

GOOD EATING:

The Vegetarian Alternative

By

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What is vegetarianism?

Vegetarianism is the practice of living on a non-meat diet. People who adopt this practice and refrain from eating meat are known as vegetarians. In addition to not eating "red meat" (beef, pork, lamb, etc.), vegetarians also do not eat fish or fowl.

Some vegetarians avoid all animal products and are called vegans. Others define their vegetarianism less strictly and may continue to eat dairy products (lacto-vegetarians), or eggs (ovo-vegetarians), or both (ovolacto-vegetarians).

How popular is vegetarianism?

The vegetarian diet has been practiced worldwide for centuries, though it has only recently become more popular in the United States and other "advanced" western nations. It has been estimated that between one and six million Americans are vegetarians. Many more Americans are limiting their consumption of meat.

Why do people give up meat and become vegetarians?

The vegetarian diet is chosen for a variety of reasons. Some people choose vegetarianism because they believe meat eating is expensive, wasteful, unhealthy or unecological. Others adopt a meatless diet for reasons of non-violence and compassion; they consider it wrong to kill animals or to cause them to suffer needlessly while being raised for slaughter.

Every aspect of our lives is, in a sense, a vote for the kind of world we want to live in.

—Frances Moore Lappe

But isn't meat eating necessary for good health?

No, it is not. The simple fact is that we don't need to eat meat in order to live long, healthy, active lives.

A well thought-out vegetarian diet is nutritionally safe and sound. Most vegetarians find it easy to balance their diet and obtain proper nutrition. Everything vegetarians need is available in most supermarkets.

How do vegetarians meet their needs for protein?

Scientific evidence indicates that vegetarians who enjoy varied diets of whole natural foods (in sufficient calories) consistently meet or exceed their daily protein requirements. Many alternative, non-meat sources of protein exist, including grains and cereals, beans, peas and lentils, soybeans and foods made from soy (such as tofu), and nuts and seeds. Vegetarians who continue to eat dairy products and eggs obtain additional, though generally superfluous, protein along with saturated fat and cholesterol.

Ironically, protein consumption may be more of a problem for the typical American meat-eater who consumes twice as much protein as his or her body can use. The need to continually breakdown and excrete large amounts of excess protein can contribute to illness.

What about vitamins and minerals? Does a vegetarian diet provide all essential nutrients?

Vegetarians who eat a varied diet have little trouble meeting their nutritional needs. More strict vegetarians who abstain from all animal products may wish to exercise some care with regard to vitamin B-12. Although vitamin B-12 deficiency is unlikely (because we need very little B-12 and trace amounts are present in certain plant foods), vegans can guard against it by occasionally eating a vitamin supplement or foods fortified with

active B-12. In any event, non-animal sources of all vitamins and minerals are readily available.

Is a vegetarian diet adequate for meeting the nutritional needs of infants and children?

For all infants, human breast milk is best, with fruits and vegetables added to the diet at the appropriate stages and as tolerated. If necessary, soy-based formulas can replace breast milk and babies can be weaned to nutritious soy milk instead of cow's milk (the latter being really intended for baby cows!)

A balanced vegetarian diet can provide all the nutrients a growing child needs. Parents of vegan children may wish to supplement vitamin B-12 by vitamin tablet or fortified cereals. A child who is a fussy eater may benefit from a daily multi-vitamin as "vitamin insurance." Medical studies have shown that vegetarian children grow to be as tall and strong as their peers.

Are there health advantages to vegetarianism?

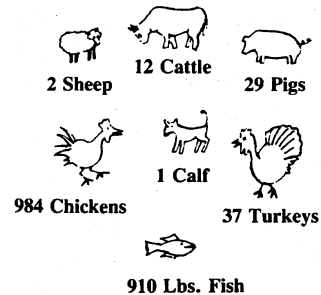
A vegetarian diet is generally higher in roughage and lower in saturated fats and cholesterol than meat-based diets. Thus, vegetarians are less likely to suffer from obesity, heart disease, arteriosclerosis and various cancers.

In addition, vegetarians may enjoy better health by avoiding the various drugs, chemicals, pesticides and dyes commonly found in meat. Half the nation's supply of antibiotics is now fed to cattle, pigs and poultry. As a result, drugs like penicillin and tetracycline are becoming routinely ingested by humans on a daily basis. Some scientists believe that this practice is undermining the effectiveness of these drugs in treating human disease.

But aren't we carnivorous by nature? Isn't the human body made for eating meat?

