Definition: **Vegetarianism** from *Black's Medical Dictionary, 43rd Edition*

Restriction of one's diet, for health, cultural or humanitarian reasons, to foods of fruit and vegetable origin. Most vegetarians, while excluding meat and fish from their diets, include foods of animal origin, such as milk, cheese, eggs, and butter. Such a diet should supply an adequate balance of nutrients and may protect against those chronic diseases related to consumption of excess animal fat. People with special dietary requirements – such as pregnant or feeding mothers, and very strict vegetarians – may require dietary supplements (see APPENDIX 5: VITAMINS).

Summary Article: **Vegetarianism** from *Encyclopedia of Environment and Society*

VEGETARIANISM, IN ITS broadest definition, is a dietary pattern where meat, fish, and poultry are excluded. Frequently, vegetarians will exclude dietary products that include animal by-products and derivatives; however, vegetarian is a broad term that can have varied definitions and meanings. Some self-defined vegetarians may include animal products ranging from eggs and dairy, to seafood, and even occasional meat. Vegetarian dietary patterns are found throughout the world today and are influenced by a myriad of factors ranging from religious beliefs, economic influence, meat availability, environmental beliefs, and ideological beliefs.

In less-developed nations, large populations have primarily vegetarian diets due to economic factors, not choice.

Broadly speaking, vegetarians can be broken into four primary groups: lacto ova vegetarians, lacto vegetarians, vegans, and fruitarians. Lacto ova vegetarians do not consume meat, fish, and poultry, but do eat eggs and dairy products. Lacto vegetarians do not consume meat, fish, poultry, and eggs, but do...
eat dairy products. Vegans do not consume any meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, or other animal-made food products, such as honey. Vegans, as well as many vegetarians, are also likely to avoid animal products in their clothing (wool, leather, and silk, for example), grooming, and cosmetic products, and other products. Fruitarian diets are vegan, but specific in that only fruits and vegetables that are defined as fruits are consumed.

In many parts of the world, particularly in less-developed nations and areas that do not lend themselves to meat production, large populations may consume a diet that is primarily vegetarian in nature not by “choice” per se, but because of circumstance. In agriculturally-based environments where horticultural production is limited these resources are more beneficial for human consumption than animal consumption, thusly limiting the capacity to develop strong animal-based agriculture and limiting meat available for human consumption. In such populations, whose diets are primarily vegetarian with occasional meat eating, meat consumption is frequently aligned with holidays and special events.

In the industrialized developed world, meat consumption is quite high. The United States leads the world in meat consumption (red meat, poultry, and fish) with an average annual consumption of 195 pounds per person. Within the United States research suggests that 2.5–5 percent of the population identify as vegetarian and that the numbers of vegetarians are on the rise. While in many parts of the world vegetarian dietary habits may be shaped by environmental and economic factors limiting the availability of meat, vegetarians in the United States often make an active choice in their dietary patterns. While various factors influence this choice—the healthful benefits of a diet low in animal products, ethical beliefs about animals, and religious beliefs—the most influential belief affiliated with American vegetarians is the belief that vegetarianism is beneficial for the environment.

As the developed world continues to increase meat consumption, there has been a parallel growth in the production of meat. Today, significant portions of the world have been transformed to enable cattle raising. In Central America, over approximately the last 50 years, a quarter of the rainforest loss has been to beef production. In addition to the rainforest loss, this beef production also impacts the environment further, as it is shipped to its primary consumer markets in the United States and Europe via the consumption of fossil fuels in transport and the output of toxic exhausts. Cattle farming has, as a practice, immediate environmental impacts.

In the United States, cattle farms consume approximately one-half of the annual water used, while simultaneously being a major source of water pollution via the tons of organic farm waste. Additionally, the intensive farming of beef production in the United States also consumes high levels of fossil fuels (with coinciding emissions) via the transportation of grains and food for the animals, the removal of animal waste, the transportation of animals, their slaughtering, and the transportation of meat.

Worldwide, the nation with the highest percentage of intentional vegetarians is likely India, with only 30 percent of the population consuming meat regularly, 20 percent being strict vegetarians, and the remaining 50 percent being occasional meat eaters. Many Indians who adhere to a strict vegetarian diet do so in part because of religious beliefs. In addition to religious beliefs, one’s economic situation may prohibit the purchase and consumption of meat for many. Socio-environmentally, for those with little economic means, cattle may be more useful as a source of labor, dairy, and dung (that may be used as a fire source) than as meat.

SEE ALSO:

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/vegetarianism
BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Linda Kalof; Thomas Dietz; Paul C. Stern; Gergory A. Guagnano, “Social Psychological and Structural Influences on Vegetarian Beliefs,” Rural Sociology (v.64, 1999).
- F. J. Simoons, Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present (University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

Daniel Farr
College of St. Rose

APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA


Copyright © 2007 by SAGE Publications, inc.

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/vegetarianism