

Many of the world's most important health advisory bodies are now in complete agreement – a vegetarian diet is one of the healthiest possible. And it seems the fewer animal products it contains such as milk and cheese, the healthier it is. In other words, the closer it is to being vegan, the healthier it becomes.

Following are some of the health statements that have been made over the years in regard to vegetarian and vegan diets.

1. The British Medical Association

The BMA was one of the first to distil the growing volume of research on diet and health in its 1986 report. It said:

“Vegetarians have lower rates of obesity, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, large bowel disorders, cancers and gall stones. Cholesterol levels tend to be lower in vegetarians.”

It went on to say that when meat eaters change to a vegetarian diet it can actually lower their cholesterol levels. It concluded by saying that vegetarians obtain all the minerals they need, that folate levels are higher and as a consequence it is a diet suitable for infants.

2. The China Study

The initial results of this combined Chinese-British-American study, which began in 1983, were announced in 1989. This was a massive study which looked at the health and eating habits of 6,500 people in real life situations. Its conclusions were accurately summed up in a New York Times headline on 8 May, 1990: *“Huge Study of Diet Indicts Fat and Meat.”* It found that the greatest single influence on the growth of degenerative diseases such as coronary heart disease, cancer and diabetes was the amount of animal fat and protein eaten – the more you eat, the greater your risk.

It highlighted some extraordinary dietary differences between affluent and not so affluent societies. For example, Chinese people are long living yet eat one-third less protein than Americans and only seven per cent of it comes from animal foods compared to Americans' 70 per cent. Past dietary advice would probably have cheered this as a good thing but the study found the opposite. *‘Animal protein itself raises the risks of cancer and heart disease.’*

These are the two biggest killers in western countries but there are others, such as diabetes, strokes, obesity and high blood pressure which are also clearly associated with the these affluent lifestyles. They are referred to by the general name of degenerative diseases and the China study found that they increased alarmingly as people changed from a more simple, predominantly vegetarian or vegan diet, to a western diet high in meat and dairy products.

The study also found that the west's preoccupation with promoting meat as the best source of iron was incorrect. The Chinese diet was predominantly vegetarian and yet adults consumed twice as much iron as American adults. The Chinese diet also contained three times more fibre than a US diet but there was no evidence that these high levels interfered with absorption of iron or other essential minerals.

The conclusions were unequivocal - that a plant-based diet is more likely to promote good health and reduce the risk of degenerative diseases.

3. The World Health Organisation

Next came an even more detailed report from the WHO in 1991. It was interpreted by the Daily Mail newspaper as a call for the world to go vegetarian - and that's precisely what it was. It stated forthrightly that a diet rich in animal products promotes heart disease, cancer and several other diseases. It confirmed the BMA's and China Study's list of degenerative diseases and added others - diabetes, strokes, osteoporosis and it also flagged up kidney failure as being related to meat eating.

It said that diets associated with increases in chronic diseases are those rich in sugar, meat and other animal products, saturated fat and dietary cholesterol and added: *“If such trends continue, the end of this century will see cardiovascular (heart) disease and cancer established as major health problems in every country in the world.”* And, of course, its predictions have been proved absolutely correct.

But it went even further and condemned the years of public urgings by governments to eat animal products. It went on to say that in future: *“Policies should be geared to the growing of plant foods, including vegetables and fruits, and to limiting the promotion of fat containing products.”* If anything, the opposite has happened.

The large quantities of cheap meat, which have adversely affected health, are only available because of intensive factory farming and the WHO also had plenty to say about that:

“Farming policies which do not rely on intensive animal production systems would reduce the world demand for cereals. Use of land could be reappraised since cereal consumption by the population is much more efficient and cheaper than dedicating large areas to growing feed for meat production and dairying.” That advice has also been ignored.

In fact, as development takes place in previously undeveloped countries there is a shift towards a more affluent diet, the report says. As a consequence, there is a dramatic increase in the incidence of diet related diseases.

4. The EPIC Study

In 1992 the largest ever study of diet and health was initiated - the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition - EPIC for short. More than half a million people have been studied in 10 European countries. What is clear so far is that non-meat diets tend to reduce blood pressure levels, reduce cholesterol levels and reduce the incidence of obesity. The study has also confirmed the importance of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables as protection against the risk of an early death. Preliminary results on the link between meat consumption and colorectal cancer suggest that frequent consumption of red meat such as beef, veal, pork and lamb is associated with a 20-40 per cent increase in colorectal cancer risk.

5. Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

In 1995, the PCRM - a pressure group but, nevertheless, a highly-respected US body which numbers the late Dr Benjamin Spock and William Roberts, editor of the American Journal of Cardiology, amongst its 9,000 doctors and scientists - issued a report to the US Government. It confirmed the lower rate of disease among vegetarians and urged the government to recommend a vegetarian diet to US citizens. Until then, the US Dietary Guidelines had never made any mention of vegetarianism. The following year they did so for the first time and the section began:

"...vegetarians enjoy excellent health: Vegetarian diets are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines and can meet Recommended Daily Allowances for nutrients. Protein is not limited in vegetarian diets..."

The PCRM report reviewed over 100 pieces of published work from across the world and was in no doubt about what we should be eating: *"The scientific literature clearly supports the use of vegetables, fruits, legumes (peas, beans, chick peas) and grains as staples. Meats, dairy products and added vegetable oils should be considered optional."* It was another clear and unequivocal statement that humans do not need to eat meat and are healthier for not doing so.

6. The Oxford Study

In 1999, Oxford University scientists released the results of another huge study commonly known as the Oxford Study. It examined the diets of 6,000 vegetarians and 5,000 non-vegetarians over a period of 13 years. The study confirmed lower rates of cancer and heart disease among vegetarians

and added a new twist – statistically-significant lower all-cause mortality. Vegetarians live longer than meat eaters!

7. American Dietetic Association

The ADA is probably one of the most respected health bodies in the world. Since at least 1997 it has acknowledged the health benefits of vegetarian and vegan diets. In its 2009 position statement on vegetarian diets it stated that:

"...appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes. ...a vegetarian diet is associated with a lower risk of death from ischemic heart disease. Vegetarians also appear to have lower low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, and lower rates of hypertension and type 2 diabetes than non-vegetarians. Furthermore, vegetarians tend to have a lower body mass index and lower overall cancer rates."

The ADA states that the features of a vegetarian diet that may reduce risk of chronic disease include lower intakes of saturated fat and cholesterol and higher intakes of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, soy products, fibre, and phytochemicals.

Conclusion

The combined conclusions of this large volume of research from these different sources is overwhelming. Vegetarian diets are the healthiest possible. So why isn't this fact more widely known? Government silence on the subject speaks volumes. Governments are terrified to tackle the vested interests of a huge industry, just as for decades they were terrified to effectively tackle the tobacco industry. You, of course, don't need anyone's permission to change your diet.

Source: www.viva.org.uk/guides/healthiestdietofall.htm