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Food And Health

Our Gastro Anatomy: The Logic Of Going VEGAN

In the previous issue **DR NANDITA SHAH** wrote about some myths related to health, food and our diets and got us into the questioning mode. Here, she informs us that human beings are designed to be vegans

What is a vegan diet? As Indians, we are very familiar with the word 'vegetarian'. But the word 'vegan' is new to our ears. A vegan is someone who does not consume any animal products. No meat, fish, milk or eggs. So no paneer, cheese, curd, ghee or milk for vegans. But a very distinct trend towards veganism is taking place all over the world. Be it India or abroad, you are very likely to see the word 'vegan' against some dishes at cafes and restaurants. And for good reasons too. A vegan diet is great not just for health, it's really environment friendly and compassionate. Could most of the meat eating world be wrong? You wonder! Is there really that much to veganism? How do I know all this is true? Could I have been wrong all my life? A lot of questions may come up. And there's one simple way to answer. Try it!



Learning from our relatives the monkeys

Most animals in nature are healthy because they eat the food most suited to their anatomy. Man is innovative. Like our cousins the monkeys we love to imitate other species and even go a step beyond. We saw the birds and we wanted to fly; today we have planes. We saw the aquatic animals and now with ships we have conquered the seas. We saw the carnivores, and we wanted to kill. So far, so good. Today we are the biggest predators on the planet, and this is killing us, literally. Heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and cancer, today's number one killers are all linked to our food habits. What can we do about it? We could begin by looking at our cousins and what they eat!

Our Herbivorous instincts and habits

Like the herbivores we are herd animals. We want to do what everyone else does whether its fashion, or eating. We live in societies, towns and cities. Carnivores usually live alone or in small families. One of the biggest challenges in changing our eating habits is our society. If everyone were to change it would be easy.

Leave a horse or a cow in the pasture and it will eat and pause and eat and pause, all day. So do we. Carnivores don't. They kill and eat their prey and then rest, sometimes for days. We, like herbivores eat all day. Breakfast, lunch, dinner, a few snacks. If we eat the foods a carnivore would eat and then eat as often as an herbivore, don't you think it will cause problems?

When we walk through an orchard or a farm, we instinctively pluck the ripe fresh fruits and vegetables and eat them. We enjoy eating them freshly plucked. There's no danger in taking a dog for a walk with us there. He or she won't be interested in what's growing. But a nearby henhouse may cause him to salivate. We are best friends but so different. Not many of us salivate when we see a chicken or goat or cow. We don't get the urge to pounce on it. Manufacturers know about our instincts all too well. When you go shopping you are attracted by herbal products, shampoos, soaps and toiletries that smell of all kinds of fruits and flowers. Can you imagine buying chicken, beef or fish smelling toiletries instead? Instinctually we are attracted to plants and their smells, not to animal flesh and its smell of death and decay. But culturally it's different. The barbecue is inviting, the smell of fish can be heavenly, and this is because of our conditioning. We have grown up with these foods. They remind us of festivity, and comfort. But conditioning can be reversed. It's possible to give up these foods and not miss them. We could not do the same with plants. That is instinctual.



Our Sweet Tooth and Multi-coloured Vision

If all this wasn't enough, we have our decidedly sweet tooth. This was not created by Nature in a wicked attempt to tempt us and make us sick, but rather in order to make us attracted to the foods that are best for us, the fruits. Today we have learnt to artificially sweeten everything so that it tastes good. This of course is unhealthy. But when we renounce the spoonfuls of sugar, we can't taste the

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sweetness even in vegetables like carrots, peas, and even onions and potatoes. Carnivores don't get tempted by sweets because they do not have taste buds for the sweet taste.

We also have a multi-coloured vision, which again most other animals don't. This is because the best foods for us span the whole range of the rainbow. It's good to eat a rainbow every day. When we see lots of different coloured fruits and vegetables at a market we are tempted to buy them. When we go to a good restaurant, no matter what we order, it's made to look more attractive by garnishing it with colourful vegetables.

