

How to Save the World Without Steak

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Contributor

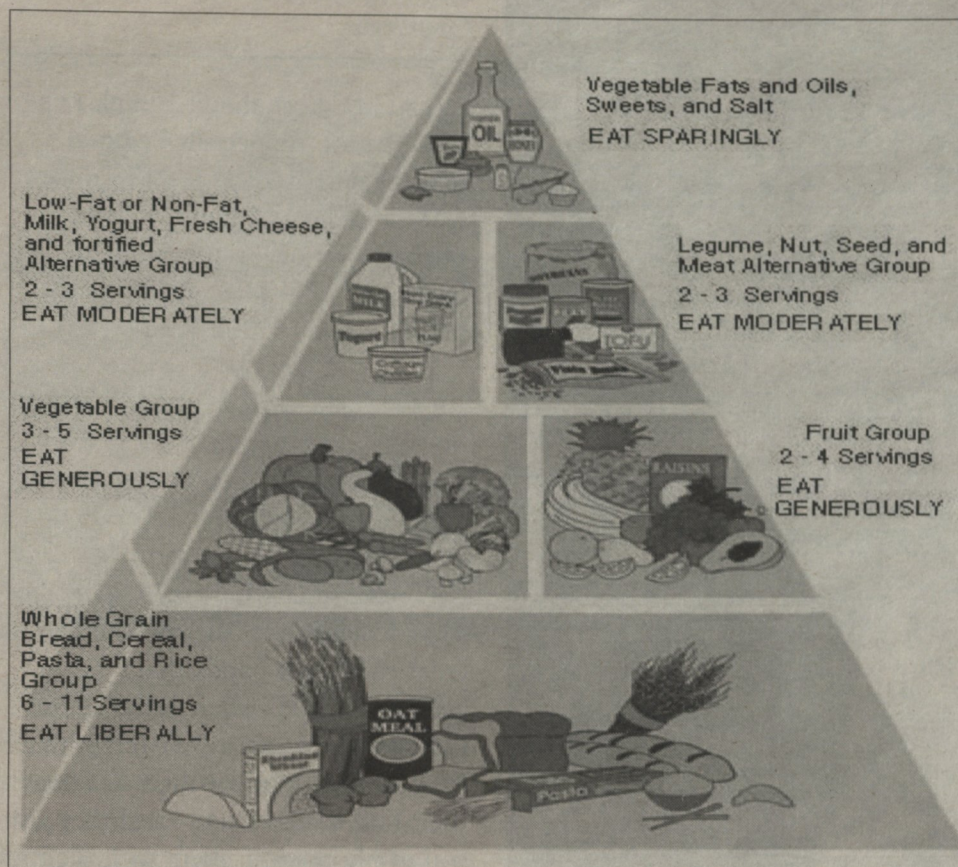
"Nothing will benefit human health and increase the chances for survival of life on Earth as much as the evolution to a vegetarian diet." -Albert Einstein

Could this be true? Could eliminating meat from one's diet really help the health and longevity of humanity? Present this question to others, and you will often hear a prompt "no!" However, it is quite possible that these people have not examined the reasons behind their firm refusal of vegetarianism. If people want to reject a vegetarian lifestyle that is fine, but let's look into it a bit first.

I want to make it clear that this article is not intended to condemn anyone. Although I am a vegetarian, most of the closest people in my life eat meat and I love them no less for it. I respect their right to choose, and would not force my views upon them. I appreciate the same respect from them, although I do have a friend who chases me with bits of his fried chicken.

If we are trying to understand vegetarianism, the first things that should be looked at are the reasons behind the adoption of a vegetarian diet. You may have seen people on television claiming that a fish being hit on a rock, or a favorite cow being turned into diner, caused them to give up meat. These "gag-reflex" vegetarians are not as common as one might think. Many vegetarians argue that their diet is based on a concern for animal welfare, environmental preservation, world hunger, the economy (to be discussed in part II), and their health. These issues will each be explained briefly.

A concern for the non-suffering of animals is stereotypically thought of as the sole reason for adopting a vegetarian diet. It is no secret that farm animals are often raised in very unpleasant conditions. In some of the smaller-scale farms the conditions are not especially bad, but the large-scale farms are known for very unethical treatment of their animals. In these farms, an exceedingly large number of animals are raised, usually indoors, in a very limited space. It is regular practice for some of these farms to do such things as de-beaking chicks, use enhancing drugs on animals, beating the animals, and the list goes on. The slaughtering process is often horrendous, and is too disturbing to further discuss. Even those who reject shocking video footage by aggressive organizations like PETA, must admit that it is naive to think that animals in these factory-



The key to a well-balanced meal: eating healthy!

farms have any quality of life. For many vegetarians it is felt that animals should not be subject to such cruelty. We can all pick up a package of pork chops at the store, but do we really understand that we are supporting a process of cruelty and pain? One might then suggest that one buys meat that is raised in more ethical ways, but suffering and pain for the animals are still inevitable. Farm animals have highly developed nervous systems, and are capable of feeling great pain, both physical and emotional. Many vegetarians consider this their number one reason for avoiding meat.

