

## Returning to a Free Life through Vegetarian Diet

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation  
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Over the years, whenever I tried to purchase medical insurance, I was always rejected by the policy providers. The reason was I suffered unexplained fevers and joint pains during my twenties. My antinuclear antibodies index was too high, and I was told that I had lupus, which could cause deterioration of body organs. It would even be dangerous for me to get pregnant. With my medical training, I fully understood the severe nature of my condition. Thus, I was constantly stressed out and irritable. I lamented and felt sorry for myself.

### Respect Life with a Vegetarian Diet to Curtail Diseases

Are there any ways to help me improve my health? Findings from animal and human research have indicated that a low fat diet with limitation on protein intake, especially the amino acids (primarily from animal protein), can counter diseases of the immune system. However, I had always been fond of gourmet food and delicacies, so it was a long inner struggle to give up my interest and desire in gourmet food. Fortunately, at the time, I was introduced to Buddhism. The Dharma Masters and fellow Buddhists kindly and patiently enlightened me that like humans, animals are made of flesh and blood, with awareness and emotions. So, I decided that no matter how good the taste, regardless of how strong the temptation, and despite the difficulty, I resolved to never eat animals again.

When I decided to become a vegetarian, the first resistance actually came from my parents. They were worried that the change would lead to malnutrition. However, step by step, I proved to them that if I carefully selected the food, then the vegetarian protein and fat that were digested and absorbed by the body were all better than animal counterparts. Vegetarian fiber and vitamins were far better than meat and fish products. The most common killers today – myocardial infarction and strokes – are so prevalent because of high cholesterol and fatty blood in our body. If we could replace animal product consumption with vegetarian diet, then our health will ultimately improve. Major international studies have also demonstrated that vegetarian diet can prevent and even alleviate diabetes. In experiments by N.D. Barnard and others, patients with Type II Diabetes were compared in two control groups. One group was given a low fat vegetarian diet, while the others continued with traditional diet. The vegetarian group showed reductions in HbA1C, total cholesterol, and LDL (lower density lipoprotein). Similarly, D.J. Jenkins and others reported that eating whole grain foods rather than traditional meat-oriented foods improved blood sugar range reading for diabetes and insulin resistance. The possibility to have diabetes induced cardio-vascular disease was also reduced. Beans and vegetarian protein can reduce proteins in the urine and reduce stress on the kidneys. Consequently, there is much less danger of having kidney complications resulting from Type II Diabetes.

When my family realized that I am dining with a healthier style, naturally they were happy with the result. Still, while at work or eating with family and friends, I sometimes worried that we could not find a venue that accommodated vegetarians or that I inconvenience others by insisting upon vegetarian diet. However, looking from a different perspective; if at a gathering,

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there are good friends, who could not eat beef or pork because of allergy or religion, we would definitely understand and accommodate. We would still enjoy their company. Then the same consideration should be applied for vegetarians.

### **Vegetarian Diet Soothes Body and Soul - Life Becomes More Tender**

Finally, the most difficult barrier to overcome was actually within my own heart. I was afraid that I could not persist being a vegetarian for the rest of my life. Would I falter and eat meat again? I told myself: most of us are not saints; we are bound to make mistakes. However, once when we know right from wrong, we ought to proceed in the right direction. Every now and then, we may accidentally have a traffic violation, get angry, or commit a mistake, but we cannot just give up and turn into a completely bad person. The choice to become a vegetarian should be the same.

In the last twenty some years, I have evolved from being a trymy- best vegetarian to a dairy free and eggless diet, and I am currently pursuing a pure vegan diet. My previously high anti-nuclear antibodies index has steadily dropped lower and lower. For years, it has actually been trending toward negative readings. My energy and stamina at work and in sports matched those of my peers. I do not get irritated or angry as easily as before. My two adorable sons now enjoy playing and doing homework with me; they praise their mother to be more gentle and patient. I believe all these improvements are the results from my vegetarian diet, which has not only improved my health, but also turned my life around.

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