



Why Parents Should Want Vegan Children

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May 10 2012

The vegan diet based in whole-foods has been proven to prevent death from heart disease, reduce “bad” cholesterol levels, and lower blood pressure. It’s also associated with lower body weight, lower rates of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and cancer.

Sounds like the solution to most of America’s health problems, doesn’t it? While the science is consistent on these benefits, “experts” in the media are instilling fear in parents by warning them not to omit the meat and dairy products that have made people – and children – sick for generations.

As a dietitian, I know just how crucial it is that children learn the importance of healthy eating at a young age. The earlier kids start loading up on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, the earlier they start reaping the benefits of a diet rich in fiber, antioxidants, and other nutrients that fight disease.

Plant-based diets are beneficial for children, as confirmed by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (formerly the American Dietetic Association), the largest nutrition organization in the world, and arguably one of the more conservative with dietary advice. Not only does this organization say that a vegan diet is appropriate for all stages of life, including infancy and childhood, it also says that a plant-based diet helps prevent dying from heart disease, reduces cholesterol levels, lowers blood pressure, and well, you know the rest.

In addition, the animal-based foods do not provide the benefits to children that have long been advertised. For example, a study recently published in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, showed that dairy products and calcium do not prevent stress fractures among active, adolescent girls. In fact, girls consuming the most calcium (primarily from dairy products) had more than double the risk of stress fracture, compared with those getting less calcium. These findings are in line with a 2005 scientific review appearing in the journal *Pediatrics* that showed dairy products do not promote bone health in children and young adults.

Given the wide variety of plant-based foods that are available, it’s easy to make healthy vegan versions of favorite family meals. Further, children eating a well-balanced vegan diet create a pattern of healthful eating that they can carry into adulthood.