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New Zealand: Death of Child Demonstrates Dangers of Health Fanaticism  
Auckland, New Zealand .... [Bettina Krause/Brenton Stacey/ANN]  
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A New Zealand couple, whose six-month-old son died last year due to complications from vitamin B12 deficiency, was convicted last week of manslaughter. Caleb Moorhead died in March 2001 of bronchopneumonia associated with anemia and brain damage. Roby and Deborah Moorhead, strict vegans, had refused to vary their son's diet and resisted medical treatment for his vitamin deficiency. They told the court that their actions were based on their religious beliefs and their interpretation of the writings of Ellen White, a founder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

This was an "avoidable tragedy," according to a leading Adventist health professional in the South Pacific. "The church does not condone extreme diets, the removal of children from medical care, or the failure to seek advice from health professionals," says Bevan Hokin, a vitamin B12 expert who is pathology director at Sydney Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga, New South Wales. "We believe in health care."

"The choice of diet is a personal matter," says Melissa Harris, assistant director for Adventist Health Ministries in the South Pacific. "Adventists encourage rational and responsible decision-making about what foods to eat. Diet alone is not a treatment for disease or illness."

Dr. Allan Handysides, health ministries director of the Adventist world church, calls the New Zealand case "a dreadful tragedy." Such a distorted view of health practices comes about through a "manipulation of the writings of Mrs. White," he says. Dr. Peter Landless, associate health ministries director, agrees, saying that fanaticism has caused some individuals to "wrench portions of Mrs. White's writings out of context."

*Fanatic excess on one hand  
As more + more Adventists  
are going to Vegan diet  
it becomes more  
urgently important  
that people know the  
importance of B-12.*



"The church, through its health ministries department, promotes a well-balanced, lacto-ova vegetarian diet [the form of vegetarianism that includes eggs and dairy products]," he says. "And even then, not when this goes against medical advice in individual cases."

Landless says the vast majority of the church's 13 million members have a clear understanding of the balanced, wholistic approach to health advocated by the Adventist Church. But when misinterpretations occur, they must be tackled head-on, he says.

An integral part of the department's worldwide education program is alerting people to the need for sufficient vitamin B12. More than two years ago, the General Conference Nutrition Council, made up of some 25 doctors, nutritionists and other health professionals from across the United States, published a document warning about the dangers of B12 deficiency. The statement emphasizes the importance of the vitamin, describes signs and consequences of deficiency, lists dietary sources, and urges all vegetarians--but especially individuals who choose a vegan diet--to ensure they get the daily recommended intake.

"Reports from around the world reveal that many long-term total vegetarians [or vegans] are especially at risk of vitamin B12 deficiency," the document reads. "Unfortunately many [vegans] do not realize the seriousness of B12 deficiency."

The Adventist Church has long been known for promoting an active, healthy, tobacco-free and alcohol-free lifestyle. In July last year, the results of a 12-year study of 34,000 Adventists in California were released, showing that the lifestyle habits practiced by many Adventists contribute to a significantly longer-than-average life expectancy. Researchers called the group "the longest-lived population that has ever been studied and described in a formal way."

The church also operates one of the largest privately owned health care systems in the world, running hospitals and medical clinics in more than 120 countries, and training thousands of health professionals each year. The church's Loma Linda University and Medical Center, located in Southern California, was established in 1905, and employs more than 9,000 staff, teaches some 3,400 students and fills 886 hospital beds. It has become internationally renowned for its ongoing contributions to medical research, and for its cutting-edge treatments in areas including heart transplant surgery and non-invasive proton beam therapy for prostate and breast cancer.

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Adventists in Mexico Gain a Third University  
Pueblo Nuevo, Chiapas, Mexico .... [Ansel Oliver/ANN]  
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Linda Vista Academy in Pueblo Nuevo, Chiapas, Mexico, was granted the status of university May 30, in a year the institution is celebrating its 55th anniversary. It is now the third Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher learning in Mexico, along with Montemorelos and Novojao universities.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Pablo Salazar, governor of the state of Chiapas, praised Adventist education, saying his family and the community had benefited from it.

Linda Vista Academy previously offered extension courses from Montemorelos University in Nuevo Leon, Mexico.

"The number of our colleges and universities around the world has almost doubled in the past 20 years," says Humberto Rasi, director of education for the Adventist world church. "This is the 103rd Adventist university worldwide."