

Study analyzes dietary and exercise behavior of vegans

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Vegans are considered health-conscious both by the public and in their own perception. Researchers at the Center for Public Health have now examined the dietary patterns and physical activity behavior of vegans and found a discrepancy between appearance and reality in many cases.

Although many vegans exercise more than the [average person](#), the widespread consumption of industrially processed foods in this group cannot be classified as beneficial to health. The results of the study were recently published in the journal *Nutrients*.

The research group led by Maria Wakolbinger and Sandra Haider from MedUni Vienna's Center for Public Health conducted an [online survey](#) of 516 people with an average age of 28 who had been vegan for at least three months when the study began. As the responses to the survey demonstrated, "being vegan is not per se synonymous with being 'healthy'," emphasizes study director Maria Wakolbinger. As undisputed as the benefits of a plant-based diet for health are in science in the meantime, the degree of processing of the consumed food has to be taken into account, particularly in this category.

Cake or fruit

Against this background, the research team arrived at the distinction between a "health-conscious" and a "convenience" dietary pattern in the vegan lifestyle. Vegans with a convenience-based diet quality (53%) were characterized by a higher consumption of processed fish and [meat alternatives](#), vegan savory snacks, sauces, cakes and other sweets, convenience foods, fruit juices and refined types of grains.

"The negative effects of industrially processed foods on health have now been clearly proven in studies," Maria Wakolbinger emphasizes. "For people who primarily consume convenience foods, a 29% higher risk of overall mortality, up to 51% higher risk of overweight or obesity, 29% higher risk of cardiovascular diseases and 74% higher risk of type 2 diabetes mellitus have been scientifically proven."

In contrast to the convenience food group, vegans (47%) who are classified as health-conscious consume more vegetables, fruit, protein

and milk alternatives, potatoes, whole-meal products, vegetable oils and fats, and cook more often with fresh ingredients.

The studied vegan population also proved to be heterogeneous with regard to physical activity behavior: "The physical activity level of [vegans](#) is higher overall than that of the average population in Austria. However, as our study illustrated, the health-conscious group is significantly more active than those who belong to the convenience food pattern," explains first author Sandra Haider.

'Pudding veganism'

In contrast to vegetarianism, veganism is a form of plant-based nutrition in which not only meat but all food and by-products of animal origin are dispensed with. In Austria, approximately 2% of people now follow a [vegan diet](#). The term "pudding vegetarianism" has already become established for variants of the vegetarian diet that are unfavorable to health in which, for example, many sweets are consumed instead of meat.

"Accordingly, the [convenience](#) dietary pattern we identified could well be called 'pudding veganism,'" Maria Wakolbinger and Sandra Haider summarize in their study on raising awareness, which they want to contribute in view of the booming market for ultra-processed meat and dairy substitutes. Today, vegan meat and milk alternatives generate an annual turnover of 1.7 billion Euros in Europe.

More information: Sandra Haider et al, The Association between Vegan Dietary Patterns and Physical Activity—A Cross-Sectional Online Survey, *Nutrients* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/nu15081847](https://doi.org/10.3390/nu15081847)

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