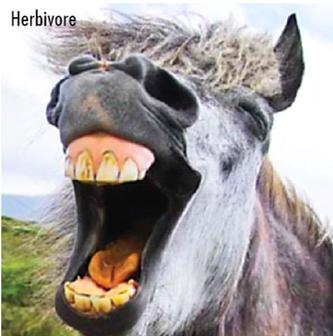
Omnivores or Herbivores? – A look at our anatomy

Since childhood we've been told that we're omnivores, but if we were to compare our anatomy with that of carnivores, herbivores, and omnivores it would be easier to arrive at the truth. Every animal has an anatomy that is suitable to its biological needs.

Eating whole is the key

In most cases, in Nature, whenever an animal eats another animal, it eats it whole, leaving behind nothing. Sometimes when the prey is too big there may be an exception, but even this is a rare. Nature is not wasteful. So when a cat eats a rat or a squirrel, it eats its prey from head to tail leaving behind not even a hair or a bone. Imagine the skeletons and pelts of mice and rats that we would see every morning after the stray cats and dogs have feasted during the nights if this were not so. The same is with a lion or a pride of lions when they eat a zebra or an antelope. The exception may be when a smaller animal eats a much larger one, say a pack of hyenas devouring the carcass of an elephant – here some bones may be left behind.

But the biggest exception is us, humans. We are unable to eat the animals that we consume for meat, whole. We first take off the skin, then we take out the bones. Our anatomy still cannot handle it. We need a knife or cleaver to hack it, and fire to cook it. Could it be that eating these animals is not anatomically suitable for us?



Teeth Can Tell their Own Story

Look at the teeth of an herbivore, and then at that of a carnivore, or even that of an omnivore, and then look at your own set of teeth in the mirror. It becomes clear that our teeth resemble that of an herbivore. We don't have a real set of canines that is able to attack our prey and tear it apart. Like herbivores, we can move our jaws both vertically and horizontally. Carnivores can only open their jaws vertically. Herbivores drink by sipping, and carnivores drink by lapping. We, like herbivores, sip.

We have enzymes in our mouths to digest carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are found in plants. Carnivores on the other hand don't have an enzyme in their mouth, but instead have a lot of acid in the stomach so that they can destroy all the germs on their prey, and then begin to dissolve and digest the skin, bones and flesh.

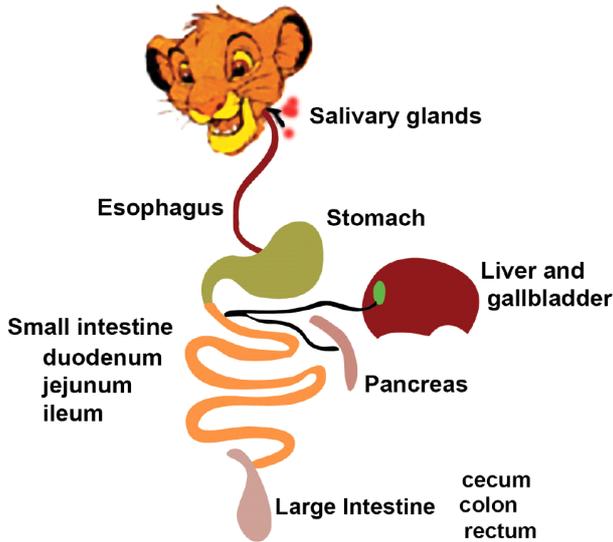
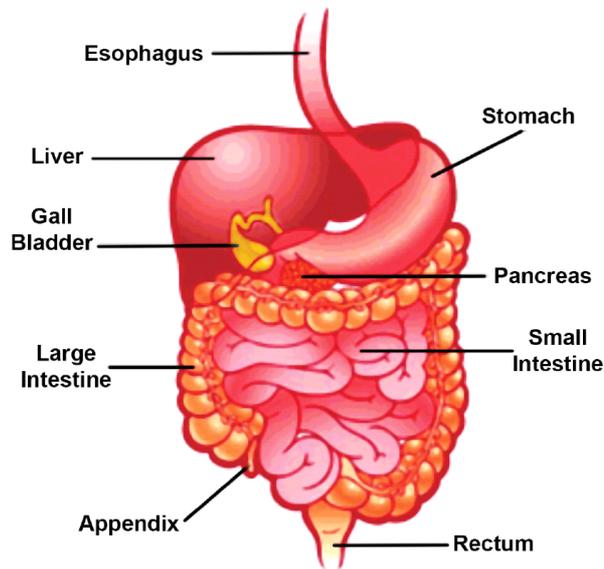
Proteins are digested in the stomach. It is clear that our stomach with its much lower amount of acid is not designed to digest a large amount of protein, and when we do eat a high protein diet, we force our stomachs to produce a lot of acid. This is one of the causes of acidity.

