

# Vegetarian way of Living

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## Abstract

It is rightly said that ‘we are what we eat’. In our routinely stressful life-activities (government jobs, private jobs, entrepreneurship etc.), we have forgotten to take care of our health. A healthy mind resides in a healthy body. Therefore, to maintain health and for holistic development of body, mind and soul, a vegetarian diet is mostly recommended. There are enough reports which discuss the benefits of vegetarian diet. Certainly, the vegetarian diet provides a blend of nutrients (vitamins, minerals), antioxidants and bioactive compounds for normal growth and development of human body. Indeed, vegetarian way of life keeps you stress-free, facilitates in lowering blood pressure, reduces the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and obesity, and strengthens the immune system, improves the mood and delays ageing. It is of utmost importance for students too. Thus, in order to stay green (cool, calm and stress-free) one must eat green.

## Diet

Diet constitutes the foods and drinks which a normal person routinely consumes. There are several forms of diets [1], [2], [3], [4], [5], [6]. These are (a) *Eggetarian / ovovegetarian*: includes vegetarian food, milk and milk-products, eggs; (b) *Lacto-vegetarian*: includes vegetarian food, milk and milk-products; (c) *Pescetarian*: includes the consumption of fish (excluding meat, poultry) and sometimes dairy products and eggs; (d) *Flexitarian*: includes mostly vegetarian diet (consumption of meat, fish or poultry occasionally); and (e) *Pure vegetarian*: includes food of vegetarian origin; and (d) *Jain diet*: includes vegetarian food, milk and milk-products. Depending on the constituents, the food can also be classified as (a) *Rajsik*: spicy, oily and salty foods having pungent taste (b) *Tamsik*: include onions, garlic, meat, fish, mushrooms, over-ripe and under-ripe vegetables and fruits, fermented foods (vinegar, bakery products, alcohol and stale food) and (c) *Satvik*: includes seasonal fruits and vegetables, dairy-products, nuts, seeds, oils, ripe vegetables, whole grains and legumes. Both *Rajsik* and *Tamsik* foods generate restlessness, negativity, high blood pressure etc. Those who practice ‘YOGA’ are advised to practice vegetarian way of living.

## Vegetarian Diet

It is a diet which is free from meat and fishes. The vegetarian diet includes (a) *vegetables*: leafy greens, asparagus, broccoli, tomatoes, carrots etc.; (b) *fruits*: apples, bananas, berries, oranges, melons, pears, peaches etc.; (c) *grains*: wheat, quinoa, millets, barley, oats, buckwheat, rice etc., (d) *legumes*: beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas; (e) *nuts*: walnuts, almonds, chestnuts, cashews; (f) *seeds*: hemp, flax, chia; (g) *proteins*: spirulina, tempeh, cheese, natto, tofu, seitan, nutritional yeast, dairy products and eggs (h) *healthy fats*: coconut oil, mustard oil, avocados, olive oil etc. However, there is a difference between vegetarian diet and vegan diet. The vegetarians eat only vegetables, fruits and animal-based products like dairy and eggs. On the other hand, vegans do not eat animal products. India has the largest population of vegetarians (35.71%). Countries like USA, UK, Germany and Italy also have vegetarian population with 3.78%, 8.57%, 9.02% and 9.67% respectively. A fresh and balanced vegetarian diet nourishes the body and promotes the holistic development of body, mind, and soul. Each year, in North America, the largest vegetarian food festival: Veggie Fest is organized under the leadership of Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj, Head, Science of Spirituality, Chicago, USA.

## Benefits of Vegetarianism

There is a renowned saying among Indians: “*Jaisa Aahaar-Vaise Vichaar*” which means “what you eat, makes up your thoughts”. However, in Sanskrit it has a wider meaning wherein ‘*Aahaar*’ includes not only the food which we eat but also what we intake by our five senses (sense of sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch). There are enough scientific evidences to prove that the food that we eat has great impact on our ‘*Aachaar*: conduct’, ‘*Vichaar*:thought’ and ‘*Vyavhaar*:behaviour’ (SOS, USA). There are innumerable advantages of a vegetarian diet over non-vegetarian (Fig. 1).



Fig 1: Benefits of a vegetarian diet.

Mr. BKS Iyengar has rightly said that “Health is a state of complete harmony of the body, mind and spirit”. The key to success is a healthy mind and a healthy diet (food) can generate a healthy mind. Thus, the healthy food which we eat actually acts as a medicine for the same. Every individual should have a craving for healthy mind rather than money, because when money is lost, something is lost and when health is lost everything is lost. Several scientific reports are available on the benefits of vegetarian diet over non-vegetarian [7]. Since time immemorial, several philosophers, Sufis, Saints and Mystics have encouraged everyone to practice vegetarian lifestyle because it calms the body and the mind and brings the individual closer to the inner peace. In the present world, where every individual from among 10 or 20, consumes a non-vegetarian diet, it has resulted in depression, anxiety, negativity, various diseases (diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, liver diseases etc.), constipation, piles and various cancers among them [8], [9], [10], [11], [12].

In Indian families most of the couples who eat a vegetarian diet have fewer quarrels as compared to those who follow a western lifestyle plus non-vegetarian diet. The same is true for their respective kids. Therefore, in Indian gatherings (marriages, birth-day parties, new-year parties, anniversaries, school mid-day meals etc.) only vegetarian food is observed in the menu. This can be attributed that a vegetarian diet with fresh-green seasonal vegetables and fruits, pulses, cereals, milk, curd, cheese, ghee, spices and nuts offer a blend of nutrients (vitamins and minerals), antioxidants and growth factors and moreover provides taste to food, maintains the body’s immunity and promotes holistic growth and development of the body. Vegetarian diet is essential for a yogis,

athletes, body builders, teachers as well as students. They prevent various cancers, signs of premature ageing including dementia [13], [14], [15], [16].

Vegetarian diet is immensely useful for the students. The students who consume non-vegetarian diet are unable to concentrate (even for an hour) on their studies and complain of forgetting their lessons very soon. The repercussions may be more severe, as these students tend to fight with their colleagues, distract the other students, and are average performers in the exams. On the contrary, those students who adhere to vegetarian or lacto-vegetarian diet remain fresh at mind, body and soul. They have calm and collected response, remain alert during the class, imbibe/grasp, and remember comparatively more, attend most of the classes (do not frequently fall ill), do not fall into unhealthy discussions with their colleagues. They are able to learn their lessons quickly in the class itself and so have time to participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Thus, these students perform comparatively better than the aforementioned. The vegetarian diet do prevents metabolic syndromes and neurodegenerative diseases too [17].

## Conclusion

Seasonal fruits, vegetables, cereals, pulses, and nuts are packet with antioxidants, minerals and vitamins and are associated with several health benefits for all those who are health conscious [18]. They are definitely a gift of nature to mankind. Looking into the innumerable benefits of vegetarian way of life, it is strongly recommended to switch over to vegetarianism.

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