

DOCUMENTS

TO BE OR NOT TO BE VEGAN



1. The question of vegetarian & vegan diets is **topical** and is often discussed at family or social gatherings. In fact, it has become so popular that the majority of restaurants now propose vegetarian and/or vegan dishes on their menus. Before going into the pros and cons of this new trend, it is important to define precisely what a vegan diet is. According to Danny Webber, a renowned performance sports nutritionist, “A **vegan diet** is a *plant-based lifestyle that prohibits the consumption of all animal products, with many people adopting a vegan diet for health, environmental and strong ethical beliefs concerning animal welfare*”. That being said, we shall now analyze how healthy and ecological this diet is and if there are any potential risks linked to it.
2. Many health benefits are put forward in favor of vegan diets. These include: a better control of blood sugar that limits the risk of diabetes; weight loss, as one eats less fat and high caloric foods; reduced risk of cardiovascular and heart disease as vegans usually have lower cholesterol, blood pressure and glucose levels; and some even claim that vegans have a lower rate of colon and esophageal cancers, as vegan diets include food that is high in fiber content.
3. Another positive aspect advanced in favor of vegan diets revolves around ethical and environmental issues. A vegan lifestyle reduces the impact on the environment and preserves natural resources that are depleted by breeding, raising and feeding animals for consumption. It is said that 60% of deforestation results from cutting down forests for beef cattle, etc., and that growing plants could feed a greater number of people.

4. However, there are also many negative effects of veganism. The major risk cited by many is nutrient deficiencies. There are key nutrients found in meat, dairy and eggs that can lead to serious side effects when not present in a diet. The most common that are cited include: anemia, disruptions in hormone production, calcium deficiency, and depression from lack of omega-3 fatty acids. Even if some proteins and vitamins can be found in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains, it is necessary and, most of the time, required by doctors that vegans add protein supplements to their diet.

5. Adults are free to make their own choices but young children cannot. Comparative studies have been made to analyze the differences in 5 to 10-year-old children raised on vegan, vegetarian and omnivore diets. The results published in the *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* state: “the vegans have healthier cardiovascular profiles but are shorter in height and display bone mineral deficiencies.” Another study made in Sweden says: “Possible combination of low vitamin A and DHA (an omega-3 fatty acid) status raise concern for their visual health.” Dr. M. Panchal, of the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, believes that it is even more crucial when infants or young children are concerned. She claims that as vegan diets exclude animal products including eggs or dairy, “this poses some unique risks for babies and toddlers because of their extremely rapid growth rate. Infants and young children simply require more protein, calcium and vitamins D and B12 than adults.” This alone should make parents who consider a pure vegan diet for their children think seriously about it first.

6. In conclusion we can say that there is more to veganism than just cutting out animal products. The choice of becoming vegan or not should be a personal one. It should also reasonably be taken after having consulted one’s doctor or physician. It shouldn’t be dictated by the desire to follow popular trends or imposed by parents or spouses.