The human body is able to digest all types of foods, so it can be argued that we are basically omnivorous. But our body's anatomy and physiology are more vegetarian than carnivorous. Our teeth, jaws, salivary enzymes, stomach acid pH and intestinal length resemble those of other vegetarian animals. Our lack of fangs and claws make killing without tools difficult. Our closest living relatives in the animal kingdom, chimpanzees and the great apes, are essentially vegetarian. Our bodies thrive on balanced vegetarian diets, and many degenerative diseases are prevented by avoiding meat.

Animals eaten by the average non-vegetarian American in a 70 year lifetime:



How many animals are killed each year to provide meat for our dinner table?

The death toll is extremely high. Each year in the United States alone over one hundred million cows, pigs and sheep are killed in slaughterhouses. An additional four billion birds, primarily chickens, are slaughtered annually. All told, the above figures

represent a line of animals stretching over 750,000 miles long—far greater than the distance to the moon and back.

Vegetarianism addresses the greatest source of violence to animals. The number of animals that suffer and die because of meat consumption is much greater than that resulting from hunting, trapping, fur farming and animal experimentation combined.

What are slaughterhouses like? How do they kill the animals we eat?

In and around a typical slaughterhouse thousands of animals suffer and are killed every day. Cattle, for example, may arrive by truck after traveling for two or three days without food or water. After being unloaded, they are herded into pens to wait their turn. Some animals panic and risk mistreatment. Stockyard workers use electric prods and wooden canes to drive these creatures through a network of chutes and runways into the slaughterhouse.

Livestock animals are generally rendered unconscious prior to being bled and butchered in federally inspected slaughterhouses. Approved techniques include carbon dioxide gassing, electroshock, gunshot and the use of captive bolt stunners which drive a metal bolt through the animal's skull. Smaller local meat packing plants may still use sledgehammers and poleaxes to bludgeon the animals into unconsciousness; it can take two or three blows with these devices to knock out a larger animal.

In contrast, kosher slaughter requires that cattle, calves, sheep and lambs be fully conscious when their throats are cut. But whatever the method used, the end result is the same. Once underway, the process of slaughter takes just moments to transform a living sentient being into a pile of lifeless flesh. This violence is the unseen price of meat eating.

Do farm animals have decent lives prior to being killed in the slaughterhouse? How is livestock raised?

Today, an increasing number of farm animals are being raised on “factory farms” where mass production techniques are used to maximize efficiency and profits. These animals are denied freedom of movement and their physical, emotional and social needs are ignored. They suffer from boredom, stress and self-destructive behavior.

In what ways are farm animals denied freedom? How severe is their confinement?

Egg-laying chickens, for example, are kept in 12-by-18 inch “battery cages.” Each cage contains four to five chickens. Veal calves are kept in stalls so small that turning around or even lying down comfortably is an impossibility.

What happens to these chickens and calves?

Because the chickens react to confinement by fighting or self-mutilation, their beak tips are cut off with either a hot knife or a guillotine-like device. While chickens living under more normal conditions can live many years, chickens raised intensively for maximum egg production reach old age in 14 months. Once their ability to produce eggs is diminished, they are sent to the slaughterhouse to be made into soup and processed foods.

The life span of a veal calf is even shorter, just 16 weeks. These animals are sent to the slaughterhouse never having had the opportunity to move about or exercise since these activities would produce muscle and, thus, a less tender cut of meat.

Where do veal calves come from?

Veal calves are a by-product of the dairy industry. In order to keep dairy cows lactating, they must be periodically impregnated and allowed to give birth. The unwanted male offspring become veal calves.

The suffering and slaughter of veal calves and chickens has led some vegetarians to become vegans and abstain from eating dairy products and eggs. These vegetarians also refuse dairy products because they know that even dairy cows are sent to slaughter once their best milk producing years are over.

And what about fish?

Fish generally live their lives under natural conditions. In this respect, their lot is better than that of most farm animals. Fish do, however, appear to suffer when they are caught and hauled onto the decks of fishing boats. There, while suffocating (fish can't breathe out of water) they flap about and show other signs of distress. Moreover, fish may be loaded into shipholds by pitchfork. Impalement likely increases suffering.

Modern commercial fishing techniques are depleting the oceans of fish. Drift nets of up to 30 miles in length function as curtains of death for many types of marine life. Moreover, some tuna fishing methods result in the cruel and unnecessary drowning of thousands of dolphins every year.

What is the moral argument against meat eating?

The moral argument is straightforward, simple and compelling. Meat eating causes unnecessary suffering and death to other sentient beings and for this reason it is wrong.

If it were the case that we had to eat meat in order to survive, then the practice of meat eating could be excused as a "necessary evil." But meat-eating is not necessary for most people in the world today. An alternative

vegetarian diet is readily available.

