

Animal Products and Human Health

Fancy adding extra years to your lifespan? Want to know the best foods to eat for optimum health? Then try cutting animal products from your diet.

There is now a huge and growing body of evidence to show that a well-balanced 100% plant-based diet is the ideal vehicle for the promotion of human health. Based on wholegrains, pulses, fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts, it is these foods that provide all the essential nutrients – vitamins, minerals, essential fats, protein, starchy carbohydrate and fibre – that we must take into our bodies if we want not just to survive, but to thrive!

The Trouble With Too Much Protein

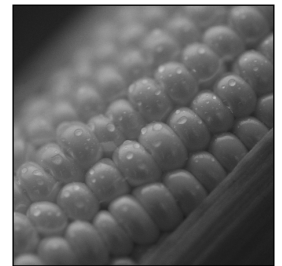
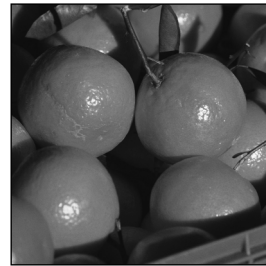
The problem with protein in the Western diet is actually more to do with eating too much than eating too little. Excessive protein consumption can lead to a number of serious health problems. Studies show that vegan diets provide sufficient amounts of protein, automatically met by a balanced, varied diet including grains (e.g. rice) and pulses (e.g. beans).

Osteoporosis

Most of our body's calcium is in our bones. The small amount in our bloodstream plays an important role in functions such as muscle contraction and maintenance of the heartbeat. Bloodstream calcium is constantly being lost through urine, sweat and faeces. Replacement comes from the bones, which depend on fresh supplies from the food we eat. Diets rich in animal protein, such as that found in cow's milk, makes the blood more acidic. The body tries to neutralise this by drawing calcium from the bones into the bloodstream, which is filtered through the kidneys and lost through urine. The more dairy consumed, the more calcium the body needs to balance the losses. Therefore too much protein actually leaches calcium from the bones and contributes to weak bones and osteoporosis. Countries whose populations eat low-protein diets have lower rates of osteoporosis and hip fractures.¹

Kidney Disease And Kidney Stones

Excess protein consumption produces more nitrogen than the body requires. This strains the kidneys, which must expel the extra nitrogen through urine, causing reduced kidney function. Over time, individuals who consume very large amounts of animal protein, risk permanent loss of kidney function. High animal protein diets also lead to more uric acid in the urine, and a general increase in urine acidity.



Because of the acidity, the uric acid does not easily dissolve and can form into kidney stones.

Heart Disease And Stroke

Saturated animal fats found in meat and dairy products raise cholesterol and can increase the risk of heart disease and strokes by blocking blood flow through the arteries. If the blood flow to the heart is blocked, a heart attack can occur. If the blood flow to the brain is blocked, a stroke can occur. Official dietary guidelines across the world recommend that no more than 10% of calories should come from saturated fats. In the UK, dairy foods contribute about 20% of total fat intake and over a third of saturated fat.² Cholesterol is found only in animal products. Meat, fish, poultry, dairy products, and eggs all contain cholesterol, while plant products do not. Choosing lean cuts of meat is not enough; the cholesterol is mainly in the lean portion. Many people are surprised to learn that chicken contains as much cholesterol as beef. A diet rich in whole grains, vegetables, beans and fruits, is free of artery-clogging cholesterol and low in saturated fat.

Cancer

Too much fat in the diet is the food-related factor most often identified for increasing the risk of



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contracting cancer, but protein also plays a role. Populations that eat meat and dairy products regularly are at an increased risk from cancers such as colon, breast, ovarian and prostate. Cow's milk contains a powerful growth hormone – IGF-1 – that stimulates the growth of malignant cells and has been identified as a key factor in the growth of human cancer. People drinking milk have increased levels of IGF-1 in their bodies.³

Diabetes

Studies in various countries have shown a strong link between the consumption of dairy products and the incidence of insulin-dependent diabetes. In 1992 researchers⁴ found that a specific dairy protein sparks an auto-immune reaction, which is believed to be what destroys the insulin-producing cells of the pancreas. Insulin is required to convert glucose from food into energy. If the pancreas does not produce enough insulin then the glucose content in the blood is too high and diabetes occurs. Studies suggest that persons with type 2 diabetes (non-insulin dependent diabetes) can improve and, in some cases, even reverse, the disease by switching to an unrefined vegan diet.⁵

Dairy And Crohn's Disease

Research has linked the intestinal disorder Crohn's disease – that causes fever, diarrhoea and pain after eating – with Johne's disease in dairy cows. The bacterium in cows interferes with their digestion, lowers milk production, and eventually kills those infected. This same bacterium has been found in the gut of humans suffering from Crohn's disease, whose symptoms include crippling stomach pain, diarrhoea and other intestinal problems. In addition to genetic factors and bacterial infections, Crohn's disease is affected by diet. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (www.pcrm.org) has reported that 'many people with the illness have little fibre – specifically vegetables and fruits – and too much sugar in their diet. Boosting plant foods, including whole grain bread and brown rice, while avoiding sugar, white flour, and white rice has reduced patient hospitalisations in research studies.'

Allergies

Consuming dairy products has also been linked to a number of allergies such as asthma, eczema and wheezing, especially in childhood. Naturally, the best beverage for infants and small toddlers is mother's breast milk. Even after the first year, food allergies to milk and milk products are common. Many children and teens with irritable bowel syndrome, autism, asthma, and allergies improve when they stop drinking cow's milk. For people who suffer from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (intestinal problem), foods rich in fat such as dairy can make the symptoms worse.

GM In Animal Feed

More than 50% of genetically modified crop material grown around the world goes into animal feed. As consumers around the world mobilise against GM

products in their own food, few people realise that eating meat and dairy products is throwing a lifeline to the biotechnology industry. While most UK vegetarians rely heavily upon soya in their diet and need to take care to avoid GM crops, meat eaters have an almost impossible task. This is because soyabean oil and meal are common ingredients in compound animal feeds and may well include GM products. There is a danger that the alien DNA inserted into the soya may be taken up by the animal in its feed and eventually get into the human consumer as well.

Vegetarian Nutrition

Some people going vegetarian worry about getting enough protein, calcium, B vitamins and other essential nutrients. The best evidence indicates that a balanced non-animal diet is the healthiest there is – for children as well as for adults.

For a comprehensive, easy-view guide to vegetarian nutrition, send for a colourful, illustrated wall-chart, priced £3.50 from Animal Aid.



'Vegetarians have lower rates of obesity, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, large bowel disorders, cancers and gall stones. Cholesterol levels tend to be lower in vegetarians.'

British Medical Association

'Appropriately planned vegan and lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets satisfy nutrient needs of infants, children and adolescents and promote normal growth.'

The American Dietetic Association

'Vegetarian groups have been shown to have lower risks of cardiovascular disease, lower rates of obesity and longer life expectancy than meat-eaters.'

The World Cancer Research Fund

References

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