And, because we don't have a lot of acid in our stomachs, when we eat a high protein meal, we most often throw in a bit of acid to help digestion. Think about it, when you go to Mc Donald's or KFC's, what do you order to drink? Most likely a Coke or something similar. This is a highly acidic drink, which helps the digestion of the protein. The same is the reason why non-vegetarian restaurants serve alcohol but vegetarian restaurants don't. Traditionally it was only the non-vegetarians that needed to consume something acidic to aid digestion. Alcohol turns acidic in our body. Whenever we finish a heavy meal, we often drink a coffee or tea, another acidic drink. All this acid may aid digestion, but its effect on our health is not so great. For example this acid leaches calcium out of the bones thereby causing osteoporosis and even cavities.

After eating a meal of flesh or cheese we typically feel full and groggy. The coffee helps a bit but we may desire a nap. This is because all our energy is concentrated towards the difficult task of digestion. The opposite is usually true when we eat fruits or a fresh vegetable salad. We feel invigorated and energised because these foods are easy to digest and pass through the stomach quickly.

Moving downwards through the digestive tract

Going down to the digestive system, we see huge differences. The carnivore's stomach capacity is 60 to 70% of the total digestive system. Their intestines are relatively much shorter. This is because they eat large meals and most of the digestion is done in the stomach. In the case of herbivores and ourselves, the intestines are much longer because much of the digestion and absorption is done here. A carnivore's digestive system is three times the length of its spine. Relatively short. Animal flesh decays fast, and needs to pass out of the system quickly. An herbivore's digestive tract is much longer, 12 to 16 times the length of its spine. Our own digestive system is 12 times the length of our spine. If decaying animal flesh passes through this long tube, toxins are released from it and are unfortunately absorbed by our systems. This is why when we eat animal products we predispose ourselves to colon cancer.



produces milk for its young. Once the baby grows up they don't drink milk any more. Except for humans. We continue to consume milk all our lives in all kinds of forms - milk, curds, butter, ghee, cheese, paneer, cream, ice cream and more. No animal drinks another animal's milk, except for humans. The problem is that meat and milk have a similar composition, ie high protein, high fat and no fibre. This is why vegetarians and non-vegetarians get the same diseases, but a vegan can avoid most of them if he consumes healthy, whole vegan foods.

On Your Marks, Get Set, Go!

Wait a minute don't do it just yet. There's a learning curve to anything new. The first thing you need to do is make a list all the healthy vegan foods you'll enjoy. What you will cook, what

you will order in a restaurant, what you will keep in your bag to snack on. Take your time and make your list. The next step is to clear your home and surroundings of all the foods you no longer wish to eat. Temptation can really get in the way, so clean it up. Finally stock up on lots of new foods that will fit into your new lifestyle. And if you like to read, pick up a book on veganism too. For more information on going vegan check out our website www.sharan-india.org. Now you are set. Take a 4 week trial run!

And if you didn't quite get there this time, don't worry. In a future issue we'll talk a little bit about how to get over our conditionings, or how to re-condition ourselves. You will see how easy it can be once you make the choice.

And you will also see how it reverses many diseases. Heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, certain cancers, allergies, asthma, colds and migraines can all be reversed. Some auto immune disorders improve, energy improves, skin improves, and even depression and mental disorders can reverse.

In May and June 2010 Dr Nandita Shah will conduct a 21 day diabetes reversal programme in Bangalore. "Many diabetics will reverse their high blood sugars and get off all medications or insulin. They will get a new lease of life," says a confident Dr Shah. Watch out for the report in the next issue so that you too can learn how to prevent and reverse illnesses with a healthy vegan diet.