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Risk of hospitalization or death from ischemic heart disease among British vegetarians and nonvegetarians: results from the EPIC-Oxford cohort study.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Few previous prospective studies have examined differences in incident ischemic heart disease (IHD) risk between vegetarians and nonvegetarians.

OBJECTIVE: The objective was to examine the association of a vegetarian diet with risk of incident (nonfatal and fatal) IHD.

DESIGN: A total of 44,561 men and women living in England and Scotland who were enrolled in the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC)-Oxford study, of whom 34% consumed a vegetarian diet at baseline, were part of the analysis. Incident cases of IHD were identified through linkage with hospital records and death certificates. Serum lipids and blood pressure measurements were available for 1519 noncases, who were matched to IHD cases by sex and age. IHD risk by vegetarian status was estimated by using multivariate Cox proportional hazards models.

RESULTS: After an average follow-up of 11.6 y, there were 1235 IHD cases (1066 hospital admissions and 169 deaths). Compared with nonvegetarians, vegetarians had a lower mean BMI [in kg/m²; -1.2 (95% CI: -1.3, -1.1)], non-HDL-cholesterol concentration [-0.45 (95% CI: -0.60, -0.30) mmol/L], and systolic blood pressure [-3.3 (95% CI: -5.9, -0.7) mm Hg]. Vegetarians had a 32% lower risk (HR: 0.68; 95% CI: 0.58, 0.81) of IHD than did nonvegetarians, which was only slightly attenuated after adjustment for BMI and did not differ materially by sex, age, BMI, smoking, or the presence of IHD risk factors.

CONCLUSION: Consuming a vegetarian diet was associated with lower IHD risk, a finding that is probably mediated by differences in non-HDL cholesterol, and systolic blood pressure.

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Vegetarian Diet Can Reduce Heart Disease Risk By Up To 32 Per Cent: Study

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If you want to do your heart a favour, put down the bacon. But don't stop there, because all your favourite meats have to go.

A study from the University of Oxford found a vegetarian diet [cuts the risk of ischemic heart disease](#) by up to 32 per cent. Sound like a massive proportion? That figure even takes into account variables like sex, age, activity level and smoking.

Even when adjusting for body mass index, vegetarianism was found to reduce heart disease risk by 28 per cent.

The study looked at a group of 44,561 men and women from England and Scotland — of which 34 per cent were vegetarians — making it the largest ever U.K. study comparing vegetarians and meat eaters.

So what is it about choosing salad over steak that makes for a healthier heart? Researchers think the lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels found in the vegetarian participants are the key.

"Most of the difference in risk is probably caused by effects on cholesterol and blood pressure, and shows the important role of diet in the prevention of heart disease," explains Francesca Crowe, [lead author of the study](#).

Vegetarians in the study also generally had lower BMIs.

So deny it all you want meat lovers, but this is hardly the first piece of evidence that a balanced vegetarian diet is loaded with health benefits. Other studies suggest that vegetarian diets can [increase your life span](#), improve [your mood](#), help [you lose weight](#) and [reduce cancer risks](#).

However, if you're not ready to give up meat completely, you could always try a [flexitarian \("part-time" vegetarian\) diet](#) and reap some of the health rewards of reduced meat intake.

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