

VEGGIE POWER

Written by: Wan-Lin Wu





As climate changes and the extinction of large number of species have led to the increasing awareness, the resulting impact on human health is closely related to our luxurious lifestyles and extravagant food consumption.

Chinese character [Su 素] as in the words of [Su Shi 素食] (vegetarian food) has the etymological meaning of “undyed silk”, which implies unvarnished purity. [Su Shi] means simple, pure plant-based diet without any animal killing or over-processed food. It also implies a diet that is toxic free, environment-friendly, and loving-yourself.

A growing number of nutrition and science studies show findings contradictory to our common belief that human beings should consume food from sources such as egg, fish and meat in their daily diet; instead, the report have shown that the flat teeth and long intestine of human body is more like the characteristics of herbivorous animals. Plant based diet not only is much easier for human body to absorb, but is also significantly helpful to mitigate risks of all sorts of chronic diseases and deterioration of climate environment.

Lean, clean and nutritiously balanced vegetarian diet is the best way to savor the original flavor of food and even more so, it provides a healthier and happier life with delicious veggie power.



More than a decade ago, upon hearing the words “vegetarian diet”, most people would simply relate that directly to some religious practice. However, due to recent ecological environment changes, evolvement of social morality and culture, and the advancement of health knowledge, - “vegan and vegetarian diet” are now realized as simple yet tremendously beneficial dietary styles. As the manifolds of meaning and in-depth knowledge of plant-based diet are revealed and understood by people, many now start to choose such diet for the sake of environment protection, for health, for animals, or even for spiritual purification.

Vegetarian Diet Becoming Popular for Benefiting Environment and Personal Health

As evidenced in the increasing number of vegetarian restaurants and special vegetarian items appearing on the menu of regular restaurants, people are now realizing the benefits of vegetarian diet. Many national and international celebrities have also publicly promoted the benefits of plant-based diet which serves as a good source of vegetarian diet information for the younger people. Many medical institutions such as Tzu Chi and Tai An hospitals are both supplying vegetarian-only hospital meals.


Some special interest groups have been promoting “Meatless Monday” on school campuses throughout Taiwan since 2009. The “20th International Conference on Health Promoting Hospitals and Health Services” held in Taiwan has also made vegetarian diet as one of the key point emphasized in the conference session of Health Promotion and Environment.

According to the “2008 Almanac of Food Consumption Survey in Taiwan”, occasional and committed vegetarians have accounted for 2% of the population, which includes pure vegans, lacto-ovo-vegetarians, five-spice-free vegetarians, veggie-picking vegetarians, and flexitarians. Starting July 1, 2009, the new regulation of food-product-package-labeling takes effect, all vegetarian products sold in the markets must be clearly labeled with either one of the 5 vegetarian types: “pure vegans”, “ovo-vegetarians”, “lacto-vegetarian”, “lacto-ovo-vegetarian” or “five-spice-free vegetarian”. This shows that consumers’ right and health safety of vegetarian population is now highly regarded.

Return to Nature Reduce Carbon Footprint

As the western saying goes, “You are what you eat.” Many biologists have provided evidences that human beings



 Hualien County Junior High and Elementary Schools promote vegetarian school lunch every Wednesday to encourage vegan diet for the school kids and support for vegetarian food preparation by the suppliers. Department of Education invites Tzu Chi volunteers to speak at the School Meals Program panel discussion, demonstrating how to prepare colorfully delicious healthy vegetarian meals with enticing aroma.

are different from meat-eating animals which have sharp claws and teeth and short length of intestines. Instead, we have flatten, broad molar teeth, jaws capable of side-to-side motion, and alkaline saliva (Carbohydrate digesting enzymes) and long intestines, which are closer to the herbivore animals optimized for grain food, thus human-being is biologically designed for eating plants.

In the view of western scholars, “animal welfare”, “environment protection” and “health” are the three main reasons to go vegetarian. Way

back in the era of ancient Greece, the famous philosopher and mathematician Pythagoras had been known to support vegetarian diet, so were Plato and Aristotle found to be vegetarians. The world hunger problem was caused by unequal distribution and waste of food rather than shortage of food. According to a 2006 report by United Nation Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), out of the global annual production of 36 billion tons of CO₂-equivalent greenhouse gases, meat production contributed around 14% to 22% of its total volume.

Global warming impact of greenhouse gases by beef production is about 13 times that of poultry production; and 57 times more than potato production. By eating one vegetarian meal per day, each of us could help reduce about 0.78 kg of CO₂ emission. One year of vegetarian diet would be equivalent to planting of 82 trees while allowing soil to yield more nutritious food at the same time.

The Right Choice

The main motivation of a vegetarian diet for the majority of people is one concerning “health”, which is so self-serving rather than kindness to animals or environment protection. Pseudo-vegetarians and flexitarians also share the same key motivation. Recently, the number of colorectal cancer patients is increasing year after year almost surpassing the number of liver cancer as the top cancer population. Doctors have pointed out that “the consumption of grilled red meat increases the risk of colon cancer, breast carcinoma, lung carcinoma and prostate cancer.” As a matter of fact, many cancers are possibly related to meat eating diet, such as lung cancer, stomach cancer, mouth cancer, larynx cancer, esophageal cancer, and bladder cancer.

