

Becoming a vegetarian: reasons you should go veg

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Current Event: Vegetarianism

Why would anyone consider becoming a vegetarian? Is a vegetarian diet healthier, or are there too many risks? The article, “Vegetarian Diets: Health Benefits and Associated Risks” by Navneet Kumar Kaushik, Anup Aggarwal, Mohita Singh, Shelja Deswal, and Priyanka Kaushik discusses the popularity in recent years of adopting a vegetarian diet. Katherine Schreiber, author for Cosmopolitan magazine, shares several downfalls to a vegetarian diet in her article, “6 Ways Being a Vegetarian Could Seriously Mess You Up”. It is important for everyone who is considering a transition to a vegetarian diet in any form to thoroughly study the benefits and risks, and to learn what would create a balanced, healthy diet free of animal products.

According to Kaushik there are many reasons why a person might choose to become a vegetarian, including their health, animal rights, or religious beliefs. Some people choose to eliminate all animal products from their diet as well as other uses, such as leather clothing. Others choose to avoid only the flesh of the animal, but may still consume eggs, honey, or dairy products. There are nearly as many variations of the diet as there are reasons for choosing it. These authors set out to review the results of studies that focused on the effects of a vegetarian diet on the human body, good or bad.

Several studies were cited in this article. A study by Sabate and Wien researched how being a vegetarian would affect the body weight of people following a vegetarian diet. Studies conducted by Tonstad, et al., and Newby, et al., looked at the BMI levels of people at various stages of vegetarianism.

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Each of these studies found that overall BMI was lower among those people who ate no animal products at all. Another study by Somannavar and Kodliwadmth found that being a vegetarian increased antioxidant levels while lowering cholesterol levels. Dourado found that vegetarians had a lower blood pressure than those who consumed meat, making a good case for a lower risk of heart disease and stroke. The risk of diabetes was also included in some of these studies, and vegans were, again, found to be at the lowest risk of all the diet types. Kaushik took care to mention that a vegetarian diet, if not properly balanced, could pose nutritional problems such as vitamin B-12 deficiency, iron deficiency, and protein deficiency.

These can be avoided by incorporating dairy products, eggs, legumes, and nuts, as well as a few other non-animal sources of protein into the diet. The conclusion that these authors came to is supportive of a vegetarian diet due to the health benefits that can be gained. Although there are some potential problems with being vegetarian, they are fewer in number than the benefits. The studies showed that vegetarianism lowers the risk of many chronic diseases and will likely increase the life span of anyone who follows the vegetarian lifestyle. There are other reasons to become vegetarian mentioned briefly in the article's final paragraph, such as a lower risk of several types of cancer. In her article "6 Ways Being a Vegetarian Could Seriously Mess You Up," Schreiber admits briefly that a vegetarian diet can have both health and environmental benefits, but spends the remainder of the article describing health concerns when not consuming meat. Her first point is that vegetarians are not able to get vitamin D3 from sources that are not animal-based, and should also take extra calcium to avoid problems in

their bones. Schreiber's next point is to inform her readers that beef and lamb are the two best ways to consume zinc, but does concede that there is a plant-based source for this important mineral in third place. Likewise, as she moves on to the topic of iron, she tells us that iron is found in a wide variety of meats. But once more, she does share some animal-product free sources of iron for preventing anemia. She then references a study conducted in Germany comparing the mental health of vegetarians vs. meat-eaters. In this study, Schreiber says researchers " found a noticeably higher rate of psych issues among those who didn't consume animal protein."

She argues that this is probably due to the struggle vegetarians face when eating out and having limited options, being judged by their friends for their eating choices, or even the high cost of meat substitutes. Schreiber goes on to discuss how vitamin B12 deficiency is one cause of depression, and more vegetarians were found in the study to suffer from depression. She attributes this to vegetarians not eating animal products, as they are a major source of this nutrient. The article wraps up with the claim that veganism could be a cover-up, linking to a study that claims half of the people who have an eating disorder are vegetarians of one form or another. Although these two articles are about the effects of a vegetarian diet, that is where the similarity ends. They conflict with each other on most points. Kaushik, et al. provide more scientific support for the benefits of vegetarianism, with limited talk of the risks, while Schreiber concedes that although there may be some benefits, it is potentially dangerous to be a vegetarian. The first article, " Vegetarian Diets: Health Benefits and Associated Risks," is found in a medical journal, which lends credibility to the content. Studies are properly cited, and the

authors explained their method of finding appropriate studies to compare. Their method included choosing studies that supported vegetarianism as beneficial, as well as studies that found a vegetarian diet to be harmful. They also looked at studies on veganism, a more stringent diet that does not use any animal products, including eggs, dairy foods, or honey. The information in the article is kept free of bias by minimizing references of their own opinions and only stating what was found in the various studies. Kaushik state that people today are obsessed with weight loss, as evidenced by the sheer quantity of diets that have been created in recent years. They go on to provide data found in numerous studies that regarding BMI values in both males and females.

A study by Tonstad shows that the lowest BMI values were found in the subjects who choose a vegan diet, followed by slightly higher values in vegetarians, compared to the BMI values of those who eat meat, supporting the idea that veganism or vegetarianism can have a positive effect on weight. Kaushik provide information from study after study to support their ideas about vegetarianism. However, they also reference a study finding that vegetarians can easily suffer from a vitamin B-12 deficiency. Additionally, they address the controversy around a vegetarian diet, notably when adopted by athletes. They freely admit that they were unable to find enough documentation to support a conclusion for or against vegetarianism and suggest that more research should be completed on this topic. This indicates the lack of bias in their article because they have evidence supporting multiple angles of this argument – for, against, and undecided. The article in

Cosmopolitan magazine, “ 6 Ways Being a Vegetarian Could Seriously Mess You Up,” is riddled with opinions and statements that lack support.

Although the author of this article links to one or two studies that appear to support her ideas, she does not quote from them or provide data for the most part. Unless her readers choose to click on the links to the study, they will be merely taking her at her word. The title of the article is a biased argument of itself, clearly taking a stance against vegetarianism.

Cosmopolitan is a popular magazine with nearly 16 million readers, most of them women between the ages of 18 and 49, and Schreiber has clearly targeted this demographic for her article. There is no evidence, for example, to support her speculative question suggesting anxiety in vegetarians is caused by “ the stress of worrying whether you can ever eat anything at the restaurants your friends pick, or fielding judgment for your eating habits, or feeling the strain on your wallet because seitan is friggin’ expensive.” This tactic aims to evoke an emotional response in her readers by appealing to the rhetoric of ethos by planting seeds of doubt in the minds of someone who was considering, or already practicing, vegetarianism or veganism by preying on their mental health.

Conclusion

The difference between these articles is demonstrated by the well-researched article that looked at both the benefits and the risks involved in practicing vegetarianism, and, on the opposite end of the spectrum, the loosely written, almost flippant, magazine article that barely looked at any of the evidence supporting the benefits of vegetarianism. The wide range of

information that can be found online, or in print, covers every stage between the two. Readers should never just take the word of a fashion magazine editor as the bottom line if they are looking for unbiased information. Anyone considering a vegetarian or vegan diet should do their research, making sure to look at the data and scientific findings in the medical community before they decide whether this is the right diet plan for them.