Vegetarian diet cuts risk of certain cancer, Adventist study finds

Researchers at Loma Linda University Health say vegetarians are 22 percent less likely to develop colorectal cancers

March 16, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Andrew McChesney/Adventist Review

A vegetarian diet may reduce your risk of certain kinds of cancer by 22 percent, according to a new analysis from the Adventist Health Study-2.
Researchers at Loma Linda University Health found that eating a plant-based diet offers significant protection against cancers of the colon and rectum, the second-leading cause of cancer death in the United States after lung cancer.

The findings, published online in the journal *JAMA Internal Medicine* this week, are the first to emerge from the university’s multimillion-dollar Adventist Health Study-2 investigation that links diet to specific forms of cancer.

“The balance of scientific evidence seems to implicate red meat and processed meat as being linked to a higher risk of colorectal cancer, whereas a diet rich in fiber — not fiber supplements — is linked with lower risk,” the study’s lead researcher, Dr. Michael Orlich, said Tuesday. “The vegans, lacto-ovo vegetarians, and pescovegetarians in our study all avoid red and processed meat and eat an increased amount of a variety of whole plant foods.”

The study, which tracked the food questionnaires and medical records of 77,659 Seventh-day Adventists over seven years, determined that vegetarians are 22 percent less likely to develop colorectal cancers than non-vegetarians.

Of those vegetarians, vegans were 16 percent less at risk of cancer, and lacto-ovo vegetarians, who eat milk and eggs, were 18 percent less at risk, although results for these groups did not achieve statistical significance.

The least at risk of the vegetarian groups were the pescovegetarians, or vegetarians who eat fish. They were 43 percent less likely to develop cancer.

Dr. Gary Fraser, principal investigator for Adventist Health Studies-2 and a co-author of this week’s report, cautioned against interpreting the results as a message to eat more fish.

“The main message is to avoid all meats, as the main result was that all vegetarians as a group did better than the non-vegetarians,” Fraser said in an e-mail interview. “Thus from this paper alone what one can really say is that replacing meats with vegetables, nuts, legumes, and fruits will most likely decrease risk of colorectal cancer.”

Orlich, an assistant professor of preventive medicine at Loma Linda University, said it was premature to conclude that the pescovegetarians’ impressive results were due to fish consumption.

“The differences between the pescovegetarians and other vegetarian groups may be due partly — or possibly entirely — to chance variation,” he told the Adventist Review. “Their diets also differ in other ways beside fish consumption. We will do follow-up analyses examining the specific associations of meat and fish with colorectal cancer, adjusting for the consumption of other foods.”

Non-vegetarians comprised half the participants in the study, and they were defined as eating meat at least weekly. Researchers, who identified 380 cases of colon cancer and 110 cases of rectal cancer among participants, said the non-vegetarians ate less meat than the average American.

The study underscores that advanced medical screening procedures such as the colonoscopy have saved many lives but it is even better to prevent cancer, potentially through diet.
The colorectal cancer report is part of Loma Linda University Health’s ongoing Adventist Health Studies, initiated in 1958 and among the world’s longest running research about health and longevity. Its previous findings have connected the Adventist diet to lower rates of obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

“There’s a history going back to the 1950s of studies on Seventh-day Adventists, and most have found that they’re healthy, long-lived populations, so it’s interesting to probe and see why,” Orlich told The Wall Street Journal in discussing the latest cancer findings.

The Adventist Health Studies are also often discussed at healthcare seminars and conferences. CNN International television devoted a segment of its “Vital Signs with Dr. Sanjay Gupta” program to the research in February.

The Adventist Health Study-2 started in 2002 with funding from the National Cancer Institute, a U.S. government agency. In 2011, the National Cancer Institute awarded it a $5.5 million five-year grant to continue the research.

Adventist Church adopts stance on vaccines

Church places strong emphasis on health and wellbeing

March 16, 2015 | Silver Spring, Maryland, United States | Andrew McChesney/Adventist Review

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has issued an official statement on vaccines, saying it “encourages responsible immunization” and has no faith-based reason to discourage believers from participating in immunization programs.

The full statement, titled, “Immunization,” says:

“The Seventh-day Adventist Church places strong emphasis on health and well-being. The Adventist health emphasis is based on biblical revelation, the inspired writing of E.G. White (co-founder of the church), and on peer-reviewed scientific literature. As such, we encourage responsible immunization/vaccination, and have no religious or faith-based reason not to encourage our adherents to responsibly participate in protective and preventive immunization programs. We value the health and safety of the population, which includes the maintenance of ‘herd immunity.’

“We are not the conscience of the individual church member, and recognize individual choices. These are exercised by the individual. The choice not to be immunized is not and should not be seen as the dogma nor the doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”
Read the statement on the Church's website.

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Vegetarian Dietary Patterns and the Risk of Colorectal Cancers

ABSTRACT

Importance  Colorectal cancers are a leading cause of cancer mortality, and their primary prevention by diet is highly desirable. The relationship of vegetarian dietary patterns to colorectal cancer risk is not well established.

Objective  To evaluate the association between vegetarian dietary patterns and incident colorectal cancers.

Design, Setting, and Participants  The Adventist Health Study 2 (AHS-2) is a large, prospective, North American cohort trial including 96 354 Seventh-Day Adventist men and women recruited between January 1, 2002, and December 31, 2007. Follow-up varied by state and was indicated by the cancer registry linkage dates. Of these participants, an analytic sample of 77 659 remained after exclusions. Analysis was conducted using Cox proportional hazards regression, controlling for important demographic and lifestyle confounders. The analysis was conducted between June 1, 2014, and October 20, 2014.

