



Be a Vegetarian, for Earth, for Us

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My medical career began in the USA. Few years gone by, I became aware of the ferociousness of cardiovascular diseases. Patients of cardiovascular disease would invariably be hospitalized again and again due to repeated onset of the illness. Clinical experience suggested that patients suffering from angina pectoris, myocardial infarction, or coronary balloon angioplasty and even after a coronary artery bypass surgery, would in just a few years - some within six to twelve months - suffer a recurrence. It is not uncommon that, by the second or third operation, all of the blood vessels in the lower limbs would have been used to replace the blood vessels to the heart, which would make it necessary to take vessels from upper limbs. I realized the existing treatments are only palliative, and one could not inhibit the recurrence of atherosclerosis without rooting its cause.

So, I began an in-depth investigation into the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, which led me to discover several associating risk factors that could not only be improved, but with promising results. Therefore, I reached the following conclusion: preventing hardening of the arteries (atherosclerosis), chest pain (angina pectoris), and heart attacks (myocardial infarction), demands a thorough change of lifestyle, starting with diet, exercise, quit smoking and alcohol, and plenty of rest.

Once knowing that “diet” is the most crucial factor in atherosclerosis prevention, I began collecting data from medical literatures, which led me to realize that vegetarian - diet consisting of fresh vegetables - is the healthiest form of diet. Not only does the diet greatly reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, it can also significantly reduce the risk of cancer. After gaining this knowledge, I began sharing it with my family and friends, and became a diligent vegetarian myself. Vegetarians were rare in the USA at that time (only about 7% claim to be vegetarians), let alone a vegetarian doctor, but I felt tremendous improvements in my physiological functions. Not only were my gastrointestinal tract unobstructed, digestion improved, but once frequented gastrointestinal discomfort also disappeared. No longer do I have to drag my weary body while doing the ward rounds every afternoon around 5pm, but instead finishing it fleet footed without any sense of fatigue.

By the time I returned to Taiwan in 1996, I was already a vegetarian for nearly 2 decades. While serving as the Dalin Tzu

Chi Hospital superintendent, I completed a book “Scientific Vegetarian, Happy Eating” (Co-published by Commonwealth and Jing Si Publications) in May 2002. Since the cardiology patients in Taiwan share the same problem, I wish everyone can see the end of cardiological disease by fundamentally changing our diet and lifestyle.

The decade after the book was published, natural disasters frequented around the globe. A major contributor is the prosperity of livestock industry, which leads to the vicious cycle of increasing global greenhouse gas, drastic depletion of natural resources and extreme climates. The perfect solution to the issue is vegetarianism. Moreover, according to my own experience, as well as close observation of the masters at Jing Si abode and Tzu Chi volunteers, not only is vegetarianism beneficial to health, it also brings stability and tranquility to one’s mind. To address the essentiality of “spirituality” and “Earth” to vegetarianism, I updated and revised the book, and published it again in September 2012. (Vegetarian Health – The Earth and Spirituality, Rhythms Monthly Publishing in Chinese)

In Europe and the USA alike, major institutions - even certain government agencies - have been advocating the benefits of “plant based diets” against certain major chronic diseases, such as obesity, cardio- and cerebral vascular diseases. There are also vast scientific discourses within professional medical papers that further support that vegetarianism can alleviate and/or prevent diseases, and the number of related books and experts also skyrocketed during the past decade.

Unfortunately, not long ago a misinformed article reported by the Taiwanese media, who took a thesis out of its context, deterred many potential vegetarians. What a pity! Here I want to point out briefly, when the report claimed that “vegetarianism is equivalent to low cholesterol”, the statement is false. The definition of low cholesterol is to have a cholesterol level below 130 mg/dl., and there are three types of people who are susceptible to low cholesterol: The first type are patients suffering from liver diseases, because liver is the organ that produce cholesterol, and an affected liver is unable to produce cholesterol; the second type are cancer patients; and the third are people with digestive problems. Cholesterol is necessary for the body to provide adrenaline to make hormones, especially sex hormones. All are derived from cholesterol. If hormones level is too low, it would manifest as symptoms. In short, there is no correlation between low cholesterol and vegetarianism. Even vegetarians must pay attention to a proper diet, since they may experience high cholesterol due to a healthy and effective digestive system. Contrary to low cholesterol, vegetarians should be mindful of high blood lipid levels.

As a cardiologist who have been a vegetarian for 30 years, I wholeheartedly believe all people are able to have a healthy lifestyle by adopting a vegetarian diet, exercising, not smoking, not drinking and getting enough rest. I wish that everyone can live healthy and carefree, in the world void of artificial and natural disasters.