



# Benefits of Being Vegetarian

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In the last decade, we have witnessed an explosion of scientific knowledge that has made more information available to humanity than in all previously recorded history. Due to the dedicated research of scientists and doctors, we now understand more than ever before about our physical body and what measures promote good health. As more evidence is coming to light about the beneficial effects of maintaining a vegetarian diet, the number of vegetarians around the world is steadily on the rise.

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Throughout history, many great philosophers, mystics, saints, and enlightened thinkers have recognized the value of vegetarianism. It is only recently that science has confirmed the views on vegetarianism explained by these great people. More and more people are realizing that this diet can increase the health and well-being of our body, mind, soul, and the planet.

Books, journals, magazines, and newspaper articles have published research on the health benefits of a vegetarian diet. Doctors and nutritionists widely recommend that people reduce their consumption of meat, high-fat foods, and eggs as a health measure. They encourage the increased use of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains in one's diet to cut down on cholesterol in the body and to minimize the risks of heart attacks, high blood pressure, strokes, and cancer. The results of medical findings have already had a far-reaching impact on the food and restaurant industries. We find more foods are being produced without animal products. If we look back even twenty years, a vegetarian eating at a restaurant hardly had any choices offered on the menu. Today, we can find a variety of delicious vegetarian dishes at most restaurants. Natural food stores and vegetarian restaurants abound in most cities. Even large grocery chain stores carry a large variety of vegetarian foods. Those who carefully consider the advantages of vegetarianism will see that the quality of their life and health can be greatly improved on such a diet.

Longtime vegetarians have testified to the changes they experienced when they gave up meat. Many have reported that they felt more energetic, not only physically, but also mentally. Animals that do not eat meat, such as the elephant, the horse, the mule, and the ox, are known for their great strength and endurance. Having more stamina, vegetarians tend to exhibit improved efficiency and concentration in their physical as well as intellectual work.

There is an expression, "You are what you eat." In countries of the East where vegetarianism has been the diet for thousands of years, people recognize that whatever they eat forms a part of their body and also influences their thoughts. They believe that if they eat the flesh of an animal that the mental and emotional vibrations or characteristics of the animal will form a part of their own nature. Today, science is researching the effect that our own stress hormones have on our body and the damage that long-term stress does to our organs. Imagine eating animals whose last days or minutes of life on earth were drenched with the hormones released in their state of fear they were in when they were about to be slaughtered. Those who eat meat are ingesting not only the flesh, but all the hormones of stress that are released due to the animal's fear as well. Thus, many people brought up in the traditions of the East prefer to live on plant foods, which are more conducive to mental equipoise.

Others can often pick up the effect on our vibrations based on what we eat. To illustrate this, there is an instructive story from the life of a great Sufi lady saint named Rabia Basri. Once when she had gone to the mountains, a group of wild animals— deer, gazelle, and mountain goats—gathered around her. They came and looked at her and stood close to her. Suddenly, her friend, Hasan, arrived. When he saw Rabia he came near her. When the wild animals saw Hasan, they all fled in fear. Hasan was perplexed when he saw this.

He looked at Rabia and asked, “Why did they run away in fear from me while they acted friendly to you?” Rabia asked, “What did you eat today?” He said, “Some onion, fried in animal fat.” She said, “You eat their fat, why shouldn’t they flee from you?”

Many enlightened beings, saints, mystics, and spiritual teachers have traditionally advocated a vegetarian diet for spiritual and moral reasons. For those pursuing a spiritual path, a vegetarian diet is essential for several important reasons. First, spiritual teachers have always taught that we are more than just a body and a mind; we are also soul. They have also taught people the process of meditation to help rediscover our true nature as soul. To help gain proficiency in the spiritual practices, vegetarianism is a helping factor. To be able to concentrate in meditation, we need to be calm and collected. If we eat the flesh of dead animals, our own consciousness will be affected.

In the East, vegetarianism has been considered essential to spiritual development. Spiritual teachers promote a life of nonviolence. Helping factors for spiritual growth include developing the ethical virtues of nonviolence, truthfulness, purity, humility, and selfless service. The vegetarian diet is a natural by-product of nonviolence, in which no harm is done to any living creature. That is why saints through the ages have recommended a vegetarian diet, avoiding meat, fish, fowl, and eggs.

Vegetarianism also improves the health of the planet. Ecologists and environmentalists are concerned about protecting the living creatures on earth. Environmentalists have pointed out that one solution to the problem of food shortages is better utilization of our resources. For example, the amount of grain needed to feed one cow to provide meat for one person could feed many times that number of people. Ecologists have also shown that raising cattle and processing meat requires much more fuel, water, and energy than is used to produce grains and vegetables. Vegetarianism is one effective means of conserving our vital resources.

People around the world are becoming more enlightened and concerned about obtaining the highest quality of life. They are more interested in solving the mysteries of the universe and more keen to find personal fulfillment and lasting happiness. We are

simultaneously concerned about the welfare of our global community and the preservation of our planet.

How we maintain the health of our body, mind, soul, and planet is a choice each has to make. A balanced vegetarian diet will result in improved health and fitness, greater mental equipoise, and higher spiritual attainment. Following the vegetarian diet can help us achieve the health and purity of our body, mind, soul, and planet. We will not only be contributing to peace for ourselves and all life, but we will also be doing our part toward making Planet Earth a haven of joy and peace.

Being a vegetarian can help us attain a healthier body, mind, soul, and planet. Along with this, we can augment our well-being through meditation. Vegetarianism prepares the groundwork for the health of body, mind, and soul. Meditation can add to our overall health by reducing stress to our body and mind, and can put us in touch with the soul. If we sit in meditation we can take steps towards a healthier state of well-being.



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