

Jan 24, 2013 by [Shikha Gandhi](#)

Veganism: Natural or Extreme diet? Latest studies raise Serious Question Marks against Veganism



I got an invitation for a Vegan Wedding in Hyderabad which piqued my interest. Googling 'Vegan' I found veganism is a way of living, more than a diet which excludes all forms of exploitation and cruelty to the animal kingdom and includes a reverence for life.

Hence, at the wedding the bride did not wear silk and the bridegroom shunned leather because Vegans swear off the usual suspects like flesh, fish, fowl, eggs, honey, animal milk and its derivative as well as silk, wool, leather and others. Predictably there was no cheese, ghee or

milk-based sweets, no curd, and other dishes that one takes for granted instead we were served plant-based food and curd made from soy.

So should one eschew all forms of animal products from one's diet and life in the name of good health and ethical treatment of animals? That's a tough choice and I am going to try to break this hard nut for you...

The Argument for Veganism:

Let's take a look at what is going for this 'extreme' diet. There is a whole lot of literature to prove that veganism is healthy and a large number of people, especially young, hip and urban middle class are converting to veganism. There are also groups working tirelessly to spread this philosophy like 'SHARAN' which holds workshops called 'Pills Vs. Peas' and 'On reversing Diabetes' in most metros like Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore etc. In Hyderabad we have a committed group of vegans called 'Hyderabad Vegans' whose numbers are swelling by the day. At the same time there are vegan restaurants, vegan potlucks, stores selling vegan products coming up almost every day.

Veganism as we know apart from shunning good old meat and flesh filters out milk and any milk based products too because milk according to vegans actually does more harm than good and the whole milk production culture is cruel and barbaric. They claim that dairy consumption has been linked to cancer, diabetes, autism, schizophrenia and many autoimmune disorders including Multiple sclerosis.

75% of the people on the planet are lactose intolerant and don't consume any dairy at all and if they do, they fall ill. And that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allows 750 million pus cells in every liter of milk which makes milk extremely unhealthy.

So vegans swear by soy milk which has fewer calories, less saturated fat, less sodium, and less sugar than the same cup of cow's milk, but it has just as much calcium and protein! And also vegetables like spinach, kale, broccoli, tofu, soybeans, almonds and molasses, to name a few, which offer more calcium per calorie than milk.

One can now say without a doubt that plant-based milk is undeniably in the best interest of cows. And the evidence that dairy farms/factories account for huge amounts of CO2 emissions, water contamination and land degradation is mounting, which only supports the argument that going vegan is one of the best decisions we can make for our planet and for our health.

Dr. Nandita Shah, founder of SHARAN, believes that veganism can cure diabetes. "Most people with diabetes are given the same advice – to cut down carbohydrates, cut out sugars, get more exercise, and take medications or insulin yet this does not cure diabetes. In order to reverse, or solve any problem, one needs to find the cause and eliminate it. Sugar is not the cause of diabetes, so no amount of cutting of sugar and carbohydrates can reverse or cure Type 2 diabetes which is mainly the result of insulin resistance. It has been scientifically proven through the work of Dr. Neal Barnard, Dr. T. Colin Campbell, Dr. John McDougall, and Dr. Gabriel Cousens among others, that by eating the right foods, diabetes can not only be prevented but also effectively reversed. Their research shows that our modern lifestyle, and consumption of animal products, processed foods, high amounts of fat, may result in diabetes, and that insulin resistance is the result of accumulation of fat inside muscle cells. To reverse diabetes, all that has to be done is to minimize the amount of fat in the diet, which a vegan diet does effectively. This causes a drop in the fat inside muscle cells, resulting in increased insulin sensitivity. Now the blood sugar is automatically controlled."

The Flip side of Veganism:

Vegan and raw diets can be healthy but there are problems with them. There were always concerns with vegan diets providing enough vitamins, especially B12 and D as well as proteins, required in more quantities by pregnant women, lactating mothers and growing children. Two recent, independent studies have increased the number of question marks against this diet.

New Studies that raise concerns about Veganism:

Eating meat and cooking food made us human, the studies suggest, enabling the brains of our pre human ancestors to grow dramatically over a period of a few million years. At the core of this research is the understanding that the modern human brain consumes 20 percent of the body's energy at rest, twice that of other primates. Meat and cooked foods were needed to provide the necessary calorie boost to feed a growing brain.

One study, published a couple of months back in the journal 'Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences', examined the brain sizes of several primates and the researchers concluded that the reason gorillas did not evolve into intelligent creatures because their diets were mostly plant-based.

The second study, published in October the journal 'PLoS ONE', examined the remains of a pre- human toddler who died from malnutrition about 1.5 million years ago. Shards of a skull found in modern-day Tanzania reveal that the child had 'porotic hyperostosis', or spongy bone growth associated with low levels of dietary iron and vitamins B9 and B12, the result of diet lacking animal products. The child was around the weaning age so the child did not consume enough nutrients directly from meat or eggs.

Either way, the finding implies that meat must have been an integral part of the pre-human diet more than 1 million years ago. The authors also said that there is no traditional society that lives as vegans, essentially because it wouldn't be possible to get vitamin B12, which is only available in animal products.

These studies question the ability of the vegan diet to provide essential nutrients and vitamins and are significant for the future of veganism.

I for one would end the 'Veganism or Not' argument by saying that extreme forms of both- rabid meat eating and raw veganism can be dangerous.



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