

Vegetarian FAQ



1) What is a vegetarian & why do people choose to be one?

A vegetarian is someone who chooses not to eat meat, fowl, or fish. Within this general definition, there are numerous categories of vegetarians, such as lacto-ovo (consume dairy products and eggs), lacto (consume dairy products), fruitarian (only fruits, nuts and seeds), vegan (only products of non-animal origin), raw foodist, macrobiotics, etc. Some vegetarians also choose to avoid spicy-scented vegetables like onion and garlic.

There are many convincing reasons to choose a vegetarian diet. Common ones include health, animal rights, ethical issues, environmental issues, religious and spiritual reasons.

2) What are the benefits of a vegetarian diet?

Vegetarians are recognised to be healthier and have lower rates of cancer, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, kidney stones and gallstones. Some insurance companies are acknowledging this by offering lower premiums for vegetarians. Other benefits of a healthy vegetarian lifestyle include longevity, vitality, improved immune system, improved athletic performance, better weight control, and enhanced calmness and clarity for the mind and disposition.

3) Why is a vegetarian diet healthier?

We all know that fibre is very important to our health; fibre can ONLY be found in plant foods. The dangers of dietary cholesterol are well-recognised; NOT a single plant food contains cholesterol. The fats found in animal foods are harmful saturated fats; those found in plant foods are mainly unsaturated fats which are known to be heart-healthy. Antioxidants, the most celebrated protectors of health, are concentrated in plant foods, especially vitamin C, vitamin E, and beta-carotene. Phytochemicals, found only in plant foods, can also protect our health in many significant ways. As there are tens of thousands of phytochemicals, scientists are still actively researching to their amazing healing properties, and they may prove to be more beneficial and important to our health than we already think. Well-known phytochemicals include soy isoflavones, carotenoids and bio-flavonoids. Plant foods are also our best source of folic acid, which protects against heart diseases and birth defects.

4) Can I become unhealthy on a vegetarian diet?

Regardless of age and sex, a well-balanced vegetarian diet and lifestyle will meet all our nutritional needs and promote good health. A well-balanced diet should include a wide variety of plant foods including grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and seeds. Plant foods in their raw and natural state, such as fruits and sprouts, are known to be nutritionally excellent with their important enzymes. Wholesome plant foods also have a much higher nutritional value than highly processed foods.

However, it should be noted that some vegetarian foods, such as those which are deep-fried, can be detrimental to our health, even though they are still comparatively healthier than meat. A diet high in fats, sugar and salt can be very damaging, regardless of whether or not we follow a vegetarian diet. Highly processed foods are often nutritionally weak, besides being loaded with artificial chemicals such as MSG. Highly refined foods such as white rice and white sugar, other than providing us with calories or energy, give us little or no nutrients. Palm oil and coconut milk have a

high percentage of saturated fats and should be used sparingly. Hydrogenated fats or trans-fats, often found in processed foods such as margarine, cookies and cakes, have been described as pitfalls of vegetarians (they raise the level of bad cholesterol and decrease the level of good cholesterol in our blood) and should be avoided.

5) Will I become weak or mentally deficient on a vegetarian diet?

Many great scientists and thinkers have been vegetarians: Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, Thomas Edison, Pascal, Socrates. Among the world-class athletes we have: Dave Scott (6 times Ironman Triathlon winner), Edwin Moses (Olympic gold medallist and world record holder), Andreas Cahling (champion body builder), etc. Herbivores, like elephants and horses, have the best endurance and strength unparalleled by carnivores.



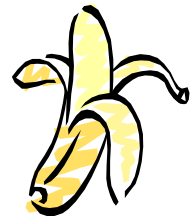
During the initial stages of cutting out meat, one may experience some feelings of weakness or even discomfort as the body detoxifies from years of meat eating. (For many, the years of poor eating habits have led to deposits on the inner wall of the colon, resulting in poor absorption of nutrients). Or, you may lose weight, weight built on animal fats and toxins, the "bad weight" that should be lost gladly! Include more complex carbohydrates in your healthy diet and be sure to exercise. Exercising stimulates the absorption of nutrients. Thus, it is important to exercise and build the "good weight".

6) Can children become vegetarians? Don't they need protein?