People in our society eat meat out of ignorance and habit and because they have developed a taste for it. But these factors do not represent moral justification.

But animals kill and eat each other in nature. Doesn't this justify our killing them for food?

No, it does not. Unlike non-human animals, we humans are moral agents. Modeling human behavior on animal behavior ignores this vital difference.

The fish that eats a smaller fish presumably has no choice. Similarly, the hawk that eats a mouse must do so in order to survive. These animals cannot turn to a vegetarian diet without perishing. They are not able to even think about such things. Therein lies the difference. Humans can conceive of alternatives and choose among them. Moreover, as moral beings, we are obliged by our nature to choose the least harmful way of living.

What does religion say about vegetarianism? Do religious values conflict with the meat industry and the practice of meat eating?

While established religions have been extremely slow to speak out on behalf of animals, the cruelty and violence of the meat industry find little support from accepted religious values.

Most religions call on their adherents to act with compassion and justice. Yet deliberately causing needless suffering and death to animals is neither compassionate nor just.

The Jewish tradition's concern for the humane treatment of animals has led some Jews to become vegetarians. And while Buddhists and Hindus can look to prescribed ideals of non-violence for guidance on questions of ethics and diet, Christians would do well to try and imagine Jesus working in a slaughterhouse. With love as his supreme value, Jesus could no more swing the sledgehammer than wield the knife.

WHAT DO VEGETARIANS EAT?!

DISPELLING SOME MYTHS ABOUT VEGETARIAN FOOD AND COOKING

MYTH:

vegetarian foods are hard to shop for and they're expensive.

FACT:

We shop at the local supermarket and find everything we need, including fresh fruits, vegetables, staples such as beans, rice, pasta and tofu (soybean curd), prepared mixes and frozen foods which are vegetable protein based. For even greater variety many vegetarians also shop in health food stores and food co-ops. As for cost, since meat is one of the most expensive food items to purchase, we believe that our food bills are lower.

MYTH:

Vegetarian meals are time consuming to plan and prepare.

FACT:

Time spent in the kitchen is a matter of personal choice. As with any cuisine, it is possible to go "gourmet" and spend hours creating a ten course vegetarian feast. On the other hand, there are plenty of vegetarian "fast foods" available that are ready to eat in minutes. A soyburger takes no longer to prepare than a hamburger. And what could be quicker than stir fried vegetables? Often recipes and prepackaged foods contain protein counts per serving, so it's easy to know if you're getting enough protein.

MYTH:

Vegetarian foods are bland and boring.

FACT:

Vegetarian foods can be as interesting, tasty and varied as the imagination of the cook. We found it easy to forget about meat once we discovered many exciting new vegetarian foods. A multitude of herbs, spices and seasonings can be used to prepare delicious meatless entrees and side dishes. Vegetarian cookbooks abound and they can serve as your guide to new and exciting culinary adventures!

MYTH:

Vegetarians can't eat out because restaurants don't offer meatless menus.

FACT:

While vegetarian restaurants are growing in popularity, they are by no means the only place to dine out. Ethnic restaurants traditionally offer meatless meals too. Italian restaurants have fettucini alfredo, eggplant parmesan, stuffed shells or spaghetti with meatless sauce. Chinese restaurants offer non-dairy vegetarian foods and will even cook up something special for you on request.

If you are in a rush or on a budget, try a pizza with mushroom and onion toppings, bean tacos and burritos, a garden (meatless) souvlaki or that Middle Eastern specialty, the falafel (a fried chick pea sandwich in a pita bread). And nowadays, most restaurants have salad bars. These can provide an excellent vegetarian meal at a very reasonable price.

But why care about animals? Do they have feelings? Can they really suffer?

That animals have feelings is undeniable. An injured animal—imagine a pet dog or cat—reacts like we might when hurt. It screeches, yelps or cries. This is not surprising since many animals have nervous systems which are very similar to ours in respects relevant to the capacity for feeling physical pain. No doubt some animals can suffer emotionally and psychologically as well. Since the capacity for suffering is well developed in animals and humans, both deserve moral treatment.

Of course, not all animals are equal in their capacity to feel pain. An amoeba and a cow have very different nervous systems. This observation does not, however, weaken the argument for vegetarianism since the vast majority of animals consumed by humans have well-developed nervous systems and can undoubtedly feel physical pain as well as emotional distress. Where questions arise, say in the case of clams or other primitive animals, the vegetarian perspective calls for giving these creatures the benefit of the doubt and not eating them.

Don't plants have feelings too?

Plants react to various stimuli but they do not have the nervous systems that animals do. If plants have “feelings” at all, these events would be very primitive and very different from those experienced by humans and other animals.

