The Case for a Plant Based Diet

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World-renowned figures as diverse as philosophers Plato and Aristotle, political leaders Benjamin Franklin and Gandhi, scientist Albert Einstein, and artist Leonardo DaVinci have all advocated a vegetarian diet. There is much information today on what constitutes a healthy diet, but some of it may seem conflicting. Some claim the best diet is the “vegan” or total plant based diet while others believe a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet is more adequate in nutrients. Some suggest that we must have some fish for heart health while others strongly believe what matters is “moderation” and having some meat, dairy, milk, yogurt is not harmful but rather essential for intake of nutrients such as vitamin B12 and calcium. These contradicting views may sometimes create much controversy and heated discussions of who is right. What constitutes a healthy diet after all?

Sorting the Evidence

In order to make a wise decision one must examine the evidence. Scientific research shows that health benefits increase as the amount of food from animal sources in the diet decreases. For those wondering, science is on the side of vegetarianism. Multitudes of studies have demonstrated its remarkable health benefits. Let us examine some of the evidence.

First, studies confirm that eating red meat will contribute to premature death. Recently, the Washington Post reported results of major research with over 500,000 Americans which concluded, “Eating red meat increases the chances of dying prematurely. The World Health Organization (WHO) has launched a campaign to reduce red meat consumption worldwide. Sadly, this same article encourages people to consume chicken and fish, which according to this study, seems to “decrease the risk for premature death”. Likewise, the WHO

Glorifying God

Isn’t it time to make healthier choices in your diet? In this process it is crucial to know why it is important to choose a healthy diet. It is not only about health. It is not about criticizing or judging others for what they choose to eat. Let us keep in mind that love and grace are priority values and people come before food, and that we must pursue the things which make for peace and by which we may edify another (Romans 14:15-19). Thus, if our discussions on diet are not edifying people with love, we must seek God for wisdom and try His gentle approach.

In conclusion, the essence of seeking healthy dietary choices is not to gain salvation or pride ourselves on how good and healthy we are, but rather to glorify our Father and Creator. Scripture remind us, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” I Cor 10:31.

References

(2) http://www.pcrm.org/health/veginfo/vegetarian_foods.html
recommendations state that everybody should eat less meat but more fish. Is that so?

By looking at previous results from the Adventist Health Study we can shed some light on this. Adventist men who consumed a vegetarian diet, including the use of eggs and dairy products, had 61% fewer heart disease deaths compared to those that ate any meat regularly. On this same study, the greater benefit was for vegetarians who used no meat, fish, milk or eggs. Compared to the general population, these “vegan” men were 86% less likely to die of heart disease. But the benefit goes beyond heart disease. Adventist vegetarians between 30 and 50 years of age were found to have 4 times less risk of death from all causes as compared to those who eat meat. These are compelling superior benefits of a plant based diet over a flexible vegetarian diet.

The scientific world has also become very interested in this. Below is a summary of other evidence listed by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine:

**Cancer prevention** — Studies have shown that vegetarians are about 40 percent less likely to develop cancer compared to meat-eaters.

**Lower Blood Pressure** — Since the early 1900s researchers discovered that vegetarian diets could in a few weeks significantly reduce a person’s blood pressure regardless of the sodium levels in the diets.

**Preventing or Reversing Diabetes** — Non-insulin-dependent (adult-onset) diabetes can be better controlled and sometimes eliminated through a low-fat vegetarian diet along with regular exercise.

**Asthma** — A 1985 Swedish study demonstrated that individuals with asthma practicing a vegan diet for a full year have a marked decrease in the need for medications and in the frequency and severity of asthma attacks.

**Gallstones and Kidney stones** — Vegetarian diets have been shown to reduce one’s chances of forming kidney stones and gallstones.

**Lower risk of Osteoporosis** — Vegetarians are at a lower risk for osteoporosis. Since animal products force calcium out of the body, eating meat can promote bone loss.

Due to this growing body of evidence, the American Dietetic Association (ADA) in July of 2009 stated that “appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.” They added it is “appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and for athletes.”

**The Unhealthy Vegetarian Diet**

So you may say, “Case settled.” Well, not really. The American Dietetic Association has also stated that “it is a mistake to conclude, that if you stay away from meats or eggs and dairy, you will live a healthy long life.” The reason is that many “good vegans” regularly indulge in ice cream and desserts, consume plenty of high sodium and fat in processed meat substitutes, enjoy fried foods and sauces high in saturated fats, and do not include enough fresh fruits, greens, vegetables, legumes, grains and nuts in the diet. Someone with such a diet plus a sedentary lifestyle and lack of regular physical activity may have the same risk of dying as a smoker or meat eater who is physically active, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables while limiting sweets. Thus, the key is in planning. The phytochemicals, anti-oxidants, vitamins, minerals, fibers and natural omega-3 fatty acids contained in fresh plant foods are the powerful contributors to longevity and must constitute most of one’s diet.

**A Word of Caution**

While a plant based diet provides an abundance of nutrients vitamin B12 is found mainly in animal products, and the plant foods that have it do not provide an active and reliable source, so vitamin B₁₂ must be obtained elsewhere in the diet. Good sources are multiple vitamins, fortified cereals and soymilk. It is especially important for pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers, and children to get enough vitamin B₁₂. If someone lives in a place where vitamin B12 fortified foods not available, one must have common sense and use the animal sources available. A lack of Vitamin B₁₂ has been known to cause severe anemia and preventable deaths for some who refused to eat the only source of B₁₂ available in animal products and this only dishonors the name of God.