The protein myth is a big one. We absolutely do not need protein from meat because it can do more harm than good. It is true that children, especially babies, may need more protein in their growing stages, but nature has designed breast milk such that only 5% of its calories are in the form of protein. On the other hand, a typical meat-eating diet often provides more than 30% of its calories from protein. Our body cannot store excess protein at all. Excessive protein, especially meat protein, has been linked to many health problems such as osteoporosis (weakening of bones) and kidney problems. Protein from plant food (plentiful in soya beans and products, nuts seeds, whole grains) is proportionate, safe and sufficient. In fact, it is almost impossible to be deficient in protein unless one is starved.

7) Some doctors say that we need to have some meat because a vegetarian diet is inadequate. Does this mean that one should not be a vegetarian?

Most doctors do not receive specialized training in nutrition and are not knowledgeable about nutritional matters. A US Senate investigation revealed that the average US physician received less than 3 hours of training in nutrition during medical school. In Singapore hospitals, doctors refer nutritional matters to dieticians, who are the experts.



Vegetarian diets, like ALL diets, need to be planned appropriately to be nutritionally adequate. It is the position of the American Dietetic Association (ADA) that appropriately planned vegetarian diets are healthful, are nutritionally adequate, and provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. ADA has even come up with a vegetarian food guide pyramid.

Most of the concerns regarding the nutritional inadequacy of a vegetarian diet centre mainly on: a)iron, b)amino acids, c)calcium, and d)protein.

a) Iron deficiency is the most common deficiency in the world. It may be true that iron from meat (heme iron) is more easily absorbed than iron from vegetables (non-heme iron). But this can easily be solved by consumption of Vit C in the same meal which can boost the absorption fourfold. Vit C is present in many vegetables and fruits, and abundant in guava and citrus fruits.

b) 9 out of the 22 amino acids we need are not made in our body and have to come from our diet. By mixing a variety of nuts, seeds, and vegetables (especially soya bean and almond nut products), this need can be easily met. Soy protein is now recognised as a complete protein with all the necessary amino acids.

c) Calcium is abundant in plant foods. Good sources: dark green leafy green vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, and soy products.

d) Protein has been discussed in FAQ4.

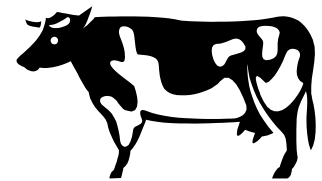
8) **Aren't animals meant to be eaten? Haven't humans been eating animals since the earliest of time?**

In the wild, the predator hunts while the prey defends itself by running or counter-attacking. Both predator and prey live a hard life. It is a fair game of survival. However in factory farms today, the animals suffer a lifetime of imprisonment. They are helpless, innocent, and totally defenseless. We exploit them, taking advantage of their weakness and incapacity. Their bodies have no defense against our equipment or machinery. No matter how they struggle and suffer, there is no chance of escape. This is not fairness. In the natural environment, animals hunt and kill strictly for survival. They do not have an option because of their instincts and body's design. On the other hand, humans have a higher consciousness.

It is disturbing that humans eat meat because "we enjoy it" or because we have conditioned ourselves to "love the taste of meat". For humans, it is NOT a necessity; it is a form of entertainment or a luxury. Most certainly, it is not for survival. There is such a wide choice of food for us without eating meat. Our body is not even suited for meat. Our instincts show we are not made for killing. There is an increasing amount of evidence to show that meat eating is detrimental to our health.

Some early humans may have been hunters. They may have killed and lived the consequences of an animalistic way of life. But we have evolved, our senses and morals have evolved. Our instincts cannot tolerate the sights or sounds of animals being killed. Why choose to revert to an animal status and its consequences now?

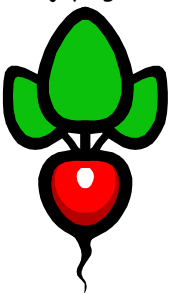
Animals are not here as our food. They express the diversity of life on earth and the wonderment, beauty, and exuberance of creation. Each animal seeks peace, joy, harmony and love. They are here to experience life on this planet, just like us.



9) **How can I enjoy life without eating meat and seafood?**

Life is a great gift and is certainly meant to be enjoyed! But why focus the enjoyment of life on the mere sensation of our taste buds? With a healthier body, a clearer and lighter mental disposition, we can surely enjoy life to its fullest. Meat, being full of toxins, chemicals, cholesterol, and fats harms the body and in the long run, turns our body into a prison when it cannot function optimally. More importantly, we will feel much better about ourselves when, by choosing a vegetarian diet, we know we are not contributing to animal suffering, environmental problems and world hunger.

