

An apple a day may not be the key to good nutrition, but vegetarians would say it shows the right line of thinking.

Vegetarian diet sprouts in the 'Beef State'

By Michelle Carr

"One man's meat is another man's poison."

Oswald Dykes

Vegetarian. The word is enough to make Nebraska cattlemen shudder and parents roll their eyes in disbelief. However, the word vegetarian describes a number of Lincolniters whose eating habits are changing their lifestyles.

Vegetarians come in all shapes and sizes. Pure vegetarians follow a strict diet of no meat, no eggs and no dairy products. Some go as far to exclude honey because it is made by bees.

Lactovegetarians exclude meat but eat dairy products. Lacto-ovo-vegetarians allow dairy products and eggs.

Even though their diets differ, the three vegetarians interviewed stressed being a vegetarian is not enough. Most exclude sugar from their diet, stray from processed foods and foods with preservatives and refuse junk food.

One vegetarian attributed his interest in diet to ill health. Mark Vasina, co-owner of the Glass Onion restaurant, 235 N. 11 St., which specializes in foods with unprocessed grains and natural foods, said he began studying nutrition because he was often-times sick. He said he suffered from headaches, allergies and hay fever, which disappeared when he began eating natural foods and cutting down on meat.

"I'M NOT SAYING that if I eat meat occasionally I will suddenly get sick," Vasina said, adding that he did notice a considerable change.

Another vegetarian noted improved health after changing his diet. Chad Hoelsing, co-manager of Open Harvest, a food cooperative, 2637 Randolph St., said meat contains toxins which build up in the

body and add stress to the digestive system.

"The body is busy eliminating toxins from poorly processed foods, which reduces body energy," he said.

Meat contains chemical toxins from medications fed to cattle and toxins produced from protein buildup, he said.

Hoelsing has had fewer illnesses since beginning his vegetarian diet, he said.

"I used to have four or five colds in one winter. Now I have only one."

Seventh Day Adventists also follow a vegetarian diet because of health reasons, according to Lenore McEndree, assistant professor of home economics at Union College. McEndree said the Adventists at Union practice a lactovegetarian diet "mainly for health reasons and because it can be a very good diet."

MCENDREE, a registered dietitian who received a master's degree in nutrition from Indiana University, said studies have shown Seventh Day Adventist men had their first heart attack 10 years later than most men. They also experienced less intestinal cancer, she added.

One theory to explain the study's finding is that the men have reduced fat content. Eating fruits, vegetables and roughage, also lowers the incidence of heart and intestinal cancer, she said.

The notion that vegetarians lack protein is incorrect. McEndree said, adding that if basic principles are followed, a vegetarian diet has the same nutritional content as a meat diet. She recommended vegetarians eat a diet that contains all eight amino acids. To do this, one of three protein combinations should be followed, according to "Diet for a Small Planet" written by Francis Lappe.

The vegetarian can combine legumes, like dried beans or peas, with grains, grains with milk or legumes with seeds. These combinations "give good quality protein,"