The vegetarian recognizes the vitality of plants. However, we must eat to survive. Eating low on the food chain causes less suffering. Therefore, it is more ethical.

But if everyone becomes a vegetarian and we stop killing animals for food, won't they overpopulate and overrun us?

This objection is silly but often heard. Vegetarianism won't lead to animal overpopulation for a number of obvious reasons,

not the least of which is that most of the animals we consume are artificially bred for that purpose. Once the breeding of “live-stock” stops, the number of livestock animals will decline, not multiply.

It's interesting to note that the only animals likely to overpopulate the earth are humans. Our population now numbers over five billion and is expected to double in the next 40 to 50 years. As our numbers increase, we further damage the natural environment and cause more and more animal species to become endangered or extinct.

If everyone becomes a vegetarian, won't all the animals that are now being raised by the meat industry be killed anyway?

It's important to realize that the vegetarian diet is not likely to be adopted en masse overnight. At best, it will be an incremental process. As more people become vegetarians, there will be less demand for meat. This loss of demand will cause the meat industry to raise and kill fewer animals.

Doesn't the meat industry provide us with many important by-products? Aren't those necessary for human survival or quality of life?

Processed animal body parts —such as leather, furs, bone material, gelatin— can be found in numerous consumer products. All these products are either non-essential or can be produced with non-animal alternative substances. These alternatives will become more readily available once a greater demand for them exists.

Won't a large scale shift to a vegetarian diet put many people out of work?

Interestingly enough, a similar argument had been used to justify the nuclear arms race —though it never made sense to prepare for planetary annihilation just to protect certain jobs. The term “peace conver-

sion” refers to creating new jobs in the civilian economy for displaced military industry workers. It’s also possible to find new jobs for slaughterhouse workers and livestock farmers. This, too, represents a form of peace conversion.

Jobs are important but so is the nature of the work performed. We owe it to our society and to ourselves to make sure work enhances human dignity and is genuinely productive and non-harmful in nature.

What are the environmental costs of meat production? Is meat-eating unecological?

Over half the agricultural land in the United States is planted with livestock feed crops. The modern high-tech farming methods used to produce this livestock feed are also producing soil erosion, water pollution, ground water depletion, and energy waste. Because it takes ten or more pounds of vegetable protein to produce one pound of meat protein, a meat-based diet requires much more agricultural activity than a vegetarian diet. The environmental impact of meat eating is therefore much greater.

While regional water shortages and “water wars” are becoming more prevalent, a hundred times more water is needed to produce a pound of beef than a pound of wheat. Moreover, it’s been estimated that the production of that same pound of beef requires an amount of energy equivalent to a gallon of gasoline, enough to drive the family car over 20 miles!

This kind of energy waste —through the release of carbon dioxide from burning fossil fuels— contributes to global warming. An increase in temperature of just a few degrees could adversely affect biological systems and human agriculture, creating economic chaos and accelerating the rate of plant and animal species extinction. Scientists say global warming could also cause the oceans to rise and inundate coastal cities.

In addition, pressure from livestock producers has turned vast tracts of public

land in the western U.S. into grazing land which has been seriously degraded by overgrazing. Conflicts between these livestock producers and wildlife are rarely resolved in favor of the wildlife. Millions of coyotes have been exterminated by “predator control” programs. And wild horses, a symbol of the freedom of the West, have been rounded up and sold to slaughter (for pet foods) so that the land can be used to produce more beef.

Why are environmentalists boycotting fast food hamburger chains?

Since 1960 about half of the tropical rainforests in Central America have been cut down or burned, in large part to provide pasture for cattle that are slaughtered, butchered and shipped as cheap export beef to American fast food franchises. Each four-ounce hamburger involves the destruction of 55 square feet of rainforest. The world’s tropical rainforests are now disappearing at the rate of 40,000 square miles a year. This destruction threatens the greatest diversity of plant and animal life on Earth.

Rainforests absorb large quantities of carbon dioxide. Thus, the loss of these forests is also contributing to global warming. When rainforests are destroyed by burning, more carbon dioxide is added to the atmosphere — further compounding the problem.

Can vegetarianism help solve the world hunger problem?

Yes, because far less land and other agricultural resources are required to sustain a person on a meatless diet. As our planet becomes more overpopulated and hunger becomes more pronounced, meat-eating will be viewed as an unconscionable luxury —in addition to a cruel and unhealthy practice. Ultimately, however, solving the world hunger problem will require not only dietary changes but also sensible population control measures and other major economic, political and even spiritual reforms.

