

News release

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## **A VEGETARIAN FAMILY AFFAIR**

Raising a family as vegetarians is as easy as child's play

Although vegetarianism is becoming more widely accepted by society, families raising their children with vegetarian ideals may encounter opposition from people who still believe that including meat in one's diet is the only way to ensure balanced nutrition. Fortunately this negative stereotype is far from accurate. This common perception is changing as vegetarianism is becoming more accepted globally. In fact, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA's) Dietary Guidelines state that "Vegetarians of all types can achieve recommended nutrient intake"<sup>1</sup>.

Numerous studies confirm that a diet full of fresh fruits and vegetables, grains and soy is your best bet for living a longer, healthier and more enjoyable life<sup>2</sup>.

Vegetarians live about seven years longer, and vegans (who eat no animal products) about 15 years longer than meat eaters, according to a study from Loma Linda University in California. These findings are backed by the China Health Project (the largest population study on diet and health to date), which found that Chinese people who eat the least amount of fat and animal products have the lowest risks of cancer, heart attack and other chronic degenerative diseases. A British study that tracked 6 000 vegetarians and 5 000 meat eaters for 12 years found that vegetarians were 40 percent less likely to die from cancer during that time and 20 percent less likely to die from other diseases<sup>2</sup>.

Furthermore, a study by the Department of Community and Family Medicine at the University of California at San Diego found that children on a vegetarian diet actually grew taller than meat-eating children<sup>1</sup>.

Besides these types of global studies, another reassurance about the sustainability of a vegetarian diet comes from the people who really know – the women who have had trouble-free vegetarian pregnancies, and are the proud parents of health vegetarian children.

Wally and Debbie Fry are two committed vegetarians who began experimenting to find protein alternatives for their own consumption over 19 years ago. All three of their daughters were raised as vegetarians.

"When my eldest daughter Tammy was born, there were not the meat alternatives like there are today. There was no big thing made of the fact that she was vegetarian. She was a strong healthy little girl who was hardly ever sick. When Hayley and later Stacey were born, they were also raised vegetarian. When my family started getting tired of eating broccoli, beans, cauliflower and so on, my husband decided that enough was enough and we had to 'invent' our own meat alternatives. That was the beginning of the Fry's brand!" explains Debbie Fry.

Today this company, Fry's Vegetarian Foods, has become an international success, with the whole family involved in the running of the business. The family also enjoys Fry's Vegetarian Foods as part of their balanced daily diet.

Sisters Tammy Kelly and Hayley Richardson, two of the Fry's daughters, have both chosen to raise their children, aged 18 months and 22 months respectively, as vegetarians as well.

Tammy, who has been in the South African National Karate Team for over ten years, did not supplement her diet during pregnancy as she has always followed a healthy vegetarian diet. "I have never had to supplement my diet with protein powders, multivitamins or minerals.

I do eat Fry's Vegetarian products which supply me with the protein I require on a daily basis," Tammy says. She feeds her son Josh a variety of rice cereal, organic fruit and vegetables, soya milk, and smoothies. Snacks include yogurt, nuts, beans and cottage cheese.

Hayley also feeds her daughter Isabella smoothies as a healthy snack, which contain a selection of paw paw, banana, strawberries, raspberries, cherries, grapes, almonds, goji berries, raw cocoa and soy milk. Both children also enjoy Fry's Vegetarian Foods, which Tammy calls her 'secret weapon'. "All their products can be heated up in a few seconds and you can be reassured that your child is getting a healthy, hormone free, preservative free and nutritionally balanced meal," she says.

Whether it's in the genes, or in the diet, both children seem to have very strong immune systems, endless amounts of energy and are sound sleepers. "My child is thriving despite never having touched a morsel of meat in her first two years of life. From my experience of raising a child as a vegetarian, you will find that your children will eat more of the things you view as being good for them, such as vegetables, fruits, nuts and so on, and they will love them," says Hayley.

Tammy says that her and her husband made the decision to raise their son as a vegetarian, but say that he can make his own food choices once he is old enough to do so. "There are so many options out there to ensure that your child is getting all the nutrients he or she needs. It really is not difficult to feed a vegetarian child. In fact, I would say it is easier," Tammy says.

Mary-Ann Shearer, best-selling South African author of the book, "The Natural Way – a Family's guide to Vibrant Health" (which has sold 190 000 copies to date), agrees that a healthy, natural vegetarian diet can provide a whole family with the right fibre, vitamins and minerals. She has raised three vegetarian daughters and says that this type of diet is much more alkaline forming than the traditional South African diet.

"The main sources of protein for children under a year should ideally be from mother's milk or a replacement. When they are slightly older, good sources of protein include raw nuts, seeds and legumes. Don't forget that there is some degree of protein in every fruit and vegetable. To make sure we obtain the correct nutrients in adults and in children, we need to eat at least five to 10 portions of fresh fruit and vegetables daily," Shearer advises those following a vegetarian diet. "A way to incorporate this would be to offer everyone some fresh fruit or vegetables before a meal. This could be in the form of freshly extracted juice, like carrot and apple juice or an avocado, or a salad or vegetable sticks with a dip like hummus which is very high in protein, before each

meal. That way they fill up on the essential foods and nutrients before they eat anything else. This works with the meat eaters too!" she says.

Shearer is bringing Dr Colin Campbell to South Africa early next year for a series of talks. Dr Campbell, from Cornell University in New York, has headed the most comprehensive nutritional research ever done to date, spanning over thirty years, and has concluded that man was designed for a plant-based diet.

It is possible for vegetarians to be adequately nourished for successful pregnancy, when breastfeeding and to raise healthy children. The key is being knowledgeable about nutrition and planning the family's diet carefully<sup>3</sup>. Raising your child vegetarian will establish good eating habits for the rest of his or her life.

If your child learns to enjoy a variety of vegetarian foods early in life, they will naturally be attracted to healthful foods later in life<sup>2</sup>. Remember to speak to your health professional should you have any concerns about your or your family's nutritional needs.

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