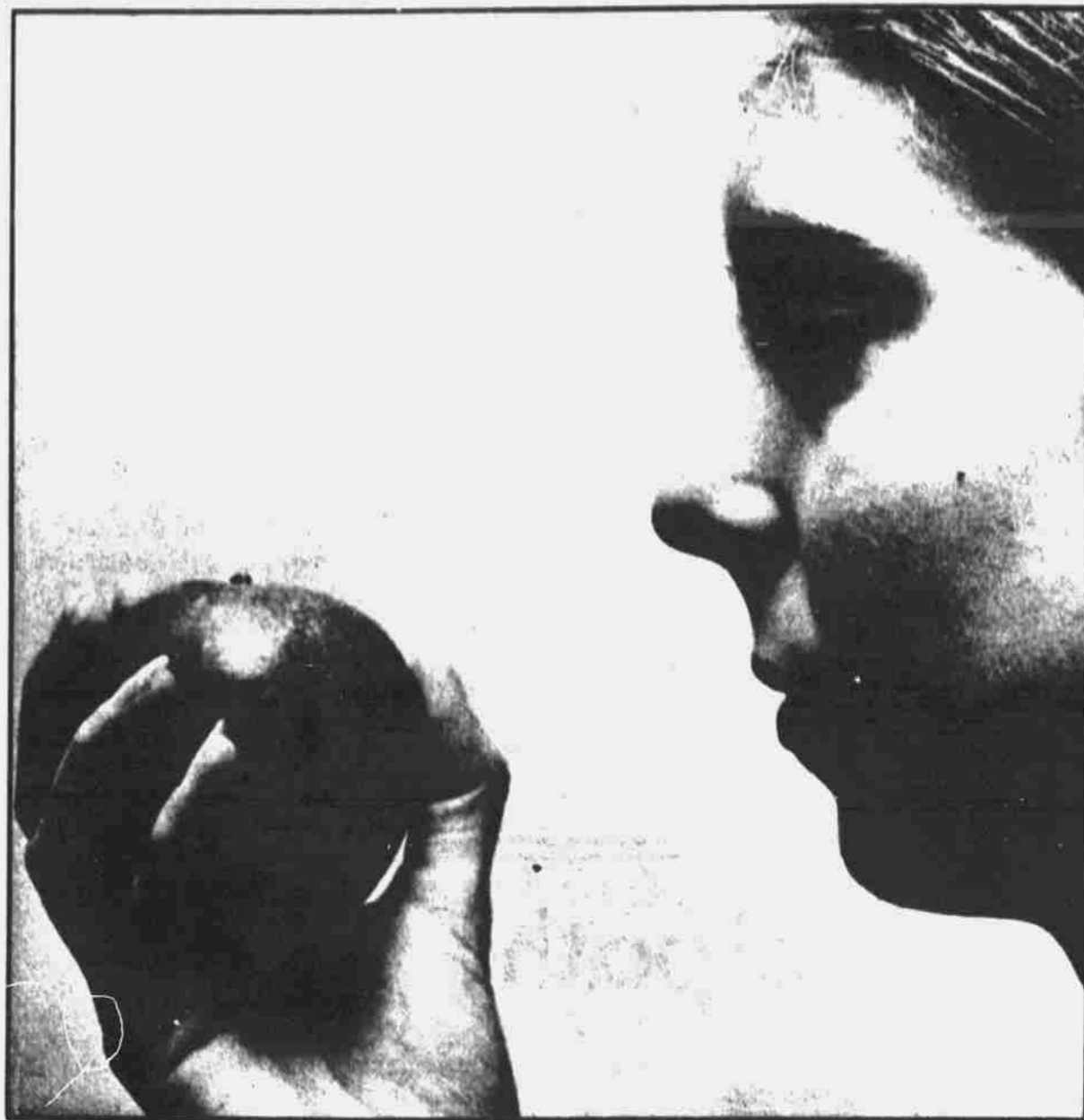


Photo by Mike Sweeney

McEndree said.

Vegetarians should also avoid "empty calorie snack items," like potato chips and candy bars, she said.

A SEVEN-YEAR vegetarian veteran said she used to measure every gram of food to be sure she was getting the right nutritional components.

"That got to be almost sickening so I quit measuring," Deb Mason said. The UNL student, said she now uses common sense to balance her diet.

Mason said she didn't enjoy meat and one day she "threw it all out." She is raising her children as vegetarians and said they don't seem to be suffering because of the absence of meat.

Her youngest daughter, 5, is repelled by turkey and sweets because they taste foreign to her, Mason said.

Changing her diet meant changing her kitchen so she "gave the junk food to the neighbors."

Cutting out meat didn't cut the food bill, Mason noted. The cost of natural foods and fresh produce is high, but it was worth it, she said.

Mason said being a good cook and knowing how to use natural foods helps her family stick with the diet. Her favorite

dish is pizza made with several cheeses and plenty of vegetables. She also makes a chocolate cake without milk and with natural ingredients.

THE ONLY PROBLEM with her diet is her parents who are unable to understand her change.

"They don't approve because they believe in the meat and potatoes diet," she said.

The others also experienced negative reactions from their families.

Hoelsing, whose father raises cattle, said his family doesn't agree with his food philosophy. Vasina said his family tried vegetarian diets, but went back to the traditional meals because they received no social support from their friends.

Vegetarians receive little social support because the American diet is based on excesses, including fats and proteins. Big business, however, is moving toward natural foods because they realize the natural diet is not a trend.

The three agreed that more people are switching to vegetarian and natural foods diets. The attitudes toward vegetarians are slowly changing, but according to Mason, "There still are people who ask me if all I eat is sprouts or soybeans."



Photo by Mark Billingsley

Vegetarians believe in the back to basics philosophy which includes whole grain products.