



## The Third-Largest Vegetarian Cohort Database

Tzu Chi Discovers That Going Vegetarian Can Prevent Chronic Diseases

Article and pictures by Hsieh Ming-Fang

Going vegetarian lowers the risk of diabetes by fifty percent as well as the risk of fatty liver disease and gallstones! The Tzu Chi Medical Foundation has established a vegetarianism database for research tracking on residents has been going on for at least ten years. Lin Ming-Nan, Vice Supt. of the Dalin Tzu Chi Hospital and the main coordinator of this project, pointed out that vegetarians spend less money on health care compared to the general population of meat eaters because of the health benefits that come with becoming a vegetarian.



In 2005, Vice Supt. Lin Ming-Nan and CEO of Tzu Chi Medical Foundation Dr. Lin Chin-Lon asked the Ministry of Health and Welfare to start a research project about healthy diets and healthy bodies. This ultimately evolved into the third largest vegetarianism database, an important source of information available for research internationally. In 2017, CEO Lin brought his team to the seventh International Congress on Vegetarian Nutrition, where 750 representatives from thirty-six countries expressed their ideas on vegetarianism. The Tzu Chi Medical Team proposed that vegetarianism could lower the probability of a stroke and several other ideas as well.

According to Vice Supt. Lin, this research project involves physical checkups of 6,008 people with an average age of 53. They measured each person's height, weight, body fat percentage, and bone density. They then did a colonoscopy, esophagogastroduodenoscopy, ultrasound, blood tests, and other procedures. The faculty also recorded the levels of education, diet, family history and more. The assistants with knowledge about nutrition helped the clients fill out a "Food Frequency" questionnaire, with questions on the frequency of eating certain foods, the frequency of vegetarian meals, etc.

Lin points out that the database contains profiles with similar traits, such as not smoking and having normal circadian rhythms that only differ in diet. They used the differences in diet





to find the effect of vegetarianism on one's health.

“After our clients came back three years later we asked them about how their eating habits changed. Our study shows that the risk of diabetes in those who continued to follow a meat-based diet was about thirty percent higher than those who converted to vegetarianism or stayed vegetarian. Risks of fatty liver, gallstones, and other diseases were also lower, which lowered insurance costs as well,” Lin says.

Lin also mentions that the Tzu Chi database is the third-largest vegetarianism database, after the Adventist Health Study of the United States and EPIC-Oxford of Europe. More and more people affirm that going vegetarian is a big win in terms of their health and the environment's health. The Tzu Chi medical team will proceed to investigate the impact of vegetarianism on arthritis, cardiovascular diseases, and more, not only to prevent disease but also to advocate how changing one's diet can increase one's lifespan and save the earth at the same time.

