

Thinking About Going Vegetarian?

5 Reasons for Your Whole Family to Make the Change

By Dr. Jenn Berman



Experts are reporting more children are choosing to go vegetarian and more parents are opting to raise their kids without meat. Here are five reasons for you to consider going vegetarian.

1. Avoiding Disease and Increasing Lifespan

I don't know about you, but I want to dance at my grandchild's wedding. Research shows that vegetarians and vegans have far fewer incidents of heart disease, cancer, hypertension, diabetes, gallstones, kidney disease, obesity and colon disease. Research at Loma Linda University has found that vegetarian men live, on average, seven years longer than their meat-eating counterparts.

2. Inhumane Treatment of Animals

It is difficult to explain to your child why she should not pull your dog's tail but it is okay to put animals in the cruelest conditions imaginable, in factory farms (which account for 99% of all animals eaten in the U.S.) and then slaughter them mercilessly. According to one

worker at IBP, the world's largest meat packing company, "Workers can open the legs, the stomach, the neck, cut off feet while the cow is still breathing....I would estimate that 1 out of 10 cows is still alive when it's bled and skinned."

We work very hard to disconnect from the truth of what we eat; we call cows "beef" and pigs "pork." When a friend's insightful three-year-old son asked if the chicken he was eating was like the chicken he had seen on a farm, she was at a loss for words. Young children don't need to know the details of the slaughter but they deserve to know accurate, age-appropriate information about where their food comes from.

3. Environmental Impact

Animal agriculture is the largest source of methane, a greenhouse gas that is 21 times more powerful than carbon dioxide. Factory farming also creates a huge amount of toxic sludge, about 130 times the waste of the human population of the United States. Agricultural waste emptying into the Gulf of Mexico has created an 8,000 square mile "Dead

Zone," where there is no oxygen in the water and it cannot sustain life.

Factory farming also uses incredible amounts of water. It takes 2,464 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef, but only 23 gallons to produce one pound of lettuce. You can save more water by not eating one pound of beef than if you skipped your daily shower for six months.

4. Avoiding Toxins

A recent study in the journal Environmental Health Perspectives revealed that people who frequently eat poultry and beef have higher levels of PBDE's (a common flame retardant) in their blood than vegetarians. These chemicals are everywhere: in children's pajamas, mattresses, computers, TVs, furniture, upholstery, rugs, and car interiors. They leak into the environment through the air, are carried by dust and water and enter the food chain. These hormone disrupters have been linked to impaired memory, abnormalities of coordination, hyperactivity, and infertility.

Because fish are known to be a great source of brain-boosting

omega-3 acids, parents are pleased when their children eat it. But, sadly, fish are the main source of human exposure to mercury, a toxin that is especially dangerous to neurological development in infants, children and fetuses. A government test of fish pulled from nearly 300 streams in the U.S. found every one of them was contaminated with some level of mercury; 27% of the fish had mercury levels that exceeded what the EPA considers safe for those who eat fish twice a week.

5. Contaminated Food

If you think that thoroughly cooking your child's burger is an assurance that he will not get a food borne illness, think again. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, E. coli and salmonella sicken an estimated 76 million Americans each year; 325,000 get hospitalized; and 5,000 die. Many are children.

There have been cases of E.coli in fruits and vegetable contaminated by water containing cattle waste, but it is most commonly found in ground beef. According to Public Citizen, slaughterhouse workers kill and gut as many as 350 animals per hour and are under pressure to work faster, causing errors such as puncturing intestines, bladders and bowels during cutting, which releases waste matter that gets ground up into burgers. As Eric Schlosser reports in his powerful documentary Food Inc., mass-produced ground beef hamburgers are composed of pieces of thousands of different cows. According to Gail Eisnitz author of Slaughterhouse, it is not a question of "if" there is fecal matter in your family's meat but "how much."

Make That Change!

Whether you go ovo-lacto vegetarian (no animals), lacto vegetarian (no animals, eggs or dairy) or vegan, you stand a good chance of making a difference in the health of your family and the planet.

*Dr. Jenn Berman, a licensed psychotherapist in private practice, is the author of The A to Z Guide to Raising Happy Confident Kids and SuperBaby: The 12 Ways Parents Can Give Their Child a Head Start in the First Three Years. She lives in Los Angeles with her husband and children.
www.DoctorJenn.com*

L.A.'s Building (Bike) Paths to a Greener Future

By Councilman Dennis Zine



The City of Los Angeles is forging ahead to become one of the largest green cities in the country. With that goal in mind, LA has undertaken several initiatives to get people out of their cars and into alternative forms of transportation.

The Los Angeles Planning Commission has put together a bicycle plan with the goals of expanding bike lanes and bike paths, adding more bike parking, and making existing parks more bike friendly. LA's vast and diverse terrain as well as its appealing climate make it a great location to promote bicycle usage.

The most popular and family friendly bike paths include: the Marvin Braude Bikeway, which runs along the beach; the Orange Line bikeway, which runs along the busway line that connects the West San Fernando Valley to the East; and the Los Angeles River Bikeway whose construction has been expanding along the entire river. For further information on the city's bike plan, please visit <http://www.labikeplan.org/>.

A quick reminder to parents: the law requires everyone under the age of 18 to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle.



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