

Vegetarianism

Jennifer grew up eating at McDonalds. Everyday was a 'Happy Meal' day. When she was eleven years old she went on a vacation with her family to Maui. On the second day, they all decided to take a scenic drive around the island to see the sights. After an hour of driving, they pulled up to a cliff that looked down over the beautiful ocean. On the other side of the road was a huge green pasture dotted with tiny yellow flowers and dandelions. Standing next to the fence was a small herd of cattle, maybe ten in all. One was a small baby, which immediately caught Jennifer's attention. The calf had huge brown puppy eyes, soft delicate nostrils and big floppy ears. Jennifer had always loved animals and seeing this beautiful young calf simply melted her heart. The magic was broken a moment later when Jennifer heard her mother say, "That's what's in those burgers you eat everyday."

Jennifer's heart went from melting to breaking. Like most people, she had never really considered where those delicious burgers actually came from. They didn't grow on trees, of course, but Jennifer had just never really thought about it. A moment of realization can change a person's life, and on this day a new Jennifer was born, with a vow to never eat meat again. Six years have passed since that day, and her vow has remained unbroken. Jennifer's story is just one of the many reasons people choose to become vegetarians. There are several types of vegetarians and many reasons why they follow this lifestyle - a lifestyle that poses many problems in a society geared to eat meat... and lots of it.

Some famous vegetarians include: Leonardo De Vinci, Sir Isaac Newton, Leo Tolstoy, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau and Gandhi. In 1847 the founders of the Vegetarian Society of Great Britain were the first to use the term vegetarian, but vegetarians have been around long before the term was created. Millions of Hindus are vegetarians. In India the primary religion is Hinduism, which does not allow the eating of animal foods. In Japan and China there are also many vegetarians due to their belief in Buddhism. In America only about 5% of the population refer to themselves as vegetarians (Dupler and Frey).

A vegetarian is defined as a person who makes a decision to refrain from eating meat. There are many different types of vegetarians. Semi-vegetarians, also known as flexitarians, will eat meat, fish or poultry less than once a week. Lacto-ovo vegetarians never eat meat, fish or poultry, but they will eat eggs and dairy products. Lacto-vegetarians don't eat meat, fish, poultry or eggs, but will eat dairy products. Vegans do not eat meat, fish, poultry or anything that is a by-product of animals such as honey, eggs, and dairy products (Boucher and Waslaski). There are many reasons why people become vegetarians. Three of the most common are: health, religion and animal cruelty.

Adopting a vegetarian diet can greatly benefit one's health. Many people believe that if you don't eat meat you won't get enough protein. But, in truth, becoming a vegetarian is much healthier for your body and it is very easy to find good sources of protein in such foods as beans, spinach, nuts, nut butters, peas and soy products. In most cases people become vegetarians because it is much healthier.

"Vegetarianism is recommended as a dietary therapy for a variety of conditions, including heart disease, high cholesterol, type 2 diabetes, and stroke. Vegetarianism is a major dietary therapy in the alternative

treatment of cancer. Other conditions treated with a dietary therapy of vegetarianism include obesity, osteoporosis, arthritis, allergies, asthma, environmental illness, hypertension, gout, gallstones, hemorrhoids, kidney stones, ulcers, colitis, premenstrual syndrome, anxiety, and depression. Vegetarians often report higher energy levels, better digestion, and mental clarity." (Dupler and Frey)

Many vegetarians also have a lower risk of getting Alzheimer's and food poisoning. One study has shown that vegetarians live longer than non-vegetarians. On average, men lived 7.28 years longer and women lived 4.42 years longer (Jenkins). Becoming a vegetarian can also lower your risk of cancer. Factory farm animals are full of pesticides and chemicals from bioaccumulation, and are pumped up with hormones and drugs such as antibiotics. Another study found that a cancer-causing pesticide, DDT, was present in large levels in 99% of mother's milk. But only 8% of vegetarians had any significant level of DDT. Women have a 35 times higher level of pesticides than vegetarian women (Dupler and Frey). The National Cancer Research Institute found that women who eat meat are four times as likely to develop breast cancer as women who eat meat sparingly or not at all (Rabbit's Vegetarian Page). But becoming a vegetarian can also be very unhealthy when not done properly. Some people become vegetarians, but don't eat nutritious food. Instead, they eat foods with empty calories such as white bread, candy and chips. This is not just unhealthy but also dangerous. A conscious effort to eat healthy is necessary to insure that the proper amount of protein, iron, calcium and other essential vitamins and minerals are consumed (Robbins 163-165). Vitamin B-12 supplements are important in a vegetarian's diet because vitamin B12 is only found in animal products. If you are not getting enough vitamins or minerals you may experience symptoms like fatigue, irritability, pale skin, and mental slowness. The more serious symptoms are difficulty breathing, skin rashes and a painful or swollen tongue (Vegetarian Diet).

Huge factory farms raise animals in extremely unhealthy and unsanitary conditions. These factories have bred many deadly diseases in animals, some of which are transferable, resulting in illness and death in humans. Becoming a vegetarian eliminates all the deadly diseases and illnesses one can catch by eating meat, such as e-coli poisoning and mad cow disease. These have killed many people throughout the world and have made millions ill. But a new disease has come into play and it could kill one out of every eight people. It's called Bird Flu and according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people can contract the deadly virus by eating undercooked meat or eggs, by eating food that has come in contact with meat or eggs contaminated with the disease, or by touching contaminated eggshells. In China they used antiviral drugs to control the outbreak. But instead of controlling it, the bird flu became more resistant, making drugs useless to protect people. And this problem is not only limited to birds; pigs and dairy cows can also carry and spread similar viruses. The risk could not be more serious.

"Senior UN System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza Dr. David Nabarro describes it as a threat to "the survival of the world as we know it." Dr. Gregory A. Poland of the Mayo Clinic has called it "what could arguably be the most horrific disaster in modern history." They describe the effects on society: "We haven't even begun to conceive of, to understand, to comprehend what that may mean for our workplace" (Dr. Jeffrey Levi of George Washington University's Department of Health Policy); "[S]chools are closed ... transportation systems are curtailed or shut down ... Critical infrastructure will or may fail: food, water, power, gas, electricity" (Dr. Constance Hanna, corporate director of health services,

Honeywell International); and "When this happens, time will be described, for those left living, as before and after the pandemic." (Eating Meat Threatens)

People can become extremely ill and sometimes die from eating meat. So why do people still eat meat? Especially now, when living a vegetarian lifestyle is easier than ever. Alternatives for meat are available in a wide variety of sources. Even some fast food chains such as Burger King now offer veggie burgers (Vegetarian 101). One of the primary reasons people still eat meat is because of the meat industry itself. Over the years, millions of dollars promoting the false benefits of eating meat have swamped our televisions, n