



CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASES VS VEGETARIAN DIET

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Abstract

In the interesting report published by the World Health Organization (WHO), Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases, there is a section dedicated to cardiovascular diseases in which an international group of experts has gathered research related to the advantages of a diet based on plant foods.

Keywords: Cardiovascular Disease, Vegetarian Diet.

INTRODUCTION

The population subgroups which consume diets rich in plant foods, present lower rates for coronary cardiopathy than the general population. For example, the rates on cardiopathy among the Seventh-day Adventists in Norway and the Netherlands are equivalent to one-third or one half of those observed in the general population. Seventh-day Adventists who eat meat have higher rates than the vegetarians, and British vegetarians have a mortality rate for coronary cardiopathy 30% lower than that found among non-vegetarians, even taking into consideration a lower consumption of cigarettes. Concentrations of cholesterol are much lower than those found among ovo-lacto vegetarians and the non-vegetarians.

Kahn, Philips and other researchers published a study conducted at Loma Linda University (California) with 27,530 Seventh-day Adventists, of which half were ovo-lacto vegetarians or strict vegetarians. The results revealed that coronary deaths (myocardial attacks) among Adventists happened only 55% as often as the rest of the population. And more: Adventists who ate meat more than four times per week run the risk of having 70% more deaths as a result of coronary diseases (factor 1.7) than vegetarian Adventists.

In as much as none of them smoke, and all follow a similar lifestyle, the differences in the risk of having a heart attack are due solely to nutrition. In the prestigious medical periodical Lancet, a study of those affected by arteriosclerosis showed that 82% of those who followed a vegetarian diet low in fats, abstained from tobacco, and carried on a program of physical exercise, were rewarded with a lowering of the cholesterol deposits which narrow the arteries and make difficult the passage of blood.

CHOLESTEROL

A strict vegetarian diet has no cholesterol, since this substance is found only in animal foods. No fruit, cereal or vegetable contains cholesterol. The body is able

to produce its own needed cholesterol, beginning with fatty acids in the diet. But when, in addition, large quantities of cholesterol are taken in with foods, its level in the blood increases dangerously.

Vegetarians have a lower level of cholesterol in the blood, which protects them against the development of arteriosclerosis, heart attacks, cerebral thrombosis and other cardiocirculatory problems. It has been demonstrated that vegetarian Seventh-day Adventists have an average level of 149 mg/dl of cholesterol, while non-Adventists who eat meat have an average of 214 mg/dl. A study was done in Australia aimed at demonstrating the effect of diet upon cholesterol levels. One group of individuals was given to eat, among other things, 250 grams of lean meat each day, while another group was given the same diet, but substituting the meat with gluten and soybean proteins. After six weeks, vegetarians lowered their cholesterol level twice as much as those who followed the lean meat diet.

CANCER

For various reasons the vegetarian diet protects against cancer.

- It is rich in substances which protect against cancer which are only found in plant food: carotene or provitamin A (carrots, bell peppers and other brightly-colored vegetables), enzymes which inactivate carcinogenic benzopyrene (in cabbage and lettuce) inhibitors of protease (in legumes) and antioxidants (vitamin C)
- It contains abundant vegetable fiber, whose absence increases the risk of cancer of the colon. Meat contains no vegetable fiber (cellulose). Fiber absorbs and flushes the carcinogenic substances that may be in the intestines, and does the same with cholesterol and biliary salts.
- Normally vegetarians consume much less fats than non-vegetarians. Furthermore, vegetable fats generally contain mono or polyunsaturated

fatty acids, with a protective action against cancer and favouring health. It has been demonstrated that as the intake of animal fats increases, the mortality from breast cancer rises.

- A diet based on vegetables is exempt from carcinogenic substances which are found in meat, nitrites and hormones to fatten cattle.

In a report of a group of WHO experts, Diet, Nutrition and Prevention of Chronic Diseases, it was indicated that the lower rates of colon and rectal cancer among Seventh-day Adventists in California (where several studies have been conducted on this subject) half of which are vegetarians, support the hypothesis of a protective effect in vegetarian diets, although this portion of the population also abstains from alcoholic beverages.

The European Code Against Cancer, coinciding with what has already been presented, recommends a diet based on fruits and fresh vegetable, as well as whole cereals rich in fiber, or whole grains.

OBESITY

Most of the studies that have been conducted generally show that those whose diet is based on plant foods, weigh an average of four to ten kilos less than those who eat meat habitually.

According to the report of a group of WHO experts, there is more proof that demonstrates that an excess of fat in the diet favour a weight increase. The greater the proportion of calories coming from fats, the greater is the risk of obesity.

The statistical reports and experiments, published in the report of the WHO, agree that vegetarians ingest a lower quantity of fats, both in absolute terms (grams of fat per day) and relative.

BLOOD PRESSURE

According to the report of WHO experts, the epidemiological studies systematically indicate that blood pressure among non-vegetarians is lower than among the non-vegetarians. Though it is not easy to determine the exact cause for these results, the studies point out that some component of the products originating with animals, possibly the proteins or fats, may affect blood pressure among well-fed peoples.

The report also recommends that in order to avoid hypertension and obesity, a diet low in fats and high in complex carbohydrates (for example, whole cereals), should be followed, and reduce to a minimum the ingestion of alcohol and the use of salt.

DIABETES

Those who do not eat meat run a lower risk of suffering diabetes. Furthermore, some studies suggest that the habitual and abundant use of meat could be related to the cause of diabetes. If it were so, diets for all diabetics should be revised to reduce meat. Since most of them include grilled beefsteak as part of the diet. It could be that diabetics are being recommended that which aggravates their disease. However, the diets of all

diabetics have been revised in the past 20 years to reduce animal fat and increase use of complex carbohydrates.

OSTEOPOROSIS

Ovolactovegetarian women generally have less osteoporosis than those who habitually eat meat. "Osteoporosis within recent times has become a disease which concerns women more after menopause. It consists of the loss of mass and consistency of the bones, which makes them susceptible to fractures and deformation.

Researchers are investigating the reason why women who follow an ovolactovegetarian diet suffer less osteoporosis than those who eat meat, while in both diets the consumption of calcium is the same. But it is thought that, by a mechanism which is still not well known, the intake of a large amount of protein in the diet based on meat causes the organism to eliminate more calcium through the urine.

PHYSICAL ENDURANCE

It is a known fact that physical endurance against fatigue of vegetarian athletes is superior to that of those who indulge in a meat diet. Those who eat a lot of meat have more starting power to reach maximum strength in a short time, but they tire more quickly. This is the case with weight lifters who have a high protein diet derived from much meat. They are capable of extraordinary strength at a given moment, but they lack endurance.

The same can be said of animals. How is it possible that a deer can escape the chase of a lion? Simply because a lion develops greater speed at the beginning of the race. But if it is not able to reach its vegetarian victim, the latter tires the lion right away. The endurance of herbivorous animals is much greater. And not only the endurance: The rhinoceros is one of the animals which develops a greater pushing power, and is strictly a vegetarian. The elephant, the buffalo and the ox are other examples of vegetarian animals with great muscular endurance and proverbial strength.

CONCLUSION

It is a known fact that physical endurance against fatigue of vegetarian athletes is superior to that of those who indulge in a meat diet. Those who eat a lot of meat have more starting power to reach maximum strength in a short time, but they tire more quickly. This is the case with weight lifters who have a high protein diet derived from much meat. They are capable of extraordinary strength at a given moment, but they lack endurance.

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