The "tastiness" in meat does not come from the meat itself. It comes from the seasoning (chilli, onion, pepper, spices, ginger, etc), all of which are plant foods. The idea that meat tastes nice is a deep-seated misconception. Meat not disguised in the flavours of vegetation, i.e. unseasoned meat, is hardly palatable. When we "enjoy meat", we are enjoying a deception at a great expense.



Giving up meat doesn't mean the end of food enjoyment. If we can make decaying flesh taste mouth watering, we certainly can make vegetarian dishes taste exquisite. And as our palate adjusts itself, we will come to appreciate the delightful and natural flavours of the wide variety of plant foods.

Undoubtedly, life is meant to be enjoyed and this holds true for the animals as well. They are here to experience peace, joy, and love, just like us. They have feelings and they experience fear and pain too. Can we really feel good about ourselves when we enjoy our life at the expense of theirs?

10) **The vegetarian food in Singapore is often greasy and loaded with MSG. This makes it difficult to maintain a healthy vegetarian diet.**

It is one of the objectives of Vegetarian Society (Singapore) to promote a healthy vegetarian diet. We work to raise public awareness through campaigns and exhibitions. But we need YOU to help increase demand for healthy vegetarian foods. Create the demand and the supply will follow. There are already numerous organic and healthy vegetarian eateries scattered around Singapore. You can consult "Healthy Food Guide" (available at major bookstores or at many vegetarian restaurants and health food stores). It is even better if you can prepare vegetarian food of your own

choice in your own kitchen. Recipes can be found in books and the Internet. Exercise your creativity and sense of adventure. Vegetarian food preparation is actually easier than most people think. All it takes is the willingness to try and explore.

11) Are organic veggies and fruits necessary to attain good health?

Going vegetarian is itself a big step towards better health. Going organic is certainly even better. Organic food, compared to conventional food, can be around 60% higher in calcium, 60% higher in iron, 125% higher in potassium, 390% higher in selenium.



12) Why is brown rice and brown bread better than the white varieties?

The original form of brown rice and brown bread is unhusked and fibrous. When wheat flour is refined into white flour, the percentages of nutrients LOST are: protein-25%, fibre-95%, calcium-56%, iron-84%, zinc-76%. The natural foods have been stripped of essential nutrients and some are artificially enriched with nutrients. Therefore, most of these white varieties are low in nutrients, although they do provide us with calories which in excess will be stored as fats. That is why they are being coined as "empty calories".

13) I am trying to be a vegetarian, but the pressure to conform to the majority is always there. How does one deal with this?

Firstly, you need to affirm your convictions about vegetarianism by being well-informed. VSS is more than happy to support you with facts and figures. When you have the conviction, you will find the courage and commitment to make your statement and be a more positive influence on others.

Secondly, if asked, explain to people your rationale (on the worrying health trend, nutrition, misconceptions, ethics, environment). VSS will be happy to provide you with such information. State your views clearly and politely, not aggressively. Be a good example of someone with a better disposition, higher morals, and better health. Interactions with non-vegetarians are encouraged; for how can we influence the world for the better if we alienate others?



Thirdly, VSS provide support and social networking to other vegetarians in Singapore. There are numerous restaurants you can visit with friends and relatives. Most importantly, remember that what you choose to eat plays a role in your relationships with people, and in your own health and the well-being of the world.

14) I am convinced to go vegetarian. But how do I go about it? What's next?

Going vegetarian is actually much simpler than what most people think. Simply by stop taking meat, you are on your first step towards a healthier and more responsible way of life. For many people, it seems difficult, only because we tend to resist changes, even if the changes are for the better. As a vegetarian, one should eat a variety of plant foods ranging from grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and seeds. Learn to like the taste of fresh greens, fruits, nuts, or seeds. Check the "Healthy Food Guide" for outlets if you are eating out. Learn some quick and simple food preparation at home. Go shopping and stock up your vegetarian pantry.



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The Vegetarian Society (Singapore) is a non-profit organisation run entirely by volunteers. It was formed in 1999 with the primary objective of promoting vegetarianism in Singapore through research and education, and linking individuals and organizations that believe in the principles of vegetarianism. The society has no commercial or religious affiliations and is not restricted to any particular form of vegetarianism. We seek to propagate vegetarianism in all its aspects such as health benefits, animal rights, environmental issues and world hunger. We are the only registered vegetarian society in Singapore, recognized as a member of the International Vegetarian Union and to have links with other vegetarian societies all around the world.

Please give your support to the vegetarian movement. Contact us if you would like to help in any way.

"Nothing is more powerful than an individual acting out of his own conscience, thus helping to bring the collective conscience to life." --Norman Cousins