

## REASONS WHY PEOPLE TURN TO VEGETARIAN DIET

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**Abstract:** The study is trying to identify the reasons why people turn to vegetarian diet. In order to research this topic, it is done an international literature review on the topic of vegetarianism, considering both pros and cons attitudes and beliefs. Even there are lot of pro vegetarian diet, however, there are studies showing that strict vegetarianism implies health risks and economical inefficiency.

The research indicates that vegetarians have varied motivations including health, ethical, economic, environmental, religious, cultural and social concerns. This conclusion has implication for educating consumers to eat healthier, and for food producers and sellers to adapt their strategies to the new tendencies in food consumption.

**Key words:** vegetarian diet, food producers, health, alimentation

### Introduction

This review aims to research the reasons why people choose a vegetarian or a semi-vegetarian diet. It focuses on pros and cons vegetarian diet, reasons and objection to the claim that people tend to eat more vegetarian food. In answering this research question, it is done an international literature review on the topic of people attitudes and believes towards vegetarian diet.

The present study is useful for both food producers and sellers that might develop their businesses correspondingly to the tendencies, attitudes and beliefs identified. Also, the study is useful for educating consumers to eat healthier food.

Considering the definition from Wikipedia, “vegetarianism is the practice of not consuming the flesh of any animal with or without also eschewing other animal derivatives, such as dairy products or eggs”. Two other terms are also used: reduced meat eaters that are people who classify themselves as reducing their overall meat

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consumption, and semi-vegetarianism defined as a self-classification amongst people who claim to have eating habits which focus on vegetarian food, but they eat some kind of meat on an occasional basis. Red meats are usually excluded.

### **Pros and cons vegetarian diet**

People tend to eat more vegetarian food, and the reasons are very different. There are 800 millions of vegetarians worldwide, of which one million in Romania (Onciu, Camelia, 2007). Vegetarians have varied motivations including health, ethical, economic, environmental, religious, cultural, and social concerns.

The first reason, and maybe the strongest one<sup>1</sup>, is health problems. Numerous research papers show that vegetarian diet is healthier. Statistics show that cancer and diabetic disease are less frequent among vegetarian people. In addition, people eating meat each day suffer, in a larger share, of hypertension, digestion and heart diseases, compared to those who have a semi-vegetarian diet (Formula AS Journal, 2007). But, in reality, the most important factor influencing susceptibility to coronary disease is age. The older one is the greater the risk (Fraser, 1994). Coming back to health problems determined by eating meat, this happens because it contains elements harmful for human health, such as cholesterol and saturated fats, hormones, antibiotics, pathogens and pesticide residues. Some people even feel better when giving up eating meat, because they have a slow metabolic rate and they don't produce enough hydrochloric acid (Brassil, Martha).

At the other extreme it is widely held that strict vegetarianism can introduce health risks. Children, pregnant women and old people are exposed to the risk of anemia, deficiency in growing up, nervous disorders. This is because animal proteins are indispensable for human body, meat has vitamin B12, and vegetables and fruits have less amino acid.

The second reason why people turn to vegetarian diet is concern about animals and animal welfare (Beardsworth and Keil, 1991). Some decide to follow it on moral grounds as they feel bad about killing animals. The sight, smell and sound of slaughter houses and the slaughter itself is unpleasant, even when the animals have been transported to the slaughter houses in humane conditions. In addition, an increasing proportion of animals are reared in battery conditions or in factory farms, which are thought to be cruel (Hillman). Thus, being vegetarian helped to express their philosophy of non-violence or no-injury to animals.

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<sup>1</sup> Previous studies show that 35% of people turn to vegetarian diet because of health reasons (Dwyer *et al*, 1974)

The third reason has economical connotations. Vegetarian food is cheaper. Thus, poorer households abstain from certain meats because of their costs. Although vegetarian eating should theoretically be cheaper than non-vegetarian eating, because it cuts out one of the most expensive items in a meal, vegetarian substitute foods are relatively expensive. For example, vegetarian sausages are 1.82 times the price. Vegetarian cheese on the other hand is either 15% cheaper or 25% dearer, depending on cheese type.