Newer Concept on Healthier Protein Source

The current medical evidence have shown that plant-based proteins such as those found within bean family products are better proteins easier for human body to digest and absorb, which is contrary to the belief in the past that meat is the main source for protein. In the draft version of “Daily Dietary Guideline” published on June 2, 2009 by the Nutrition Society of Taiwan has adapted the change to recommend the protein intake to come from bean family products as the primary source. In the detailed document of the dietary guideline, it also states that “Daily nutritious diet should be based on non-processed foods originating mainly from plants.”

Well known nutrition scientist Dr. T. Colin Campbell whose work helped former president Bill Clinton regaining his health, examined the relationship between dietary behaviors and death rates in regions of China and Taiwan. After thorough study of these findings, he concluded that “low-fat, whole food, plant-based diet” is the best way to improve human health. According to him, animal protein was mistakenly considered as a better protein source in the past for a very long time, this idea has misled

us for decades to nearly a hundred year... hardly any theory has done more damage to us than this misconception.” Ever since the year 2000, USDA has allowed school lunch to use tofu and soy yogurt completely as meat alternatives. Some medical studies have found that excessive consumption of animal protein could over-burden our body causing kidney stones, diabetes, kidney disease and high blood pressure. Excess intake of protein could cause calcium loss in bones leading to osteoporosis.

Now fully on vegan diet, the former American president, Bill Clinton, is an

excellent example of adopting plant-based diet for better health. He has survived a severe heart attack in 2004 and has since then cut back on calories and cholesterol intake, except forsaking foods such as hamburgers. In 2010, he again experienced another cardiac event and started to worry that he won't be able to live long enough to see his grandchildren. He turned to Dr. Campbell's recommendations for help and adopted dairy free plant-based diet after his heart surgery. He lost weight of about 10 kg claiming that a vegan diet saved his life while celebrating his 66th birthday in 2012.




 Dr. Yi-Kung Lee, ER Department Director of Dailin Tzu Chi Hospital, at the event of “Love Heals the World” in Gu Keng Township, Yunlin County, sharing his experience of vegetarian diet which successfully made him fitter and slimmer. 

Vegetables and Fruits Are Lifesaving Foods

Cholesterol is only found in meats and doesn't exist in plant-based food. Test results found that the amount of heavy-metal and residual chemicals in meats is dozens of times higher than the level in plant-based foods. Besides that, its containment of environmental hormones and toxics along with exposure to foot-and-mouth disease,

avian-flu and mad-cow disease, are also motivations to choose vegetarian diets for health conscious people today. Other national and international researches have also shown that plant-based diet helps reduce risks of many diseases including cardiovascular disease, cancer, stroke, and can even mitigate allergy effects. This is because vegetables and fruits contain rich level of vitamins, minerals and trace elements which are excellent source of anti-oxidants for body detoxification, and immunity boosting for



 The good deeds came as a result of a vegan diet. Anchor Fastener Industrial Co., Ltd in Kaohsiung joins the movement of “80% full on Vegetarian meal, 20% spared for the needy,” which helps save much money for the company. In return, President Thompson T. H. Chang donated 1,000 artificial tooth implants to Tzu Chi Medical Mission to help disadvantaged and people in poverty. The donation is received by Dr. Ruey-Ho Kao (3rd from the left), superintendent of Hualien Tzu Chi hospital, and Dr. Ming-Jie Huang (2nd from left, Director of Dental department, Hualien TC hospital).

protection. Therefore, doctors would still recommend eating more vegetables and fruits to improve our health even though most people are not completely giving up meat just yet.

It is evident that there're plenty of benefits of health for us to be on vegetarian diets, and this has led many health conscious medical professionals to become vegetarians. Director of Tzu Chi hospital in Hualien Dental Service Department, Dr. Ming-Jie Huang, has experienced spinal disc herniation in his 30s, requiring long-term rehabilitation. After switching to a vegetarian diet, his muscle strength improved and no longer need rehabilitation therapy. His feeble and sickly wife has also recovered from a stomach disorder without further medication years after converting to a vegetarian diet. Dr. Yi-Ying Huang of Tai chung Tzu Chi hospital was diagnosed with very high level of anti-nuclear antibodies (ANA) in serological tests and considered to be in high-risk group of developing lupus erythematosus, which disqualified her from getting medical insurance. She has seen the amazing effect of plant-based diet in herself - 20 years after she started on vegetarian diet, her ANA level has dropped year after year and with a better body strength. Dalin Tzu Chi hospital ER director Dr. Yi-Kung Lee and Dr. Yu-Jie Su, director of Cancer Medical Center,

were both weighting over 100 kg and had gone through a "transformation" after converting to a vegetarian diet. Dr. Lee sheds 40 kg and now sleeps better, becomes mild-tempered and more energetic. Previously, Dr. Su had been struggling with obesity-induced hypertension; then after proper exercises and a vegetarian diet, he lost 18 kg and became much healthier.

Healthy Lifestyle Sustains Harmony

With all the evidences showing that vegetarian diets have absolute positive benefits over our environment, health and spirituality, it still takes quite a number of outstanding vegetarian athletics to break the myths of meat eating equals to muscle building. Even so, the concept of vegetarian diet is still being questioned and challenged in many writings and debates. Indeed, vegetarian diet is not meant to be cure-all. And the best way to maintain your health will require not only a proper diet but also sufficient exercise and a loving, compassionate and radiant heart. The true spirit of vegetarianism is to promote an ever-evolving universe and advancing civilization, keeping our mind, body and environment in harmony with a lifestyle of health and sustainability.