

FAQ on Vegetarian Diet

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation
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Q: Why do we adopt a vegetarian diet? What are the supporting reasons?

A: There are two reasons for a vegetarian diet.

1. The concept of cherishing life: many people can appear to love their pet dogs or pet cats more than their relatives and friends. When they hear about incidents of animal cruelty, they are very upset and even seek law or media attention to condemn the act. If their pets were to be killed for foods, their reaction would be very strong indeed. However, they may be very indifferent toward the welfare of other animals. Are there any difference between your pet dogs or pet cat and other animals such as pigs, cattle, or lambs? They are all living beings; how could you stand the idea of slaughtering them and making the bad karma of killing?
2. Adopting a vegetarian diet is the most direct way to rescue the world from global warming crisis. Research results indicate that eating vegetarian foods can reduce carbon production by 4.1 kg per day per person. This is approximately equivalent to the absorption of carbon dioxide by 108-360 trees. To produce 1 kg of meat, an equivalent of 36.4 kg of carbon dioxide is emitted into the atmosphere. Moreover, the production of meat is not energy efficient; it is estimated that the amount of energy required raising and transporting 1 kg of beef, lamb, or pork can power a 100-watt light bulb for three weeks. Therefore, a simple change of life style can effectively slow down the global warming trend.



Q: In real life, it is very difficult to abide a strictly pure vegetarian diet. In certain circumstances, one may have to eat foods mixing with animal product, can one still be counted as a vegetarian?

A: The main purpose of being a vegetarian is for a long term cultivation of compassion and loving kindness, purifying the mind and body, and protection of the environment. In the process, it is more important to be constantly mindful of the initial vow and commitment of non-harming. If circumstances or occasions that do not allow a strict vegetarian diet, we may have no choice but to follow the flow of events. The most importance thing to remember is that we should not “intentionally” be eating meat or harming sentient beings.

Q: If delicious foods are lying in front of me or I am seeing other people enjoying meat-based delicious food, how can I restrain myself?

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Meat-based foods on the dining table are the end product of a process involving the beginning of life to the ending of life, even though we do not directly participate in the whole process. However, if we think of how the meat are carved from the animal body piece by piece, and the crying voice of animals when they are slaughtered, we can empathize this as if we were wounded and bleeding; there is intolerable pain and suffering. If we view the meat dishes on the dining table in this way, they lose the lure of delicious taste and become merely things that will no longer satisfy our taste buds. When we clearly comprehend these thoughts in our mind, we know how to face the situation at the very moment.



Q: I often heard that vegetarian diet is not nutritionally balanced, how do I solve this problem?

A: Nutritional imbalance has many causes depending on food intake, not simply due to a meat-based diet or due to a vegetarian diet. Evidence from scientific research indicates a vegetarian diet is much healthier; it is healthier to eat natural vegetarian foods, not processed vegetarian food. For nutritional balance, it is suggested that every meal should contain vegetables and fruits of 4 different colors. A vegetarian diet that is not balanced can be deficient in certain minerals, vitamins (the B vitamin groups), and certain fats and protein components most readily found in animals. You should know that sea-weed products provide minerals, yellow vegetable provides B vitamins, and animal fats and proteins can be substituted with tofu, soy bean, or nuts. We believe that if we are mindful of what we eat, we can all enjoy happy and healthy vegetarian meals.