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Goin' Veg – Is a Vegetarian or Vegan Lifestyle Right for You?

Have you ever considered adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet? Are the health benefits worth giving up that juicy steak or roast chicken? You decide!

What Does it Mean to be a Vegetarian?

Individuals may become vegetarians for a variety of reasons, including health, ethics, environmentalism, and religion.

There are different types of vegetarians including:

- **Lacto-ovo vegetarians:** who avoid all animal flesh, but do consume dairy and egg products
- **Lacto vegetarians:** who avoid animal flesh and eggs, but do consume dairy products
- **Ovo vegetarians:** who avoid all animal products except eggs
- **Pesco-vegetarians:** who avoid meat but may eat fish
- **Pollo-vegetarians:** who avoid meat but may eat poultry
- **Vegans:** vegetarians who avoid all animal and animal-derived products

A vegan diet can be viewed as the strictest form of vegetarianism. A vegan diet is generally defined as a way of living that attempts to exclude all forms of animal exploitation and cruelty. This includes exploitation for food or any other purpose, so therefore a vegan diet not only excludes animal flesh, but also dairy, eggs, and other ingredients that come from animals. Some of these include:

- gelatin
- honey
- shellac (think salon nails!)
- whey
- some forms of vitamin D3

What Are The Health Benefits?

Studies have shown that vegetarian diets – including total vegetarian or vegan diets – that are *appropriately planned* are healthy, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. ‘*Appropriately planned*’ is key! Unless you follow recommended guidelines on nutrition, fat consumption, and weight control, becoming a vegetarian may not be the best choice for you.

Compared with meat eaters, vegetarians tend to:

- Consume less saturated fat and cholesterol
- Consume more vitamins C and E, dietary fiber, folic acid, potassium, magnesium, and phytochemicals (plant chemicals), such as carotenoids and flavonoids
- Be likely to have lower total and LDL (bad) cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and lower body mass index (BMI), all of which are associated with longevity and a reduced risk for many chronic diseases

Check out this [interesting video](#) on: VEGANS vs MEAT EATERS - Who Will Live Longer?

Both vegetarians and vegans need to pay special attention to nutrition strategies meant to increase the absorption of nutrients from plant foods. It is important they make sure to:

- Eat a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Replace saturated and trans fats with good fats, such as those found in nuts, olive oil, and canola oil
- Consume fortified foods and supplements, especially for nutrients such as iron, calcium, omega 3, and vitamins D and B12

Vegetarians and vegans may also want to consider regularly getting their blood nutrient levels measured.

The few studies directly comparing vegetarian to vegan diets report that vegans may have a somewhat lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and various types of cancer than vegetarians.

This [article](#) outlines some benefits of a vegetarian diet:

1. Good for heart health
2. Reduces cancer risk
3. Prevents type 2 diabetes
4. Lowers blood pressure
5. Decreases asthma symptoms
6. Promotes bone health

Ready to Give Vegetarianism a Try?

Whether you are ready to go 'no turkey' and fully switch to being a vegetarian, or simply decide to increase your plant-based food sources and reduce your total consumption of meat, you will enjoy health benefits.

[This video gives you a glimpse of what happens to your brain and body when you go vegan.](#)

Check out these websites for recipes:

[Country Living/Food and Drinks/Vegetarian](#)

[Love and Lemons/vegan-recipes/](#)

Or these books and cookbooks:

- [The New Becoming Vegetarian](#)
- [Becoming Vegan: The Complete Reference to Plant-Based Nutrition](#)
- [The Oh She Glows Cookbook](#) (*Love this one!*)
- [The Vegetarian Cookbook for Beginners](#)
- [The Complete Vegetarian Cookbook](#)
- [Love Real Food: More Than 100 Feel-Good Vegetarian Favorites](#)

Sources:

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/becoming-a-vegetarian>

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/vegan-vs-vegetarian>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/becoming-a-vegetarian>



Rochelle Morandini

Member Health & Well-Being, Director

If you would like to contribute or have ideas about what you would like to see in the ReFresh series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.