

Vegetarians may be at lower risk of heart disease, diabetes and stroke

April 13 2011

Vegetarians experience a 36 percent lower prevalence of metabolic syndrome than non-vegetarians, suggests new research from Loma Linda University published in the journal *Diabetes Care*. Because metabolic syndrome can be a precursor to heart disease, diabetes, and stroke, the findings indicate vegetarians may be at lower risk of developing these conditions.

Metabolic syndrome is defined as exhibiting at least three out of five total [risk factors](#): [high blood pressure](#), elevated HDL cholesterol, high glucose levels, elevated triglycerides, and an unhealthy [waist circumference](#). The Loma Linda University study found that while 25 percent of vegetarians had metabolic syndrome, the number significantly rises to 37 percent for semi-vegetarians and 39 percent for non-vegetarians. The results hold up when adjusted for factors such as age, gender, race, physical activity, calories consumed, smoking, and alcohol intake.

"In view of the high rate of metabolic syndrome in the United States and its deleterious [health effects](#), we wanted to examine lifestyle patterns that could be effective in the prevention and possible treatment of this disorder," says lead researcher Nico S. Rizzo, PhD.

"I was not sure if there would be a significant difference between vegetarians and non-vegetarians, and I was surprised by just how much the numbers contrast," he continues. "It indicates that lifestyle factors such as diet can be important in the prevention of metabolic syndrome."

The study examined more than 700 adults randomly sampled from Loma Linda University's Adventist Health Study 2, a long-term study of the lifestyle and health of almost 100,000 Seventh-day Adventist Christians across the United States and Canada.

Thirty-five percent of the subjects in this smaller sub-study were vegetarian. On average, the vegetarians and semi-vegetarians were three years older than non-vegetarians. Despite their slightly older age, vegetarians had lower [triglycerides](#), glucose levels, blood pressure, waist circumference, and body mass index (BMI). Semi-vegetarians also had a significantly lower BMI and waist circumference compared to those who ate meat more regularly.

"This work again shows that diet improves many of the main cardiovascular risk factors that are part of [metabolic syndrome](#)," says Gary Fraser, MD, PhD, principal investigator of Adventist Health Study 2. "Trending toward a plant-based diet is a sensible choice."

Provided by Loma Linda University Adventist Health Sciences Center

Citation: Vegetarians may be at lower risk of heart disease, diabetes and stroke (2011, April 13) retrieved 5 May 2024 from

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