



# THE BRITISH DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

*The Professional Association for Registered Dietitians*  
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# Media Release

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## Is Vegetarianism as Healthy as it is Beefed up to Be?

National Vegetarian Week runs between 23<sup>rd</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> May and, according to The British Dietetic Association, meat-eaters could have some lessons to learn from vegetarians.

Registered dietitian, Dr Frankie Phillips, spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association, and author of a new authoritative review of vegetarianism and health<sup>1</sup> says: "Following a vegetarian diet does not automatically mean being healthier. Vegetarians and meat-eaters alike need to make suitable dietary and lifestyle choices. So many attributes of being vegetarian or vegan seem to be able to influence health, for example, they tend to be leaner<sup>2</sup>, more active, and less likely to smoke than their meat-eating counterparts. This makes it difficult to untangle the web of factors in the vegetarian diet and lifestyle that may have an impact on health. But it seems that vegetarians, and especially vegans, have lower rates of heart disease, and associated risk factors such as lower blood cholesterol levels.

"Evidence for cancer is not so clear-cut and there is no evidence that being vegetarian *per se* confers protection against development of cancer. A range of other diseases are also reported to be less prevalent in vegetarian populations, but the million-dollar question of what causes these differences is still not clear, and more research is needed to find the answers" says Dr Phillips.

In terms of nutrition, a well balanced vegetarian diet can provide all of the key nutrients needed in the body at all ages, but more restricted vegetarian diets, in particular vegans, need to ensure that sufficient protein, essential fatty acids, vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, vitamin D and minerals, such as calcium, iron, iodine and zinc, are included. On the other hand, compared with omnivorous diets, plant-based diets tend to provide more folate, fibre, antioxidants, phytochemicals and carotenoids.

Dr Phillips concludes: "From the research I have carried out, it seems that a lower intake of saturated fatty acids, which can help to keep cholesterol levels down, alongside eating more wholegrain cereals, more fruit and vegetables, pulses, such as beans and lentils, and maintaining a healthy weight are all likely to contribute to the observed differences. For those who don't want to become vegetarian, all of these dietary goals may be achieved whilst still including some lean meat, chicken or fish.....and even the occasional bacon sandwich!"

The British Dietetic Association has published a fact sheet on guidelines for a balanced vegetarian diet, available to download free from <http://www.bda.uk.com/Downloads/vegetarianfoodfacts.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips F. (2005) Vegetarian Nutrition. *Nutrition Bulletin* **30** (2): 132-167.

<sup>2</sup> Vegans and vegetarians have a body mass index (BMI) typically 1-2m/kg<sup>2</sup> lower than matched meat-eaters.

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### **Notes to Editors**

The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional Association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 5,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance.

Registered dietitians hold the only legally recognisable graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence.

Registration, awarded by the Health Professionals Council, is an indication that a dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct.

For further details about the British Dietetic Association, please visit our Website: [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

Also, see our brand new Weight Wise website with some great information put together by registered dietitians specifically for consumers at: [www.bdaweightwise.com](http://www.bdaweightwise.com)

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