



Do we have to be vegetarians to have a good health ?

We have noticed lately that people are following the "vegetarianism" phenomenon in their diets because they believe that in order to have a better health it is better to stay away from meat or its byproducts.

Is it true? What are the best methods to have a good health and a healthy body?

When vegetarian diets are based on an unbalanced mode, it is not enough for the body. The body will lack nutrients and thereby develop deficiencies and diseases.

Vegetarians can be categorized in to mainly four types:

- **Type 1) Semi vegetarians** - These 'vegetarians' eat all types of foods, fish and chicken. However these individuals limit the amount of animal products they consume.
- **Type 2) Lacto vegetarian** - Individuals in this group are a step up from the semi vegetarians. They avoid all animal products except for dairy products in their diet.
- **Type 3) Lacto-ovo vegetarians** - This type of vegetarian diet excludes all meat except for dairy and eggs. Not too different from the previous type.
- **Type 4) Vegans** - These are the 'hard-core' vegetarians who avoid all animal products in their diet, such as meats, dairy products, and eggs. The vegan diet rely on lentils, beans, soy products etc..

Whatever is the vegetarian diet, it is important for the body to get sufficient nutrients. For example when you eat rice you must accompany it with a legume in order to provide all essential aminoacids. If you do not consume milk and its byproducts, you are depriving your body of important nutrients such as calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D; if you totally do not eat meat, then your body will lack vitamin B12 and iron which may lead to anemia. There are stages of the human life where he/she needs a large amount of proteins esp. during pregnancy and lactation, during childhood and adolescent where it is needed to build up muscles. Of course plant foods are of importance to the human body as they provide complex carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and fiber. Plant foods are an important contributing factor in weight loss and cholesterol decreasing programs. A lot of meat, whole cream milk, creams, butter, etc would aid in the increase of cholesterol in the blood. The body needs small amounts to fats, moderate amount of proteins and a good amount of carbohydrates to perform its functions. Any thing in excess would be harmful for the body.

Proteins are found in plant and animal sources; the difference is that animal-sourced proteins are rather complete i.e. have all the essential aminoacids while plant-sourced ones lack few aminoacids. That does not mean that plant sourced proteins are not good but rather need to complement each other to give a complete protein(beans with rice, rice with lentils, etc...). According to recent research studies, the best approach is to consume few foods of animal origin and few others from plant origin. The most impor-



tant thing is to have a balanced and variant diet. If your diet accounts for most food groups, then it is balanced and variant. Keep in mind, moderation is also a key factor.

We should include the following in our diet daily:

Protein group:

We should include foods such as

- 1) beans(rich in iron), peas, lentils, nuts, and some meat, chicken or fish
- 2) breads, rice, wheat, barley and oats
- 3) milk and milk products proteins; choose those that are low in fat

General guidelines for vegetarians

To have your diet balanced, it must contain moderate amounts of different foods ; you must:

- 1) consume whole-wheat bread, grains, whole-legumes or enriched ones
- 2) consume a good amount of fresh vegetables esp. green leaved ones as they are rich in folic acid, vitamins and minerals

- 3) include fruits as well as they are also essential foods in your daily food intake
- 4) consume milk products as they are an important part of your diet; it can be incorporated in the vegetarian diet
- 5) pay attention if you are a vegan; vegans are the strictest among vegetarians as they do not consume anything of animal origin.
Such persons must take vitamin B12 as a supplement as they totally lack it in their diet.
Calcium as well would be a critical nutrient; you must consult with your physician to check if there are any deficiencies.
- 6) avoid saturated fats such as butter and hydrogenated oils and revert to vegetables oil.
- 7) consult with your dietitian in order to agree upon the best vegetarian diet to follow where it is balanced and supports the daily body needs.