What’s the Best Way to Lower Levels of IGF-1, the Cancer-Promoting Growth Hormone?

By Julia Helms
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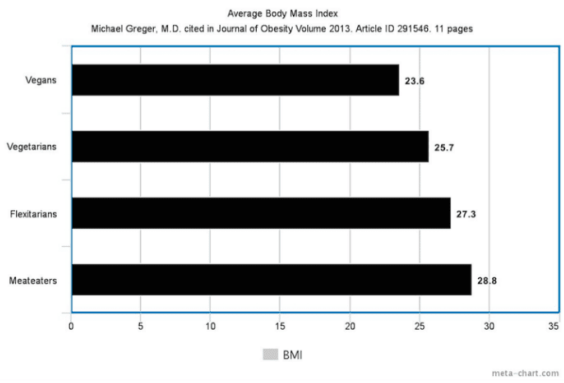
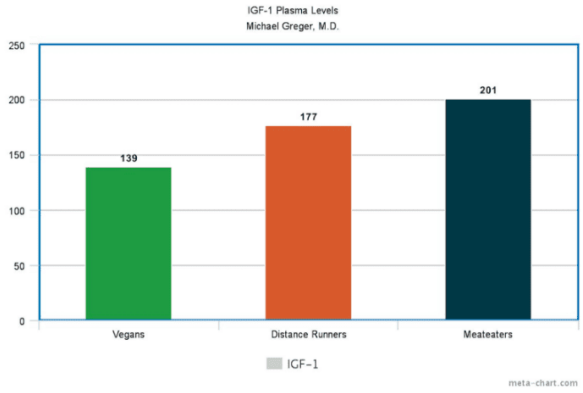
In the NutritionFacts.org video below, Dr. Michael Greger explores the link between obesity and the cancer-causing agent IGF-1* (insulin-like growth factor) produced by fat cells. Children and adults with a higher body mass index (BMI) typically have higher levels of IGF-1. We’ve also summarized his main points below.

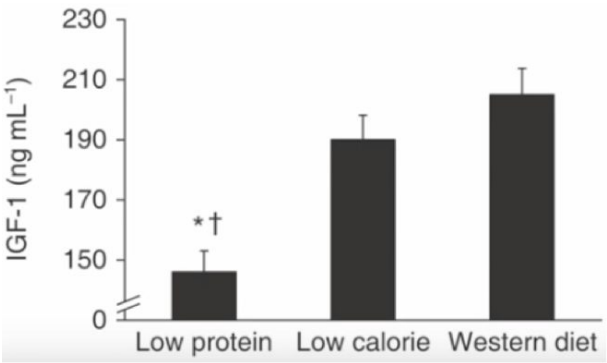
Studies suggest those who eat a vegan diet have lower levels of IGF-1 than meat-eaters and vegetarians. Looking at the chart below, they also have lower BMIs. So can one lower their levels of this cancer-causing hormone just by lowering their BMI?



For answers, Dr. Greger looked at studies that compared long distance runners to plant-based eaters. The runners had similar BMIs to the plant-based eaters, but still ate meat and dairy. Blood tests showed that those eating a low fat, plant-based diet still had lower levels of IGF-1 than long distance runners.



Whole plant-foods typically have fewer calories than those included in the Western diet. So could it be that vegans are simply eating fewer calories? When compared with people eating a calorie-restrictive diet, plant-based eaters still had the lowest levels of IGF-1.



While BMI is a factor in cancer risk, IGF-1 is lowest in those who eat a low-fat, whole foods plant-based diet. It is not how many calories, but which calories that seem to determine cancer risk. Watch the video to learn why scientists suggest, “reduced protein intake may become

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an important component of anticancer and anti-aging dietary interventions.”

*IGF-1: Insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1) is a natural human growth hormone instrumental in normal growth during childhood, but in adulthood can promote abnormal growth—the proliferation, spread (metastasis), and invasion of cancer.

Dr. Greger’s Video Sources:

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