

VEGGIE LOVE

By Adrienne Harebottle



Contrary to popular belief, vegetarianism offers a very healthy, tasteful and ethical alternative to meat

From having more energy and improved concentration, to a radiant glow and stronger immune system, the benefits of eating a vegetarian diet are encouraging more people to stop eating meat. Studies on the link between consuming meat and heart disease and cancer have helped to further raise awareness of the positive effects this animal-friendly lifestyle has on the body.

Melissa List has been vegetarian for the last decade and four years ago she stopped eating all animal products, such as eggs and dairy, to become vegan. Since then, she has felt healthier and benefited from a stronger immune system. "I know that it [being vegetarian and vegan] benefits your health because I've seen it for myself. I sleep better, I have increased energy, light periods, improved clarity and focus, clearer skin, I'm sick far less often, my eyesight is better, and the list goes on," says the freelance writer.

As meat is rich in iron, a common perception associated with vegetarianism is anaemia, or low iron levels. But, even if you ate steak all day long, your body wouldn't be able to absorb the iron if you were lacking vitamin C. This illustrates the importance of eating a well balanced diet. The best sources of vitamin C, and other essential vitamins for your body to function properly, are all found in fruits and vegetables. This means



all the nutrients needed by our bodies can be obtained through a meat-free lifestyle.

According to nutritionists, if you follow a balanced diet of fruit, nuts, seeds and vegetables, there is no need to eat meat, as the vitamins and nutrients it contains, such as protein and iron, will be absorbed from other sources.

Sunflower seeds and whole wheat are very rich in protein and iron among other nutrients, says Ahmed Al Hasan, Nutrition Development Manager at Organic Foods and Café. "Known as a top superfood, amaranth surpasses whole wheat in protein, iron, zinc, copper and nearly all nutrients. It is also the one grain with the highest amount of folic acid," he says.

Another incredible grain is quinoa. "Now recognised as a supercrop by the United Nations and a supergrain by nutritionists, quinoa is finally getting the attention it deserves. Not only is this superfood high in vitamin B, iron, zinc, potassium, calcium and vitamin E, but it has also been dubbed as the superior

grain as it is a complete protein and contains all eight of the essential amino acids," he says.

LINGERING MISCONCEPTIONS

Vegetarianism is widely accepted as a healthy way of life in countries where it is embraced for spiritual and ethical reasons. But this appreciation of not eating meat is lacking in the Western world, says Alison Andrews, author of *Simple Raw Food Recipes and Raw Food and Weight Loss Tips*. Despite all the up-to-date information on the benefits of vegetarianism, several misconceptions remain.

"Many people associate vegetarianism or veganism with being weak, undernourished, unhealthy and even weird," says Andrews, adding that her immune system is stronger since eating raw fruit and vegetables as a vegan. "Since I became vegan [and started following a] high raw diet I never get sick at all," she says. "I used to get a common cold or flu a few times a year but now it just

never happens. Everyone else can be dropping like flies and I am in perfect health."

Non-meat eaters also believe vegetarians don't enjoy tasty food, adds Andrews, who says the opposite is true. "There are people out there who think that vegetarians or vegans just don't like food very much, so they can just present us with a side plate of wilted salad vegetables and we'll be happy. I actually became even more of a foodie after becoming vegan. There is a whole world of food out there that non-veg people tend to miss out on — they get stuck in the mindset of 'well, it's either chicken, beef or fish.' They just recycle the same recipes over and over."

EXPLOITATION AND HORMONES

While health was an important factor, it was also for ethical reasons that Andrews gave up animal products. "I stopped eating meat after discovering the reality of factory farming. I later began to move towards a vegan diet ... [but] ate small amounts of animal products from time to time. Then I [decided] that I didn't want to have anything to do with animal exploitation any longer."

Hormones and antibiotics are being fed to animals at an increasing rate and these are making their way into dairy products and are most certainly present in meat, says Al Hasan. "[If you do choose to eat meat,] do so wisely," he says. "Meat should be organic to ensure that it is free from hormones and antibiotics, which affect our immunity and cause inflammation."

How you prepare your food is very important, too. "Eat your vegetables raw, since cooking them depletes their potassium, magnesium, calcium and other nutrients," says Al Hasan.

"While humans can survive on many different types of diets, surviving and thriving are two very different things. The [meat-free] raw food diet is for those who want to thrive, not just survive," explains Andrews. **B+**



Vegan meal ideas

A great way to make baked potatoes interesting, says Alison Andrews, is to serve them with a flavourful sauce. "Steam or boil some broccoli and then season with herbs and spices. Add the cooked vegetable in a blender with some coconut cream and blend into a thick sauce. Serve this on the baked potato — it's simply delicious." If you're not a fan of broccoli, use mushrooms. "Coconut cream is great for making amazing vegan soups," says Andrews. "Just cook the vegetables in spices and blend with coconut cream. You can make any kind of soup: broccoli, pea or potato. For butternut soup bake the butternut with some nutmeg in the oven. Then blend it with coconut cream and serve as a delicious soup starter." "You can also make great Thai-style curries using all sorts of vegetables, such as peppers, cauliflower, tomatoes, onion, garlic, chilli and aubergines," says Andrews. "Cook the vegetables in coconut cream and curry. Serve with rice and a salad." Get creative with your salads, advises Andrews. "Make your salads amazing by adding finely chopped raw vegetables such as peppers, snap peas, tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, beetroot, spinach, lettuce and then add avocado, sun-dried tomatoes, and fresh herbs." For more vegan recipes, including finger-licking desserts, visit www.loving-it-raw.com.