Another major issue of concerns to many vegetarians is the environment. Environmental concern is growing, and people are finally acknowledging that our planet is in trouble. Meat production harms the environment as it has been found to significantly cause desertification (loss of topsoil, and the drying-out of land, making it unsustainable). Also, there are massive deforestation practices taking place to make way for more grazing livestock. What is most unfortunate is that the tropical rain forests are included in this deforestation process, in a big way. At the current rate we will one day be chewing our steaks between gasps. In

addition, this deforestation process is causing the extinction of various types of endangered species. The amount of water needed to raise livestock is astonishingly greater than the amount of water needed to raise an equivalent weight of crops. Keep in mind too, that crops need to be grown specifically to feed most livestock, which depletes our planet of its water even more. And if you still think we have an unlimited source of fresh water, I would suggest doing some research on that topic (Environment Canada has some helpful information). When we support the meat industry, we are also contributing to global warming. In a publishing of *Physics World*, it is calculated that about 21% of human-caused Carbon Dioxide emissions are caused by our meat-eating ways. Animal waste disposal is another problem, which often results in nasty pollution, especially for rivers, and other bodies of water. The crap has to go somewhere, and there is way too much of it to bag it all up and sell it as fertilizer. There are some other environmental implications of meat consumption, but I will move on. The point is that even if you don't buy the moral argument, even if you swerve to hit raccoons in your car, you are still part of this

world, and eating meat certainly isn't helping our planet.

Another big issue which leads many to become vegetarian is world hunger. Meat consumption causes some major problems for the starving people living in third world countries. As already mentioned, raising livestock causes abundant land to become unsustainable makes poor use of fresh water resources. Fertile land and fresh water are absolutely essential for those who struggle to find their next meal. Our great demand for meat has caused the impoverished third world farmers to switch from efficient crop production to the raising of livestock, as it is temporarily more profitable for them to do so. Worse than this, these farmers are sometimes driven off their own land to make way for the expansion of the meat industry. When this occurs, it leaves the people of these countries without the means to produce an adequate supply of food.

After being presented with all of these reasons for vegetarianism, one might think "well sure I would be helping all those causes but I can't sacrifice my own health in the process, vegetarian diets are unhealthy." This is usually the crux of the anti-vegetarian position, and it could not be more inaccurate.

There has been a great deal of research which compares the health of vegetarians and non-vegetarians, and the following is a list of some of the most startling findings. Vegetarians suffer significantly less from: heart disease, diabetes, obesity, hypertension, osteoporosis, kidney stones, gall stones, bowel problems, alcoholism, dental caries, Diverticulosis (a colon disease) and cancer. Also vegetarians consume less: pesticides, nitrates (major carcinogens found mostly in preservatives), mutagens (cell mutating carcinogens from meat preparation methods), saturated fats, cholesterol, and food poisons. Vegetarian diets have been found to be high in fiber, vitamins and minerals, phytochemicals (evidence suggest these may be cancer preventatives), carotenoids (evidence strongly indicates that these are very important to cancer prevention). Here is the biggest kicker; there is nutritionally nothing that cannot be acquired through a vegetarian diet, which can be acquired through a meat-including diet. Also it is completely possible for anyone to adopt a healthy and balanced diet without any meat. Although the findings I have just listed are based on a great deal of research, I strongly encourage anyone who reads this to review the research on vegetarian diets for themselves. The evidence is there; please do not just take my word for it!

Janice McKendrick
Contributor

The 2nd Annual UPEI Blood/Plasma Donor Challenge between students and faculty and support staff is set to begin!

On Wednesday, Sept. 20 the 2nd Annual UPEI Blood/Plasma Donor Challenge between UPEI students and faculty and support staff kicked-off with an event at the Student Union building with hot-dogs, refreshments and a "What's Your Type?" event. Canadian Blood Services will have the "What's Your Type?" event where people are encouraged to come out and find out what blood type they are,

and answer any questions about becoming a blood donor.

Last year UPEI students pulled ahead of the faculty and support staff, and took home the title, but everyone agreed that the real winners are the hospital patients in need of the donated blood products.

"The UPEI Student Union has committed itself to this Canadian Blood Services Campaign both because it is a worthwhile community effort, and because as a collective, our student body has the power to make an incredible difference," said Ryan Gallant, Student Union President.

Currently more than 4,000 Islanders donate blood, but there is always room for more donors in the clinics.

"The hope for us is to see more youth learning about the need for blood donation, and to see them in the clinic donating blood," said Peter MacDonald, Regional Director of Canadian Blood Services Atlantic. "Challenges often bring out a competitive drive among people, which is a great way to introduce them to the process, but ultimately we like to see these first time donors coming in on a regular basis."

The goal this year is 400 donations from all the groups. All students, faculty and support staff are encouraged to stop by Canadian Blood Services at 85 Fitzroy Street in Charlottetown to make their donation. When a member of these groups visits the clinic, they will be asked to mark their name

on the appropriate sign-in sheet which will be used to count the donations made.

"We are delighted to be taking part in the 2nd Annual UPEI Blood/Plasma Donor Challenge, and to be supporting this important cause" said UPEI President Wade MacLachlan. "We had an impressive number of donations from students, faculty and staff in 2005, and aim to do even better this year."

To book an appointment or for more information call 1-888-2-DONATE to speak with a Canadian Blood Services representative. Additional information on Canadian Blood Services and blood donation can also be found at www.blood.ca.