

Pills or papayas? Survey finds Americans want healthful foods, not more medicines

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If you thought Americans would rather pop a pill to treat illness than make major diet changes, think again. A new survey shows the vast majority would rather change their diets—including trying a vegetarian diet—than use medicines. According to a nationally representative survey of 1,022 adults conducted in mid-January by Opinion Research Corporation, 69 percent of Americans would prefer to try a dietary approach. Just 21 percent preferred treating diabetes with medicines.

The survey, commissioned by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), reinforces results from PCRM's clinical research on diabetes, which has consistently found that people with diabetes adapt well to low-fat vegetarian diets and gain important health benefits.

In Dr. Neal Barnard's Program for Reversing Diabetes, a new book published in January, PCRM president Neal Barnard, M.D., outlines a dietary approach to diabetes based on scientific research showing that a low-fat vegan diet can lower high blood sugar levels three times more effectively than oral medications. In the past, many clinicians have felt that patients lack the willpower to make diet changes and would rather "pop a pill." The new results show just the opposite.

"A low-fat vegetarian diet offers a powerful way to control and even reverse diabetes," said Dr. Barnard. "The idea that Americans would rather take pills than make diet changes is a myth. Americans clearly favor tackling serious diabetes with diet changes, including vegetarian diets." The survey was conducted January 12 through 15, and included

515 women and 507 men, 18 years and older, living in the continental United States.

Other key survey findings:

- Women are even more likely than men to prefer food changes over pills. Women preferred diet by 73 percent versus 17 percent for medicines. For men, the split was 65 percent versus 26 percent.
- People with more education and higher incomes were especially likely to favor a diet approach.
- Americans aged 45 to 64 were more enthusiastic about diet changes, compared with older Americans; 76 percent of the middle-aged respondents preferred diet changes. Among those aged 65 and above, the figure dropped slightly, to 59 percent. The most pill-happy generation was the 18- to 24-year-olds. But even in this group, only 30 percent favored using medicines, while 63 percent favored diet changes.
- People living in Western states were especially likely to prefer diet changes: 73 percent versus only 17 percent for drugs.

Source: Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

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