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Health Benefits of Veganism

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A review of the literature by Corey Wrenn, VegFund's Spring 2013 intern

For much of Western history, veganism was viewed as a relatively alien concept outside the various religious, social justice, and health movements in which it sometimes flourished. Those who abstained from the standard flesh-based diet tended to be viewed as peculiar and eccentric, but the health benefits of veganism have been known for some time.

Dr. John Harvey Kellogg required vegetarianism of his patients at his sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan. Rationing during World War I familiarized Americans with plant-based eating, and many came to realize that Nonhuman Animal flesh was not necessary for survival. Kellogg reported in 1923 that meat-packers, alarmed at the post-war decline in "meat" consumption, launched an "Eat More Meat" campaign, flooding newspapers with scientific misrepresentations that touted the medical necessity of "meat" consumption.

These industry-influenced misconceptions about human nutrition continue today. Yet, with the arrival of Frances Moore Lappe's *Diet for a Small Planet* in 1971 and Dr. John Robbins' *Diet for a New America* in 1987, the healthfulness of vegan eating began to gain legitimacy. More recently, Dr. Campbell's *China Study* has improved our knowledge of plant-based diet and human health. Not surprisingly, these modern doctors lament the very same obstacles Dr. Kellogg faced with "meat" industry claims-making.

However, mainstream medical science continues to stress the importance of abstaining from Nonhuman Animal products. Adhering to a vegan diet has been shown to reduce the likelihood of contracting the following diseases, and, for some of these, their effects can be reduced or reversed (Campbell 2004 and Marsh, Zeuschner, and Saunders 2012):

- Cancer
- Heart Disease
- Atherosclerosis
- Type I and Type II Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Diverticulitis
- Osteoporosis
- Obesity
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Eye Diseases
- Alzheimer's Disease
- Kidney Disease
- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Gout

A study of Seventh-Day Adventists found that veganism helped extend participants' lives by as much as 8 years and improved their quality of life in old age (Fraser and Shavlik 2001). Other benefits include an improved mood (Beezhold and Johnston 2012) and reduced risk of food-borne illness (Painter et al. 2013).

The consumption of Nonhuman Animal products is thought to account for \$29-\$61 billion dollars in healthcare each year. Kaiser Permanente, the largest managed care organization in the United States, recently recommended veganism as a low-cost, low-risk method for avoiding these health concerns (Tuso et al. 2013). The American Dietetic Association (2003) agrees, ensuring us that a nutritious, healthful vegan diet is appropriate for all ages. Because the ill-effects of non-vegan eating disproportionately impacts vulnerable populations who do not have access to healthier alternatives (Wiig and Smith 2008), veganism is about justice for humans as well as nonhumans.

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