**Meat Free May**

***Why try a vegetarian diet in May?***

**You’ll ward off disease.**

Vegetarian diets are healthier than the average diet, particularly in preventing, treating or reversing heart disease and reducing the risk of cancer. A low-fat vegetarian diet is the single most effective way to stop the progression of coronary artery disease or prevent it entirely. The mortality rate for cardiovascular disease is lower in vegetarians than in non-vegetarians because vegetarians consume less animal fat and cholesterol.

Fruits and vegetables also contain disease fighting phytochemicals which may help to prevent diseases, including heart disease, cancer and diabetes (see <http://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/090313p70.shtml>). Eat a variety of different coloured fruit and vegetables (red, orange, yellow, blue and purple) for the most benefit.

**You’ll keep your weight down.**

The standard western diet - high in saturated fats and processed foods and low in plant-based foods and complex carbohydrates - is making us fat and killing us slowly. A study conducted from 1986 to 1992 by Dean Ornish, MD, president and director of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, found that overweight people who followed a low-fat, vegetarian diet lost an average of 24 pounds in the first year and kept off that weight 5 years later. They lost the weight without counting calories or carbs or feeling hungry.

**You’ll live longer.**

If you switch from the standard American diet to a vegetarian diet, you can add about 13 healthy years to your life, says Michael F. Roizen, MD, author of *The RealAge Diet: Make Yourself Younger with What You Eat.* Residents of Okinawa, Japan, have the longest life expectancy of any Japanese and likely the longest life expectancy of anyone in the world, according to a 30-year study of more than 600 Okinawan centenarians. Their secret: a low-calorie diet of unrefined complex carbohydrates, fiber-rich fruits and vegetables, and soy.

**You’ll reduce your risk of food-borne illnesses.**

The Food Standards Agency found that there were 500,000 cases of food poisoning a year in the UK, with an estimated 287,000 of those being linked to chicken, beef and lamb compared to just 48,000 linked to vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds (see <http://www.food.gov.uk/news-updates/news/2014/6097/foodpoisoning>).

**You’ll ease the symptoms of menopause**.

Many foods contain nutrients beneficial to pre-menopausal and menopausal women. Certain foods are rich in phytoestrogens, the plant-based chemical compounds that mimic the behavior of estrogen. Since phytoestrogens can increase and decrease estrogen and progesterone levels, maintaining a balance of them in your diet helps ensure a more comfortable passage through menopause.

**You’ll have more energy.**

Good nutrition generates more usable energy*.* Too much fat in your bloodstream means that arteries won’t open properly and that your muscles won’t get enough oxygen, making us feel tired. Whole grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables are high in unrefined complex carbohydrates, supplying the body with plenty of energizing fuel.

**You’ll be more ‘regular.’**

Eating a lot of vegetables necessarily means consuming more fiber, which pushes waste out of the body. Meat contains no fibre. A meat free diet gives fewer instances of constipation, hemorrhoids and diverticulitis.

**You’ll help the environment.**

The meat industry is a major cause of pollution. In the United States, chemical and animal waste runoff from factory farms is responsible for over 173,000 miles of polluted rivers and streams. Pesticide and fertilizer runoff from fields growing animal feed crops is one of the greatest threats to water quality today. Also, livestock production is responsible for almost 15% of global human related greenhouse gas emissions (see <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/197608/icode/>).

**You’ll avoid toxic chemicals.**

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that nearly 95 percent of the pesticide residue in the typical American diet comes from meat, fish and dairy products. Fish, in particular, contain carcinogens (PCBs, DDT) and heavy metals (mercury, arsenic, lead, cadmium) that can’t be removed through cooking or freezing.

**You’ll help reduce famine.**

It takes 10kg of animal feed to make 1kg of beef, 4 - 5.5kg of grain to make 1kg of pork and 2.1 - 3kg of grain to make 1kg of poultry meat. On average, a farmer can feed up to 30 people a year on one hectare with vegetables, fruits and cereals. If the same area is used for the production of eggs, milk or meat, the number of people fed reduces to 5 - 10 (see <http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=7L8E4PgIa4E%3D&tabid=1326>). Not eating meat means more food to feed a growing world population.

**You’ll spare animals.**

Many vegetarians give up meat because of their concern for animals. Every year in the UK approximately 2.6 million cattle, 10 million pigs, 14.5 million sheep and lambs, 80 million fish and 950 million birds are slaughtered for human consumption (see <http://www.hsa.org.uk/faqs/general#n1>). And, unlike the farms of yesteryear where animals roamed freely, today most animals are factory farmed: crammed into cages where they can barely move and fed a diet tainted with pesticides and antibiotics.

**You’ll save money.**

The average weekly food shop in the UK (see <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2521821/Families-spending-revealed-Biggest-cost-heating-looking-homes.html>) comes to £55, of which £15 is meat, and only £4.20 is spent on fresh vegetables and £3.20 on fresh fruit. Fruit and vegetables are much cheaper than meat, and replacing £15 of meat with fruit and vegetables would reduce weekly costs substantially.

**It’s easy.**

It’s easy to find great-tasting vegetarian foods, whether you’re in your local supermarket or out at lunchtime. For recipes, look no further than the internet or your favorite bookseller. And if you’re eating out, many restaurants and fast food outlets offer vegetarian selections. So rather than asking yourself why go vegetarian, the real question is: Why haven’t you gone vegetarian?

