

ARE VEGETARIANS AT LESS RISK FOR OBESITY, DIABETES, AND HYPERTENSION?

OBESITY, DIABETES, HYPERTENSION, AND VEGETARIAN STATUS AMONG SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS IN BARBADOS: PRELIMINARY RESULTS

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Diabetes, hypertension (high blood pressure), and obesity are growing problems in populations around the world and researchers of this study of Barbados residents wanted to find out what, if any, lifestyle choices might reduce a person's risk for these conditions.

In this 1999 investigation, the authors examined more than 400 adult Adventist males and females, ages 25 to 74 years. Among this group, women suffered from hypertension and diabetes more frequently than men. And, more than twice as many males and females had hypertension, compared to the number of individuals who had diabetes. In addition, over half of the population was overweight and two in 10 individuals were obese.

For the lifestyle factor of diet, seven out of every 10 individuals followed a vegetarian diet, with fewer women than men choosing vegetarian meals. Results indicated that many individuals did not know that they had both high blood pressure or diabetes.

Rates of diabetes, hypertension, overweight and obesity were lower among participants who were following a vegetarian diet for five or more years as compared to those who were on such a diet for less than five years, or for those who were not vegetarians.

In light of these findings what can you do to prevent and control diabetes, hypertension, overweight, or obesity? The authors suggest that it is important to be aware of these facts emphasized by their study:

- You can have hypertension and/or diabetes and not know it;
- Women are more likely than men to have either one or the other of these conditions;
- Obesity itself is a disease;
- Being fat or overweight places individuals at risk for both high blood pressure and diabetes;
- A vegetarian diet may be one factor to help prevent disease;
- Benefits, such as reduced weight, normal blood pressure, and less occurrence of diabetes, will be seen only after behavior changes have been made over time. With support from family and significant others, the authors encourage, "Stick with the program and stay committed to change."

The clear message from this study is that populations and individuals continue to be at risk for these three conditions, but since these conditions can be prevented, we can take steps to avoid disease. The authors recommend these healthy lifestyle actions to save lives, lengthen lives, and enhance the quality of lives while reducing health care costs.

To control weight and diabetes:

- Adopt a diet that includes more fiber and less meat.

To reduce hypertension and related cardiovascular disease:

- Walking, jogging at least 3 times a week for 30 minutes per session;
- Using steps instead of taking the elevator or escalator;
- Participating in community or group activities.