

Experts get to meat of discussion: vegetarianism not all bad

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Many people have come to the conclusion that mother's advice wasn't so bad after all.

"Eat your vegetables!" she would say.

A good portion of the population grew up to do just that—by becoming vegetarians.

Whether for spiritual, moral, political or nutritional reasons, it is estimated that more people across the world practice vegetarianism than eat meat.

Nutritionalists and doctors are split in their reactions to vegetarianism. But all agree it is not something to be approached lightly.

Lena Clancy, assistant dietary director at Lincoln General Hospital, said the U.S. consumes large quantities of meat with some overconsumption. She believes vegetarianism may solve diet or metabolism problems.

"I don't see anything wrong with it as long as the person gets a balanced diet," she said. However, she added that some people go to extremes including only one kind of food.

The effects of such a diet depend on the choice of foods included in a long-term plan.

"If you choose foods that are healthy as substitutes, then it's all right."

Too often though, vegetarianism is given a bad reputation because some advocates make the wrong substitution and eat foods that are nutritionally low, according to Jane Walgamotte, director of food service at Union College. She pointed out that this also happens with non-vegetarians.

Walgamotte organizes the menus for 600 Seventh Day Adventist boarding students with an emphasis on vegetarian foods.

"The Seventh Day Adventist Church encourages healthful living and feels a vegetarian diet can contribute," she said. "Vegetarianism is in no way a test of faith."

THERE ARE more vegetarians than meat-eaters in the world, she said. Youths are beginning to abhor slaughtering of people or animals, she said. She said she finds this trend promising.

The director noted that animals have been prone to disease for a long time and especially in the modern mechanized world. Moreover, less land area is needed to produce food when it is fed directly rather than feeding first to animals. For this reason, consumers can save money by purchasing high protein legumes, soybeans or gluten.

Adventists believe that man was created to not eat meat, she said.

"God desires me to be a vegetarian because of the disease potential. Most meats are high in cholesterol. In a vegetarian diet there is no cholesterol."

She added that overall fat content was lower.

Grounds that a vegetarian diet supplies insufficient protein are unfounded, she said. The National Academy of Sciences, in recent years, has discovered that protein requirements are much lower than previously believed. An excess might even be detrimental to kidneys, she said.

Walgamotte said that she recommends lactovegetarianism, which includes eggs and milk. Pure vegetarianism doesn't include these, but complete proteins can be obtained by mixing vegetables and grains that are comparable to each other. As an example, she said the proteins in tortillas and legumes, when consumed together, make up a complete protein.

Walgamotte said she shifted gradually from eating meat to vegetarianism.

"I was not as convinced at the beginning that meat was detrimental to health. But the more vegetarian foods you eat, the less you want to chew meat."

Hazel Fox, head of the UNL department of food and nutrition, said it is possible to have a "very good diet" as a vegetarian. But, she cautions, a person would have to plan his diet carefully.

FOX SAID variety is the most important thing for vegetarians. Certain nutrients, not certain foods, are needed for a well-rounded diet, she said.

"Don't just depend on one thing," she said.

Grains, cereals, legumes and nuts all are necessary in a vegetarian program, to make sure the person gets all the vitamins he needs.

However, persons who are pure vegetarians and don't eat dairy products may have deficiencies of vitamin B12, Fox said. These persons should supplement their diets with B12 tablets, she added.

Fox said she thinks there is a trend toward vegetarianism as part of the "back to nature" movement.

She said preservatives and additives in prepared foods is an issue which concerns many people.

"I think it's kind of healthy having alternative diets," Fox said.

Dr. Guy Matson, family practitioner, said that in his experience, religion is the primary reason for people to not eat. He added, though, that it is becoming prevalent with the increased emphasis on diet and controlling obesity.

"It is feasible for a human being to live without animal protein," he said. "There is no evidence that it will lead to a longer life or impair health. We could improve health as a nation most if we try to keep ourselves physically and emotionally normal, whether we have meat or vegetable

sources of protein."

Eating a balanced diet and balancing the number of calories taken in with the number expended is the most important factor, he said.

Proponents of vegetarianism who report that it adds to health are not aided by medical evidence, according to Dr. Y. Scott Moore, general practitioner. Although he said most vegetarians he sees promote it as a fad, there are a lot of serious, life-long practitioners.

Moore doesn't see excluding meat from the diet for health reasons because "a few people doing it don't know how to supply all their nutrition."

HIS ADVICE for anyone planning to convert to vegetarianism is to "do more than stop eating meat. They should find out about nutrition, so they can continue to have enough protein and a balanced diet."

Another dietician, Mary Carey, director of food service at Bryan Memorial Hospital, agrees with Moore. Carey said she has reservations about a vegetarian diet because unless it is properly planned, it will be low in protein and iron.

And, Carey said, "It takes a lot of knowledge to put it together well."

Carey said these diets never would lack vitamins, but would be short on nutrients, protein and minerals, especially if no dairy products are included.

In order to properly plan a vegetarian diet, Carey said, people "really ought to go to a nutritionist, get a reference book and put the diet together."

"It bothers me, frankly," she added.

Carey said she thinks there is nothing wrong with the way the nation is eating.

"Few countries in the world have as much protein as people in this country," she said. I have always thought that part of the energy and vitality of this country has been its nutritional level."

Carey said if a person analyzed a naturally grown carrot and one grown with insecticides through regular farming methods, no difference would be found.

One faction which might logically oppose vegetarianism is the beef industry. Susan Briggs, who holds a degree in nutrition and raises cattle near Seward with her husband Bob, said that "beef is a terrific product to buy."