How do I become a vegetarian? Is it difficult? What are the first steps?

Becoming a vegetarian can be relatively easy once you've decided it's what you want. You can reorient your cooking with the help of a vegetarian cooking course, cookbook, or friend with a few good recipes. And, of course, it helps if those closest to you respect and support your decision.

You need not become a vegetarian all at once. You may want to think of it as a goal and try to take steps toward it over a period of time. Some people start by abstaining from "red meat" and then —after a period of adjustment— proceed to giving up fish and fowl. Some people continue to eat dairy products and eggs. Others consciously strive to minimize the consumption of these foods and eventually may give them up entirely. Thus, vegetarianism encompasses different paths and different definitions. To some extent, it's a matter of personal choice and conscience.

Years from now, factory farms and slaughterhouses may be outlawed and people may wonder how their ancestors could have eaten the dead bodies of animals. But today meat eating is the norm. At the very least a vegetarian must have the will to be different. However, a non-violent diet has its own rewards. For those who care, vegetarianism is a way to achieve good eating in more ways than one.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I have a dream. I see humankind understanding that the spirit which sings in our hearts, sings as well in the hearts of other animals. I see us realizing that there are many kinds of intelligence, many kinds of souls, many kinds of suffering and striving. I see us knowing that all creatures are endowed with the same will-to-live which we possess. I see us respecting theirs, as we would like our own to be respected were we in the less powerful position and they dominant upon the earth.

—John Robbins

All beings tremble before violence. All fear death. All love life. See yourself in others, then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do?

—Buddha

We need a boundless ethics which will include the animals also.

—Albert Schweitzer

It is my belief that man will never be at peace with his own kind until he has recognized the Schweitzerian ethic that embraces decent consideration for all living creatures—a true reverence for life.

—Rachel Carson

Alas, what wickedness to swallow flesh into our own flesh, to fatten our greedy bodies by cramming in other bodies, to have one living creature fed by the death of another!

—Ovid

I have from an early age abjured the use of meat, and the time will come when men will look upon the murder of animals as they now look upon the murder of men.

—Leonardo da Vinci

But if you will contend that yourself were born to an inclination to such food as you now have a mind to eat, do you then yourself kill what you would eat. But do it yourself, without the help of a chopping knife, mallet or axe—as wolves, bears and lions do, who kill and eat at once. Rend an ox with thy teeth, worry a hog with thy mouth, tear a hare or lamb in pieces, and fall on it and eat it alive as they do.

—Plutarch

Flesh foods are not the best nourishment for human beings and were not the food of our primitive ancestors. They are secondary or secondhand products, since all food comes originally from the vegetable kingdom. There is nothing necessary or desirable for human nutrition to be found in meats or flesh foods which is not found in and derived from vegetable products. A dead cow or sheep lying in a pasture is recognized as carrion. The same sort of carcass dressed and hung up in a butcher's stall passes for food!

—John Harvey Kellogg

It is only by softening and disguising dead flesh by culinary preparation that it is rendered susceptible of mastication or digestion, and that the sight of the bloody juices and red horror does not excite intolerable loathing and disgust.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley

Vegetarianism serves as the criterion by which we know that the pursuit of moral perfection on the part of humanity is genuine and sincere.

—Leo Tolstoy

Animals are my friends ... and I don't eat my friends.

—George Bernard Shaw

The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

I hold that flesh food is unsuited to our species. We err in copying the lower animal world if we are superior to it.

—Mahatma Gandhi

One farmer says to me, "You cannot live on vegetable food solely, for it furnishes nothing to make bones with," and so he religiously devotes a part of his day to supplying his system with the raw materials of bones; talking all the while he walks behind his oxen, which, with vegetable made bones, jerk him and his lumbering plow along in spite of every obstacle.

Whatever my own practice may be, I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other.

—Henry David Thoreau

You have just dined; and however scrupulously the slaughterhouse is concealed in the graceful distance of miles, there is complicity.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

While millions of human beings in the Third World go hungry for lack of grain, millions more in industrialized nations are dying from heart attacks, strokes and cancer—diseases caused in part by over-consumption of beef. The feeding of grain to livestock rather than to people is one of the most critical and largely unrecognized issues of our time.

—Jeremy Rifkin

For information on how to obtain more copies of this booklet or about local vegetarian resources, workshops and other activities, write or call:

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Nan and Walter Simpson are peace activists, environmentalists and animal rights advocates. Nan has a B.A. in American studies and is a registered nurse. Walter has masters degrees in philosophy and environmental studies and is a professional energy conservationist. Their vegetarianism springs from a commitment to non-violence and justice as well as a love of animals and a love of life.

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