

Health & Fitness

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Vegetarianism can work but demands care & effort



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Meinig, DDS

Dear Dr. Meinig:

I am a newcomer here and like your articles, but I am told you are against vegetarianism. I know vegan can be deficient in vitamin B₁₂, but would you write about any other problems? I am on the fence.

— H.T.

Dear H.T.:

First, vegetarians will be pleased that one of their big problems, the need for a non-animal source of B₁₂, has been eased. I don't know how many of you eat sea vegetables, but I have just learned that three ounces of arame has between 0.09 to 1.5 micrograms (mcg.) of B₁₂, three ounces of wakame has 1.9 to 5.3 mcg., and two

sheets of nori contain 2 mcg. The RDA for people over 10 years of age is 3 mcg., and for pregnant and nursing mothers the RDA is 4 mcg.

True vegetarians, those who never use any animal products, can lead a reasonably healthy life but, in practice, there are few who do so. Now, let me cover a few reasons for not supporting vegetarianism.

First of all, it is much more difficult to plan a diet that provides sufficient quantities of protein, calcium, riboflavin, vitamin D, iodine, iron and vitamin B₁₂. Such planning requires considerable knowledge in the area of food composition and nutrition.

For example, soy beans are

low in the amino acid methionine, which can be supplied by sesame seeds if they are included at the same meal. On the other hand, cereals, corn and sesame seeds are low in lysine, but they can be balanced by sweet potatoes and soy beans as their supply of lysine is ample.

All of the 20 amino acids must be in reasonable balance each meal, or the body's important need for protein to build new cells will be lost. Animal protein has all the essential amino acids; vegetable protein does not.

Problems that creep up on numbers of vegetarians after about three years on the diet are anemia, sore tongue, weakness, loss of weight, back pain, tingling of the extremities, gum disease and mental confusion. Children tend to be smaller and may have learning difficulties.

People who have not been feeling well and drop meat from their diet often report how good they feel on a vegetarian diet. Actually, unless they were allergic to meat, the usual reason for their difficulty with meat is a body deficiency called achlorhydria. That means their stomachs are not producing a sufficient amount of hydrochloric acid digestive enzymes. The result is a failure to digest the protein in meat and to utilize calcium. It is very common as we become older for our enzyme supply to diminish.

What is needed when this occurs is to take supplements of stomach and intestinal enzymes. Actually, when deficient, digestants are needed to handle vegetable foods as well, but as such foods do not produce as many adverse symptoms as does the poor digestion of meat products, the need isn't as obvious.

It is only in the last 10,000 years that people have in-

cluded more vegetable matter in their diets and 7,000 years since grains became a food for man.

Most of our ancestors during the past two to three million years lived in a world suffering from the Ice Age. This caused us to be hunters and gatherers. Some roots and vegetable matter could be located but, for the most part, our predecessors found animal protein was the most available life-sustaining food.

We tend to think our ancestors lived in the lush tropical areas of Africa that were loaded with fruit and nut trees. Actually, the number of these trees available was small and too seasonal to provide dependable year-round nutrients. It is our huge orchards of today that have led us to think that fruit and nut trees were always abundant. Their current great availability is due to expert farming, planting, fertilizing and watering. For example, just take a trip from San Diego to Eureka or from Miami to northern Florida, and I challenge you to find a single voluntary fruit or nut tree growing along the roadways in these two tropical states.

Dr. Weston Price, who studied large numbers of tribes of 14 different races of modern primitive hunter-gatherers in all parts of the world, didn't find one group living on a vegetarian regime.

For those of you who dislike the use of animals for food, and we all do, it would be well to realize that none of the animals used would ever have been born or have experienced life at all, had they not been raised by man for food. Sure, we must insist that humane methods be used, but we need to keep in mind that we have been genetically programmed to their use over some three million years of time.

Vegetarians who use some fish and poultry find it easier to live a healthy life.