The cost per unit of protein is low, she said.

"People like to eat it," she said. "If you're making diet and meals a pleasurable part of life, meat is important."

"It takes a lot of study and concentration on diet to get protein needs," she added. "Most vegetarians don't study enough to plan an adequate diet."

VEGETARIANISM, is nutritional, political and, for some, even spiritual, according to three Lincoln vegetarians.

Mark Vasina, co-owner of the Glass Onion restaurant, said he embraced vegetarianism "five years ago, when I lost my taste for meat."

Vasina said he thinks processing changes have made meat taste differently than it did then.

Since he became a vegetarian, Vasina said, he has slept

better and his overall health has improved. He also said he thinks his lifestyle became simpler and he became more politically aware.

He said he became more individually responsible, not dependent on corporations for his food.

"It radicalized me," he said. "Promoting meat-eating takes grain away from needy countries."

Vasina said he does not think vegetarianism is the answer to all the world's woes, but it is a step in the right direction.

Mary Hansen said that for her, vegetarianism is a moral issue. She said she has heard that 90 percent of the grain in the U.S. goes to feed animals, not a hungry world, and since she could not justify this, she became a vegetarian.

She also said she feels that meat is full of fat containing an unhealthy amount of pollution gathered from the environment.

Hansen said vegetarianism has made her feel "lots healthier," and also is less expensive than a regular diet. But, she added, "many hassles" accompanied her lifestyle change.

For one, she said, she feels she must eat meat if she is in situations where it would be inhospitable if she did not.

Deb Ronder said she bases her vegetarianism on her spiritual belief that it is wrong to kill animals. She said she thinks there is enough protein in the world without eating meat.

"I JUST don't think that animals need to be sacrificed," she said. "They're my friends."

Like the other two, Ronder said she thinks vegetarianism has made her healthier and increased her energy, stamina and patience. She said this is the reason many athletes are vegetarians.

Ronder, who has been a vegetarian for six years, said she thinks more people are becoming interested in vegetarianism. She said she subscribes to a vegetarian magazine whose circulation increases each year.

All three said they are not pure vegetarians, which means they eat eggs or some form of dairy products. However, only Hansen said she drinks milk. They all said they eat cheese, yogurt and eggs.

Also they all said they place importance on grains in the diet, balancing them with fruits and vegetables. Vasina said he eats most of his food cooked, while Ronder said she tries to eat as much as she can raw.

"When you cook, you lose a lot of nutrients," she explained.

In addition, all said they do not use white sugar or any artificial sweetener. Instead, they use natural sweeteners such as honey, molasses or maple sugar.

All said their friends are understanding about their lifestyles and that their families will prepare them vegetarian meals when they visit home.

Both Hansen and Ronder said they occasionally take vitamins to supplement their diets.

Hansen said she takes vitamin D in the winter when it is not easy to derive from the sun. Ronder said she has a regular program of vitamins because she works 45 to 50 hours a week and a balanced lunch is not always possible.

Vegetarian recipes

Jane Walgamotte, director of food service at Union College, plans vegetarian meals for the college's 600 students. Below are some of her favorite recipes.

Green Rice

1/4 cup oil
1 cup finely chopped green pepper
1/2 cup chopped onion (or chives)
1 13-ounce can evaporated milk 2 eggs, beaten
1 cup finely chopped parsley (spinach, or combination)
1 small clove garlic (or 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt)
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon G. Washington Broth
2 cups cooked rice
1 cup grated cheddar cheese
SAUTE. green pepper and onion in oil.
BEAT. eggs and milk together, and combine all ingredients, mixing well.
BAKE. in buttered casserole or timbale cups.
TEMPERATURE. 350 degrees F.
TIME. 50-60 minutes.
YIELD. 8 large servings.

Quick Pizza

3 English muffins, split (or burger buns or sourdough bread)
2 tablespoons margarine
2 cups shredded cheese
1/2 cups sliced stuffed olives
1/2 cup finely chopped onion (optional)
1 clove garlic, crushed (or one teaspoon garlic salt)
1 8-ounce can tomato sauce
Butter muffin halves. Combine remaining ingredients; spread on muffin halves. Broil in oven or electric frypan. (Note: Mushrooms or sliced vegetarian wieners may be added, if desired.) Yield: 6 small pizzas.

Asparagus and Cheese Casserole

1 cup cooked asparagus (canned or frozen)
4 eggs, well-beaten
2 cups evaporated milk
6 ounces (1 1/2 cups) grated cheddar cheese
1 cup cottage cheese
2 slices bread, cubed and toasted
1 teaspoon salt, or to taste
Cut asparagus into one-inch pieces. Combine all ingredients. Bake in buttered casserole at 350 degrees F. for 35 minutes. Yield: 8 servings.

Cheese Blintzes

1 cup sifted all purpose flour 1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon margarine, melted
3 eggs, beaten well 1 cup milk
2 cups dry cottage cheese 1 egg
1 cup sour cream 1/4 cup raisins (optional)
1/2 cup margarine, melted
2 tablespoons sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
Sift flour with salt, and combine with margarine, eggs and milk, beat smooth. Pour about 3 tablespoons of batter on hot, lightly oiled 6-inch skillet for each blintze. Tilt skillet from side to side until batter covers the bottom. Cool on one side only until edges begin to curl and look dry. Remove from skillet and place on towel to cool. Combine remaining ingredients for filling, reserving half sour cream. Place each blintze cooked side up. Spoon 3-4 tablespoons of filling onto center of each blintze. Roll up, or fold sides over filling. Brown lightly on both sides in skillet with margarine just before serving. Serve hot with sour cream or jelly.