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Vegetarianism in India

India has always been a country centered on culture. Food in particular, has been influenced by many religions in the past and many traditions have been passed down for generations. Recently, as India's economic status has emerged into a booming and modern society, the people of India struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle similar to that of their ancestors and deities.

There are many factors of our human anatomy that give reason to why we should eat purely as vegetarians. Animals are divided into three categories according to their natural diets. The first category, carnivores, consists of animals such as lions and dogs. These animals contain a hydrochloric acid in their stomach that assists in the digestion of raw meat and contain small salivary glands in their mouths because they do not need to pre-digest flesh. Carnivores also contain an intestinal tract that is three times their body length so that the rapidly decaying flesh can be expelled from the body as quickly as possible. Carnivores also have sharp teeth and claws to rip the flesh of their meal. The second category, herbivores, consists of animals such as cows and elephants. The animals in the herbivore category eat strictly grass and leaves. The third category, frugivores, consists of animals such as an ape. Frugivores live on fruits, nuts, and grains. Humans belong to both the herbivore and frugivore categories. Humans have intestinal tracts that are about twelve times the length of their body, so decaying meat cannot be expelled as quickly as a carnivore. Humans also have small, dull teeth that make it hard to rip meat, and easier to eat vegetables and grains. Humans also contain salivary glands in their mouth as it is necessary to pre-digest food. We can see that humans are vegetarian by nature, and due to the circumstances over the past several thousand years, humans have adapted to an omnivore diet, meaning they eat both plants and cooked meats.

The three most common religions in India that enforce vegetarianism are Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Most Indian religions have philosophical laws that forbid consumption of meat; Jainism is just one of the many religions that institutes an outright ban on meat consumption. India is home to more vegetarians than any other country. About 30% of India's 1.2 billion population practices vegetarianism, with overall meat consumption increasing. Vegetarianism in religion is very common in Indian history. The Hindus practiced vegetarianism as a way to observe and participate in nonviolence. In participating in nonviolence, they were not allowed to kill any animal, and especially not eat animals. In Buddhism, vegetarianism was observed to strictly follow the precept that killing is prohibited. While some Buddhists view this as intended toward the forbiddance of killing humans, there are some Buddhists that view this by means of restricting from killing both humans and other animals, no matter what their size and importance to society. Jainism observes vegetarianism in a way that is similar to that of the Hindus belief in nonviolence, but the Jains are stricter and believed that everyone should participate in being a vegetarian whereas the Hindus allowed people to make their own decisions and preferred that people were vegetarians. Also in Jainism, no use or consumption of products obtained from dead animals was permitted either. They are so careful about not killing living things, that the Jains avoid uprooting plants so to not accidentally kill the plant in its entirety.

Not only will the newly committed vegetarian feel an overall sense of spiritual well-being, according to the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, but the person and the person's physician will begin to notice an overall sense of better health. Newly committed vegetarians will notice a change in the energy and overall sense of being just a short time after transferring from eating meat to a vegetarian status. Vegetarians tend to have lower blood fats, cholesterol, and triglycerides than meat eaters. In result to the consumption of

foods that are higher in fiber and have more natural origins, rather than in fat vegetarians have a much more stable and improved digestive systems compared to the digestive systems of meat eaters.

Another health benefit noted in vegetarianism is the reduction in the occurrences of heart disease, compared to meat eaters. This happens because vegetarians are not consuming the high rates of fat found in meat to cause heart disease. Vegetarianism has also been shown to reduce the number of certain cancer possibilities. These possibilities include colon, prostate, and ovarian cancer. Vegetarians are less likely to receive a cancer diagnosis because their diets are low in saturated fat, high in fiber and contain phytochemicals, which protect from cancer. Compared to meat eaters, vegetarians have an approximately forty per cent chance of less likely being diagnosed with certain types of cancer. Studies have linked an increase in white blood cell production to vegetarianism as well. These cells are required in fending off bacteria, infection and disease. Thus, the immune system is stronger when a vegetarian diet is followed.

Diets that are high in animal proteins tend to cause the body to excrete more calcium, uric acid and oxalates. These are three substances that are the main components of kidney stones. By eating a vegetarian diet the body does not secrete as much of these substances, therefore it does not form kidney stones. For many of the same reasons that the risk of kidney stones is reduced by following a vegetarian diet, the chance of diagnosis of osteoporosis is also reduced. Eating meat may actually promote bone loss because it forces calcium out of the body.

Another important health benefit of a vegetarian diet is detoxification. When the diet is limited to vegetables and grains, the body is easily able to cleanse itself of harmful toxins in the body. Fewer of those harmful toxins exist when the body is faced with a vegetarian diet rather than a diet that is high in fat and processed foods. These foods tend to slow down the digestion process and this allows your body to soak up and accumulate the toxins from this type of diet. A person with a diet of regular meat consumption would need to detoxify their body at regular intervals, but because vegetarians do not consume these foods, there is no need for frequent detoxification or no need for detoxification at all.

