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### The Shortcomings of Veganism

Several years ago, Holly Paige, British mother of four, realized there was something wrong with her two youngest children. She noticed her daughter's "cheeks were pinched, she was small for her age, and although she had skinny arms and legs, her belly was big and swollen" (Mann 1). Occasionally in the grocery store, her youngest daughter would grab a package of butter off the shelf and bite into it as though it were a cookie. After observing these oddities, visiting several doctors, and doing some research herself, Paige concluded that her kids were suffering from both vitamin D and protein deficiencies. Immediately following this discovery, she ended the vegan diet her family had been following and assumed a more traditional diet.

As of late, veganism has become an increasingly popular, yet controversial diet with some people claiming it is the healthiest way to live and others stating it is not a maintainable way to live. While Paige's story is extreme, her children are just one example of veganism failing to be healthier than alternative diets. Though veganism may be beneficial for the select few, I believe that it is overrated and not a healthy choice for all individuals, especially children. As a growing child, there are certain nutritional elements that simply cannot be ingested when avoiding all animal products. Because of the potential health risks for children, and other susceptible groups, vegan diets should be followed only after doing the proper research.

According to Authority Nutrition, being vegan is not a good idea for your health. This is primarily because you are deprived of many essential nutrients such as Vitamin B12 (Gunnars). Additionally, many of the amino acids that are found primarily in animal protein are not found in in other foods and are therefore not made up for. Additionally, there is little to no evidence proving that a vegan diet is superior for weight loss compared to other diets. Conversely, according to a study done by the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, vegan diets are higher in fiber, magnesium, folic acid, vitamins C and E, and several other things (Craig).

A strong argument has been made for being vegan as an adult claiming that “most lifestyle diseases, diabetes, cancer, and other auto-immune disorders can be prevented by the right diet” (Velayanikal). More specifically, vegans have a “lower risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD), obesity, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers” (Craig). These benefits can be explained by an increased consumption of fruits and vegetables, which are high in fiber and vitamins C and E, as well as the elimination of red meat which is a known cause of cardiovascular disease. A less common health benefit was found by a man named Prasad Hariharan who told Velayanikal in an interview that he “often used to have stomach upsets and would catch cold[s] frequently,” (Velayanikal) but after he stopped consuming these milk products, his health issues seemed to disappear and he saw an improvement in stomach health. While not as traditional of a benefit, Hariharan’s case demonstrates the wide range of benefits that a vegan diet can provide.

A study conducted at the Department of Nutrition at Benedictine University found that decreasing consumption of animal products could be “associated with improved mood” (Beezhold et. al. 294). More specifically, those who consumed a vegan diet versus an omnivorous diet saw changes in stress level. The same study however proved that fewer people

with depression or anxiety saw the same benefits. While the decrease in stress could be more of a placebo effect than anything, it is an interesting thought that one's diet can have such a large effect on their life.

While there are some benefits to being vegan, there are more drawbacks that make it an inferior choice of diet to that of others. A recurring theme seems to emerge as the number one issue with veganism: lack of nutrients. An article focusing on vegan diets for dancers quotes dietician Suzanne Farrell, who points out that “many vegetarians and vegans are missing the veggie part” (Meanley et. al. 1) and as a result are eating foods that may not come from animals but also do not have any nutritional value. Also discussed in this article are the so-called “five pitfalls of veganism,” which include “lack of calcium, low calorie count, diminished muscle tone, limited variety, and too little fat.” All five of these are potential health risks that are commonly associated with a vegan diet. Additionally, these deficiencies are especially prevalent for dancers and other athletes who are expending a lot of energy on a daily basis.

An increase in skepticism of strict diets for children was strengthened in 2008 when “a 12-year-old vegan girl was admitted to a Scottish hospital with rickets,” (Mann 2) a degenerative bone disease that occurs when the person has a vitamin D deficiency. “Her spine was said to resemble that of an 80-year-old woman.” Most commonly those who are vegan suffer from a lack of vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, iron, protein, and low caloric intake, hence increasing the risk for diseases such Rickets and others that occur as a result of nutrient deficiencies. This is a huge risk that is associated with being vegan and can potentially be life threatening.

The same article pointed out the danger of binge eating animal products as a result of being vegan for long periods of time. With any extreme diet, there is a risk for bingeing and

suffering from the consequences, however, after eliminating all animal products from your diet, the reintroduction of them can have incredibly severe consequences. Paige, the mother of four introduced earlier says after having one bite of chicken for the first time in years, she “went wild. Typically, in a day [she] would eat half a chicken, two litres of milk, half a pound of cheese and three eggs... It went on for weeks” (Mann 3). Paige’s experience of reintroducing animal products was not a healthy reintroduction. After years of being without these foods, she was unable to responsibly reintroduce it back into her life.

Another drawback to the vegan diet is fostered by a popular misconception that it leads to extreme, quick weight loss. This has been tested against other diets, though, and found not to be true. After being compared to the Atkins diet, those who were vegan lost only half the weight those on the Atkins diet lost. A study conducted at Stanford known as the A to Z study compared the Atkins diet (low-carb, high-fat) to the Ornish diet (low-fat, near-vegan). The study concluded the Atkins diet proved more beneficial to the participants. Those on the Atkins diet lost on average double the weight of those on the Ornish diet. Additionally, the Atkins diet seemed to “decrease blood pressure, increase HDL levels, and decrease triglycerides” (Gunnars). This study proved that a vegan diet is not the most beneficial on a health standpoint for several categories.

While veganism has been increasingly popular, there are severe risks that a person should know about before making the change. More specifically, those with children ought to know that their children may be at risk for malnourishment if they choose to feed their child a plant-based diet. Additionally, athletes need to research and test how it may or may not affect their bodies. This is primarily important for athletes because of the low caloric intake that often goes hand-in-hand with being vegan. If these issues are not addressed, a person may be at risk for

living a deficient lifestyle. That being said, people continue to choose this diet as a lifestyle, so clearly some are reaping its benefits. Because no one person is the same, every diet will affect people differently. Keeping this in mind, before starting any diet, a person should do their research and look at both the potential benefits and risks that come with the diet they are going to assume.

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