



Vegan Diet Linked to Lower Medication Use In Old Age

By Megan Edwards
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Older adults who eat vegan may need significantly fewer prescription drugs than their non-vegetarian counterparts, according to new research.

A [study](#) published in the *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* examined the relationship between a vegan diet and polypharmacy—the use of five or more daily medications—in older adults. The study included 328 people aged 60 and older who participated in health measurements and answered questionnaires about what they ate, their chronic illnesses, and how many prescription drugs they took. Researchers found that people who consumed a vegan diet used 58 percent fewer medications than those who ate a non-vegetarian diet.

Researchers also noted that age, body mass index (BMI), and pre-existing diseases impacted the number of pills taken by older adults. BMI had a particularly strong positive correlation with polypharmacy, meaning the higher the BMI of a participant the more pills they took. But even when taking these factors into account, the data showed a strong association between a vegan diet and a reduction in pharmaceutical use by more than half.

When examining possible explanations for why a vegan diet was so strongly linked with a decreased need for medication, researchers hypothesized that the increased fiber intake and decreased [saturated fat](#) intake that is common of vegan or plant-based diets positively impacted key health markers such as blood sugar, blood pressure, weight, and cholesterol.

A [larger study](#) from 2018 looked at a sample of nearly 4,000 older adults who took multiple medications and found a similar correlation between [healthy lifestyle](#) choices and lower mortality rates (especially deaths due to cardiovascular incidents). Behaviors such as not smoking, being physically active, consuming a moderate amount of alcohol, and getting adequate sleep were assessed and used to rank participants' overall lifestyle as unfavorable, intermediate, or favorable. Researchers affirmed that those with intermediate or favorable lifestyle rankings had a much lower mortality risk than those who engaged in less healthy behaviors.

The bottom line: Eating more plants might mean taking fewer pills later in life. This latest research adds to the ever-growing body of evidence that a plant-based diet is beneficial for your health at any age or stage of life.