hen who can never scratch in the dirt or stretch its wings, the sow who can never build a nest or root for food in the forest litter etc.

45. Don't the animals have to die sometime anyway?

Humans have to die sometime too, but that does not give one a reason or excuse to kill someone, or to cause them a lifetime of suffering.

46. Isn't vegetarianism/veganism socially difficult?

It is very easy to be vegetarian these days. It is not socially difficult and it has, in fact, become widely accepted. Veganism, however, is still regarded with suspicion by most people but this will change as veganism grows.

In effect, what you are saying is that it is ok for an animal to suffer or die to save you a little social inconvenience. Surely a life is worth more than that.

47. Can me turning vegetarian/vegan make any difference?

In their lifetime the average meat-eater eats 36 pigs, 36 sheep, 8 cattle and 550 poultry. That may be only a comparatively tiny contribution to the meat industry, but it makes a big difference to those individual animals! I was inspired by others to become vegetarian (and later vegan), people have followed me and still others have followed them. We can all make a difference.

48. Aren't animal product industries worth a lot of money?

One cannot simply justify or defend a practice on the grounds that it is profitable. After all, a great many crimes are very profitable too. We should ask ourselves not how much an animal's life is worth to us but how much it is worth to the animal - for whom it is everything.

49. Haven't animals adapted to farming?

Animals have been forced into adaptations that increase their productivity by straining their bodies often beyond their physical limits.

Typical examples include the dairy cow who may go lame as it breaks down its own body tissues to produce 10 times its natural milk yield (see 13), and broiler chickens, 6 percent of whom die from the physical strain of increasing their body weight 50-60 times in seven weeks. Forced adaptations only increase the suffering of farm animals.

Other Points

50. Isn't vegetarian/vegan food expensive?

Animal products, especially meat and cheese are the most expensive of all our staple food stuffs.

As more people become vegetarian, commercially-produced vegetarian products are becoming cheaper.

51. Wouldn't vegan farms deprive wild animals of their habitat?

It has been estimated that the land required for vegan diets is about 25 percent of the land required for meat-based diets. This would free vast areas that could be returned to natural habitat.

52. Is vegetarianism/veganism safe during pregnancy?

Pregnant women have special dietary needs and must always take care to ensure they receive all the nutrients that they and their developing baby need. These nutrients can all be obtained on vegan and vegetarian diets.

53. Is vegetarianism/veganism safe for babies and children?

The British Medical Journal report 'Nutrition and Health' states that: "the vegetarian diet is adequate for the nutritional needs of infants".

Vegan and vegetarian children thrive. Vegan children in particular tend to be slimmer than their peers and therefore less prone to obesity-related diseases.

54. Does a vegetarian/vegan diet require specialist knowledge?

The basic principles of healthy eating are not difficult to grasp and have nowadays become almost common knowledge. The same principles apply whether you be vegan, vegetarian or otherwise: eat more fresh fruit, vegetables, and whole foods and cut down on saturated fats, sugar, salt and alcohol.

There is nothing in animal products that has to be carefully compensated for (except, perhaps, vitamin B12. See 30). Many of them do us a lot more harm than good (see 4, 9, and 16). Cutting out animal products only makes a 'healthy' diet healthier.

55. How do you know that plants don't suffer?

To experience physical suffering an organism needs to have a central nervous system that is able to interpret certain stimuli as pain. A plant does not have this ability. We therefore have no reason to believe that they suffer.

56. What's wrong with free-range meat?

It is preferable to eat meat from free-range animals than from intensively farmed animals. But free-range animals are no more deserving of an unnecessary death than any other animal.

57. Don't animals convert plants that we can't eat into meat that we can?

True, but more relevant is the fact that a lot of food we *could* eat is being fed to animals, in particular intensively-farmed animals.

58. What if I made use of an animal that was already dead?

It is not the eating of meat that is being questioned but the killing of animals unnecessarily.

If you somehow managed to obtain some meat without killing an animal (or by paying someone else to kill it for you) - for example, by stumbling across an animal that was already dead - then I can see no moral objection to you eating it.

59. If you were starving on a boat at sea, and there was an animal on the boat, would you eat the animal?

Humans will go to extremes to save their own lives, even if it means hurting someone or something. (People have killed and eaten other people in such situations.) This example, however, isn't relevant to our daily choices. For most of us, there is no emergency and no excuse to kill animals for food.