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New Findings Emerge

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Green vegetables and legumes lower your risk of colorectal cancer.

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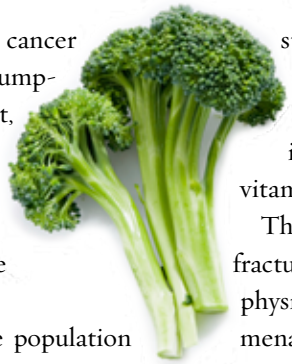
Red meat doubles your risk of diabetes.

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Interesting new data from the Adventist Health Study–2 continues to emerge. The project began in 2002 with almost 100,000 Adventists enrolled nationwide. The health data provides a clear focus on how a healthy lifestyle can reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis.



Colorectal cancer is a leading cause of cancer death in the United States. A frequent consumption of cooked green vegetables, dried fruit, legumes or brown rice was associated with a 24 to 40 percent decreased risk of colorectal polyps (which may develop into cancer) in Adventists, compared with those using these foods infrequently.

In the United States, 27 percent of the population suffer from metabolic syndrome, a condition that can be associated with serious health consequences. In the Adventist Health study, a vegetarian dietary pattern was associated with a more favorable profile of metabolic risk factors (HDL cholesterol, triglycerides, glucose, blood pressure levels and waist circumference), as well as a 56 percent lower risk of metabolic syndrome compared with a non-vegetarian dietary pattern.

Following a vegetarian diet is associated with a lower body weight and a lower risk of diabetes. Mean body mass index was 23.6 for vegans, 25.7 for lacto-ovo vegetarians, while the mean for nonvegetarians was 28.8 kg/m2. Prevalence of type 2 diabetes was 2.9 percent in vegans, 3.2 percent in lacto-ovo-vegetarians and 7.6 percent in nonvegetarians. After adjustment for many factors, vegans had a 49 percent lower risk and lacto-ovo vegetarians a 46 percent lower risk of type 2 diabetes compared to non-vegetarians.

Factors such as vitamin D supplementation, degree of skin pigmentation, and the amount and intensity of sun exposure have a greater influence on vitamin D status than diet. No significant differences were found in vitamin D status between vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Mean serum 25(OH)D levels (a measure of D status) were higher in whites (77.1 nmol/L) than in blacks (50.7 nmol/L). Pigmented skin reduces vitamin D production.

There was a 37 percent reduction in risk of wrist fracture for the Adventist women with highest level of physical activity with respect to the lowest level. Early menarche was found to be associated with increased ischemic heart disease and stroke mortality, and overall mortality. A one-year delay in menarche was associated with 4.5 percent lower total mortality, 6.0 percent lower ischemic heart disease mortality and 8.6 percent lower stroke mortality.

Long-term consumption of meat at least once a week was associated with a 74 percent increase in risk of diabetes compared to long-term adherence to a vegetarian diet. Even after accounting for overweight and body weight changes, weekly meat intake remained an important risk factor for diabetes. Risk of diabetes was greater when members consumed processed meats (frankfurters, etc.) rather than other meats.

Postmenopausal Adventist women who ate meat at least once a week increased their risk of ovarian cancer 2.4 times, while eating cheese three or more times per week doubled their risk. Risk was reduced 68 percent with eating tomatoes five or more times per week. High fruit consumption also lowered risk.

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