

Protect Your Health by Embracing Vegetarianism

By Hsieh Ming-Feng

Plant-based diets have been enjoying a rising popularity due to their contribution to environmental protection. Dr. Yeh Chang-Ming, Director of the Department of Occupational Medicine at Dalin Tzu

Chi Hospital, has been a vegetarian for almost 20 years, which has helped him maintain his LDL (low-density lipoprotein) at a constant level below 70, which is the threshold value for cardiovascular disease.



During outpatient hours, he always shares his experiences with the health promoting effects of plant-based diets. Some diabetes patients were able to reduce their dosage or even stop taking diabetes drugs altogether after changing their diets.

Dr. Yeh is a graduate of the third class of the School of Medicine, Tzu Chi University. Due to his engagement in Buddhism student clubs during his college years, he often ate vegetarian meals served by the college cafeteria. Due to the convenient location of this cafeteria, he ate meat dishes much less frequently. He first noticed the impact of vegetarian and meat diets on the human body through his participation in a 10 km road running event in his freshman and sophomore year. He successfully completed the course in his freshman year due to a mainly vegetarian diet combined with regular exercise. However, in his sophomore year he barely reached the prescribed target of completing the course within 1.5 hours due to his meat-based diet and lack of exercise.

Starting in his senior year, Dr. Yeh ate vegetarian meals at college exclusively, but he still ate meat dishes at home since he felt uncomfortable breaking the news to his parents. One day, while eating a chicken drumstick at home, he suddenly bit on a piece

with a weird texture, which made him wonder whether animals can get cancer just like humans. What happens to humans if they eat cancerous animals? Maybe they will just digest them? But he still had a creepy feeling and therefore decided to switch to vegetarianism and explain his decision to his parents.

After becoming a vegetarian, he realized that his physical and mental endurance improved considerably. He recalls that he was prone to tantrums as a child. After adopting a vegetarian diet, he has become much more mellow. He also realized that he is less susceptible to catching the common cold and tends to get over colds much faster with noticeable improvements in only one or two days. Even during his time as a resident doctor, he was able to maintain his physical strength despite the fact that he often had to stay up late or go sleepless for up to 32 hours while on duty.

After he was promoted to attending physician, he was inspired by Lin Chin-Lon, M.D., F.A.C.C., CEO of Buddhist Tzu Chi Medical Foundation and Practicing Cardiologist to promote vegetarianism to his patients during outpatient hours. He encourages them to increase their vegetable and fruit intake, decrease their animal protein and fat intake. Dr. Yeh tells the story

of one of his patients who is around 60 and has mild diabetes. However, due to a large number of business luncheons and dinners within a period of one to two years, he was unable to control his diet and blood sugar level and was therefore forced to take insulin injections. Since existing studies indicate that vegetarian diets are beneficial for diabetes patients, Dr. Yeh recommended that he become a vegetarian. After the patient changed his diet, his blood sugar level (Glycated Hemoglobin HbA1C) dropped successively to a level slightly above 6. The maximum dosage of three different medications was therefore gradually decreased to half a pill of compound medicine taken in the morning and evening.

Another young patient had a critical HbA1c value between 11 to 12. Dr. Yeh therefore recommended that he should eat more vegetables and less animal-based foods. Due to his lighter diet coupled with an exercise regimen, his dosage could be steadily increased and his diabetes improved dramatically to a point where he no longer needed medication.

Dr. Yeh points out that he has been able to maintain his LDL level at a normal value between 60 to slightly

above 70, which is below the threshold value of 70 for cardiovascular disease, over many years. The 2019 version of Canada's Food Guide provides the following daily dietary guidelines for Canadian citizens: 50% fruit and vegetables, 25% whole grains, and 25% protein (which should mainly be plant-based). There is scientific evidence that fruit and vegetable rich diets have significant health benefits.