Even the vegetarian food is cheaper, animal farming seems to be an efficient use of land, because there are utilized the areas not used as arable land. It does support grass or other plant life which human cannot utilize it directly. Thus, it is needed a system which converts that grass into a form of food that people can eat. So, much of the land discounted for arable use can be, and is, used for the raising of food animals. In many areas where animals are farmed, they are the only things which can be farmed. In these areas, therefore, animal farming is the most efficient use of the land. In addition, most of the world's surface is not covered by land, but by the oceans and seas. At present, millions of tonnes of fish are caught or farmed each year. As well as not eating meat, many vegetarians don't eat fish. Some authors consider that, if vegetarianism really caught on and everybody on the planet stopped eating fish, the two-thirds of the population who are not starving at present would soon join the third who are (Grover). Even the animal farming is an efficient use of land, there are studies on world food security estimating that an affluent diet containing meat requires up to 3 times as many resources as a vegetarian diet (Penning de Vries, 1995).

The fourth reason is environmental concern, which is related to the economical one. Worldwide food production requires 30% of the total soil available, 20% of fossil fuel energy and a major part of the fresh water flow (Nonhebel, 2004). Raising cattle seems to be one of the most damaging components of agriculture (Goodland, 1997). They cause the most environmental damage of any non-human species through over-grazing, soil erosion, desertification and tropical deforestation for ranches, in addition to their gaseous emissions and manure products. The methane that cattle emit and bioxide carbon emitted by the electrical central needed for farms' maintenance are factors that contribute to global warming. The land used for producing feed for animals needs irrigation that rises to 80% of the level of water needed for human consumption (Romanian Society of Vegetarians).

The fifth reason is religious issue that determines people to adopt a more or less vegetarian diet. For instance, orthodox Moslems and Jews who eat meat from animals slaughtered in conditions meeting their ritual requirements sometimes say they are vegetarians, because their halal or kosher slaughter is not widely

understood. Orthodox Christians fast more than eighteen weeks a year, eating just vegetal origin food.

The sixth reason comes from culture, different culture having different learning in their attitudes towards animals: naturalistic, ecologicistic, humanistic, moralistic, scientific etc. (Kellert, 1988). Moral attitudes are related to concerns about livestock welfare, but animal welfare would to some extent feature in humanistic attitudes towards companion animals. In a comparison of Japanese, Germans and US Americans, Kellert found that the moralistic attitude was very strongly developed amongst the Germans. The Japanese had a well-developed humanistic outlook and Americans varied according to which part of the country they were raised.

The seventh reason emerges from social issues. Some people reduce their meat consumption to conform or adapt to the lifestyle or standards of friends, relations or other influential people. One's own body image is an important example (Bolger).

Even people tend to eat more vegetarian food; there are consumers that enjoy eating meat. The taste of meat helps to reinforce that enjoyment and this is one of the main reasons why would-be vegetarians resist becoming vegetarian. But meat is regarded as a dead food which is in the process of decomposing and eating it is synonymous with ingesting death. Even amongst meat-eaters meat does not have an image of being a "health food", but it may be thought to be "good for health" (Bolger).

### **Conclusion**

Hence, a balanced conclusion of all consideration above should establish that the reasons why people tend to eat more vegetarian food vary from health, ethical, economic, environmental to religious, cultural, and social concerns. Even there are lot of pro vegetarian diet, however, there are studies showing that strict vegetarianism implies health risks and economical inefficiency.

This conclusion has implication for educating consumers to eat healthier, and for food producers and sellers to adapt their strategies to the new tendencies in food consumption. The vegetal production will be developed, while meat producing businesses will shrink or meat producers will change their attitudes towards consumers, respecting their rights to food safety and correct information. The trade with vegetal products must be developed.

To support this effort, it is recommended that further studies be undertaken as quantitative research identifying the quantitative dimension of vegetarianism phenomena.

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## РАЗЛОЗИ ЗБОГ КОЈИХ СЕ ЉУДИ ОКРЕЋУ ВЕГЕТАРИЈАНСКОЈ ИСХРАНИ

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### Апстракт

Ова студија покушава да идентификује разлоге због којих се људи окрећу вегетаријанској исхрани. У намери да се истражи ова тема, урађено је истраживање међународне литературе на тему вегетаријанске исхране, разматрајући гласове и за и против овог становишта и уверења. Иако постоји велики број гласова за вегетаријанску исхрану, ипак, многе студије показују да стриктна вегетаријанска исхрана подразумева ризик по здравље и економску неефикасност.

Истраживање показује да вегетаријанци имају различите разлоге за своје становиште, као што су здравствени, етички, економски, еколошки, религиозни, културални и социјални. Овај закључак има импликације на едуковање потрошача да се хране здравије, и за произвођаче хране и продавце да прилагоде своје стратегије новим тенденцијама у потрошњи хране.

**Кључне речи:** вегетаријанска исхрана, произвођачи хране, здравље, исхрана

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