Exposures  Diet was assessed at baseline by a validated quantitative food frequency questionnaire and categorized into 4 vegetarian dietary patterns (vegan, lacto-ovo vegetarian, pescovegetarian, and semivegetarian) and a nonvegetarian dietary pattern.

Main Outcomes and Measures  The relationship between dietary patterns and incident cancers of the colon and rectum; colorectal cancer cases were identified primarily by state cancer registry linkages.

Results  During a mean follow-up of 7.3 years, 380 cases of colon cancer and 110 cases of rectal cancer were documented. The adjusted hazard ratios (HRs) in all vegetarians combined vs nonvegetarians were 0.78 (95% CI, 0.64-0.95) for all colorectal cancers, 0.81 (95% CI, 0.65-1.00) for colon cancer, and 0.71 (95% CI, 0.47-1.06) for rectal cancer. The adjusted HR for colorectal cancer in vegans was 0.84 (95% CI, 0.59-1.19); in lacto-ovo vegetarians, 0.82 (95% CI, 0.65-1.02); in pescovegetarians, 0.57 (95% CI, 0.40-0.82); and in semivegetarians, 0.92 (95% CI, 0.62-1.37) compared with nonvegetarians. Effect estimates were similar for men and women and for black and nonblack individuals.

Conclusions and Relevance  Vegetarian diets are associated with an overall lower incidence of colorectal cancers. Pescovegetarians in particular have a much lower risk compared with nonvegetarians. If such associations are causal, they may be important for primary prevention of colorectal cancers.
Vegetarian Diet Lowers Risk for Some Cancers, Study Finds

By Angela Chen

A vegetarian and pescovegetarian diet reduced risk for colorectal cancers, according to a new study. Dr. Michael Orlich, the study's lead researcher, explains the findings. Photo: Getty

March 9, 2015

To prevent certain types of cancer, a vegetarian diet with some fish might be the best protection, according to a new study.

The study, published online Monday in the journal JAMA Internal Medicine, found that fish-eating vegetarians, or pescovegetarians, had a 43% lower risk of colorectal cancers than nonvegetarians.

This beat out the results for vegans, who had a 16% lower risk, and lacto-ovo vegetarians, who eat milk and eggs and who had an 18% lower chance. Combined, all types of vegetarians had a 22% reduced risk for colorectal cancers than nonvegetarians.

According to the researchers, the additional benefit from fish probably comes from omega-3 fatty acids. However, they note that even the nonvegetarian group in the study consumed less meat than the average American.

Colorectal cancer is the second most deadly cancer in the U.S., after lung cancer, and previous studies have suggested that meat-heavy diets, especially processed meat, can elevate risk for the condition. This latest research is led by Michael Orlich, an assistant professor of preventive medicine at Loma Linda University, a Seventh-day Adventist institution in California.

Vegetarians who also ate fish had even greater protection against colorectal cancers than other vegetarians, the study found. So-called pescovegetarians had a 43% reduced risk for the cancers compared with people who ate...
meat. Photo: Corbis

Dr. Orlich’s team tracked the food questionnaires and medical records of 77,659 Seventh-day Adventists over a mean period of 7.3 years. Seventh-day Adventists were chosen in part because the religion encourages a healthy lifestyle. Previous studies on the population found that their diet is associated with lower rates of obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure.

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“There’s a history going back to the 1950s of studies on Seventh-day Adventists, and most have found that they’re healthy, long-lived populations, so it’s interesting to probe and see why,” says Dr. Orlich.

The researchers sent detailed food questionnaires and follow-up surveys every other year. They sorted the participants into categories based on their reported food intake, rather than simply asking them if they were vegetarian. Among the participants, 52% were vegetarians of various types, including 29% lacto-ovo vegetarians, 10% pescovegetarians and 8% vegans.

Overall, the team found 380 cases of colon cancer and 110 cases of rectal cancer. The study participants had 34% fewer cases of colorectal cancers than would a representative group from the U.S. population at large, Dr. Orlich says.

The various groups did have some lifestyle differences beyond diet. Vegetarians, for example, were usually older than nonvegetarians and were more likely to exercise, while vegans consumed less calcium. However, the benefits of the vegetarian diet still persisted after the researchers controlled for several of these factors, including exercise, alcohol consumption, smoking history and family history of colorectal cancer. Dr. Orlich says he hopes future research can look at more details of different types of vegetarians and follow up for a longer period.

According to the researchers, vegetarians might be protected from colorectal cancer not only because they eat less meat, but because they eat more plants. “Diets high in fiber are linked with decreased risk, and fiber comes from whole plant foods, so this could be a major reason why the risk is much lower,” said Dr. Orlich.

The vegetarian groups also ate fewer fatty foods and snacks in general than the nonvegetarians. This helps reduce excess levels of insulin in the blood, which has been linked to elevated risk for colorectal cancers.

The benefits of eating fish are more difficult to interpret, since the pescovegetarians ate about as much fish as did the nonvegetarians, Dr. Orlich says. Pescovegetarians’ extra protection against cancer may not be only from the fish itself, but perhaps from a combination of fish and increased consumption of plants, he says.

Write to Angela Chen at angela.chen@dowjones.com

Corrections & Amplifications

The study was published in JAMA Internal Medicine. An earlier version of this article incorrectly said the study was published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. (March 11, 2015.)
The Official Site of the Seventh-day Adventist world church

Immunization

March 02, 2015

The Seventh-day Adventist Church places strong emphasis on health and well-being. The Adventist health emphasis is based on biblical revelation, the inspired writing of E.G. White (co-founder of the Church), and on peer-reviewed scientific literature. As such, we encourage responsible immunization/vaccination, and have no religious or faith-based reason not to encourage our adherents to responsibly participate in protective and preventive immunization programs. We value the health and safety of the population, which includes the maintenance of “herd immunity.”

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