Another health issue that is almost nonexistent in the vegetarian population is weight. Vegetarians do not ingest the amounts of fat found in meat, and in result do not store the fat in their bodies. The problem is a serious issue for meat eaters. There are many cases of obesity due to the fact that meat eaters store the fat from the meat in their body, and as time goes on they accumulate all the fat from the meat and have troubles with removing it. Your body is naturally healthier and people feel better when the commit to a diet that is high in dietary fiber, which is consumed from vegetables and fruits. A vegetarian essentially feeds their body the nutrition that it needs to provide the body with useful energy, not energy that has to be stored.

One of the most recent social problems occurring in India today is the people's battle with obesity. The word "recent" is enforced because India's economy is rising at a rather rapid rate. The growing economy brings a booming new business industry. People are newly introduced to the extended work hours and in some families, both parents are the "breadwinners". Working long days is a trouble for the Indian middle class families, as is for most people around the world. To help fit feeding the family into their busy schedules they usually pick up food to-go, which in most cases is an unhealthy choice. Because they have busy schedules that the must attend to, they have begun to neglect some of their religious customs, including abstaining from the consumption of meat. In major metropolitan areas as well as some rural areas the fast food industry has sky-rocketed into a major form of food production. There have been reported cases of people waiting in lines ranging from two to three blocks long, just to get food from a fast food restaurant. Because the newly rich attain more amounts of money than they are used to living on, they choose to spend it on food, and not all of it is good. They are leaning towards more processed foods than fruits and vegetables. Overall, they newly rich Indian population is struggling with an increasing waistline. India is one of the countries that have the lowest obesity rate, but its numbers have been continuing to increase for the past decades and show no signs of changing.

Another severe problem concerning the health of most Indians is malnutrition. India's current population is 1.155 billion people. 220 million of India's population is malnourished. India is home to the largest number of malnourished people in the world. In addition, they also contain one-third of the world's underweight children. Generally, people who are malnourished are those living in poverty. Due to the extremely large population of India, there are not enough jobs for everyone and not enough land for everyone to farm and produce their own means of nutrition. This creates a circumstance of survival of the fittest. Those who have the intelligence or skill are able to get jobs or farm to provide for them and their families, those who aren't are cast into poverty because they cannot afford a lifestyle where bringing food to the table is almost guaranteed most every night. Another factor for malnutrition is the family unit, which is commonly very large in India, especially in the lower classes. These people live in crowded, dirty areas in both metropolitan and rural areas. These areas, known as slums, are usually located in terrible areas of cities and are usually surrounded with trash from the city or neighboring areas. The trash is somewhat of a method of exploring for food for families in the slums because they cannot find another source of food. Although any source of food is sparse, the people living in the slums normally are faithful to their religion and its customs of abstaining from meat. The most common religions of the people living in poverty and are malnourished is Hinduism and Jainism.

Little effort is being done to bring a constant, healthy diet back to India. While the people living in poverty do receive support, the efforts are very minimal. The upper class are mostly unwilling to participate in charity, so they save their money for themselves. This way of "contributing" has been the standard form of food distribution for the past few decades. New forms of food distribution have recently been developed. These new techniques focus on the malnourished children living in poverty, specifically those under the age of six. A common new technique is free midday meals in government aided and government funded public schools, allowing over 1.2 billion Indian children to be fed daily. The National Children's Fund is another new technique. This Fund provides support to the voluntary organizations that help the welfare of children, especially those programs focusing on food distribution and also free medical programs helping those in the areas of poverty. Although the government is seen as a somewhat friendly partner in the prevention and fight against poverty, some argue the opposite. People argue that the government control is actually increasing the poverty rate in India, not reducing it.

There are many other ways that an established equal healthy food supply can be administered to every social class. One way in particular would be through education. Children, from a very young age, need to be taught how to maintain a healthy diet that is suitable to both their body, and religion. Whether it is taught in school or even in the families, the lesson is a necessity that is best not cast aside. Another important lesson that is lacking in the education of children in India, especially in the slums, is the values of their religion. If their soul is strengthened with the traditions of their religion, they might feel compelled to continue on with the traditions of eating vegetarian. There are many ways that a food supply could be administered to the areas of poverty, but one technique in particular would be to establish public gardens. This allows for the people to not only create their own food supply, but teaches them a work ethic so that they may feel compelled to search for a job that will lead them into a better and more sustainable lifestyle.

In conclusion, modern influences have altered India's cultural structure. The modern influences have especially influenced food consumption. As India continues to grow, both by population and economy, people changing their food habits and they struggle, especially, with obesity in the more privileged households and those who are faced with a life of poverty continue to be faced with food shortages and struggle with malnutrition. All of these factors can be changed by establishing a food security plan and returning to their ancestors' habits. By doing so, India will have a balanced, healthy food supply that people will be able to live on in all social classes.

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