

Vegetarianism provides health, environmental benefits

MARY EARP

From vegans to pescatarians, vegetarians are becoming more and more common. From around 3.4% of Americans being vegetarian in 2000 to somewhere from 6-10% today, many people are attempting to evaluate their diet. With decreased cancer possibility, an enormous drop in cholesterol along with the various other health improvements and the sheer ethics behind the fact, vegetarianism may be the right choice.

"I became vegan because the vegan diet is better for health, the planet and animals than a non-vegan diet is," Sequoyah Hill, senior, said.

After being a vegetarian for one year, cholesterol drops by 24.3%. Vegetarians have up to 50% less chance of developing cancer than meat eaters. Meat eaters are approximately 20% more likely to develop hypertension than



Allison Kirsch and Katherine Stubblefield, sophomores, enjoy vegetarian burritos at lunch. They became vegetarians for many reasons, including animal rights and health benefits.

Photo by Mary Earp

for vegetarianism is animal rights. Every day, over two billion animals are slaughtered. Animals

"I think the way animals are treated in factory farms alone should make any person with a heart

vegetarian, if not vegan."

Animals are pumped full of hormones and stimulants to increase their growing rate. These hormones cause cancer and many other diseases. One of the main chemicals injected in American cows used by dairy farmers, recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH), shows up in milk and other products taken from these cows. This chemical is banned in Canada, Europe and many other countries, but is still used excessively in the United States.

If animals aren't growing fast enough, whether they are injected with hormones or not, they will most likely be killed. They are slaughtered in inhumane ways, and the fact is, animals aren't treated as well as they could be.

Free range options are available, but many of these free-range options aren't what we think they are. The USDA has no specified requirements for free range

chickens except that they have an opportunity to be in the outdoors, so many of the chickens labeled as free-range are kept in a tightly packed shed or stall with a door and a small strip of land outside. The USDA only regulates free-range labels for chickens used for meat, not for eggs. There is no way to know for sure where your meat is coming from unless researched.

Although there are many reasons to be a vegetarian, these people often suffer from a lack of zinc, calcium, Vitamin B-12, Vitamin D, Iron and protein, along with other vitamins provided by meat.

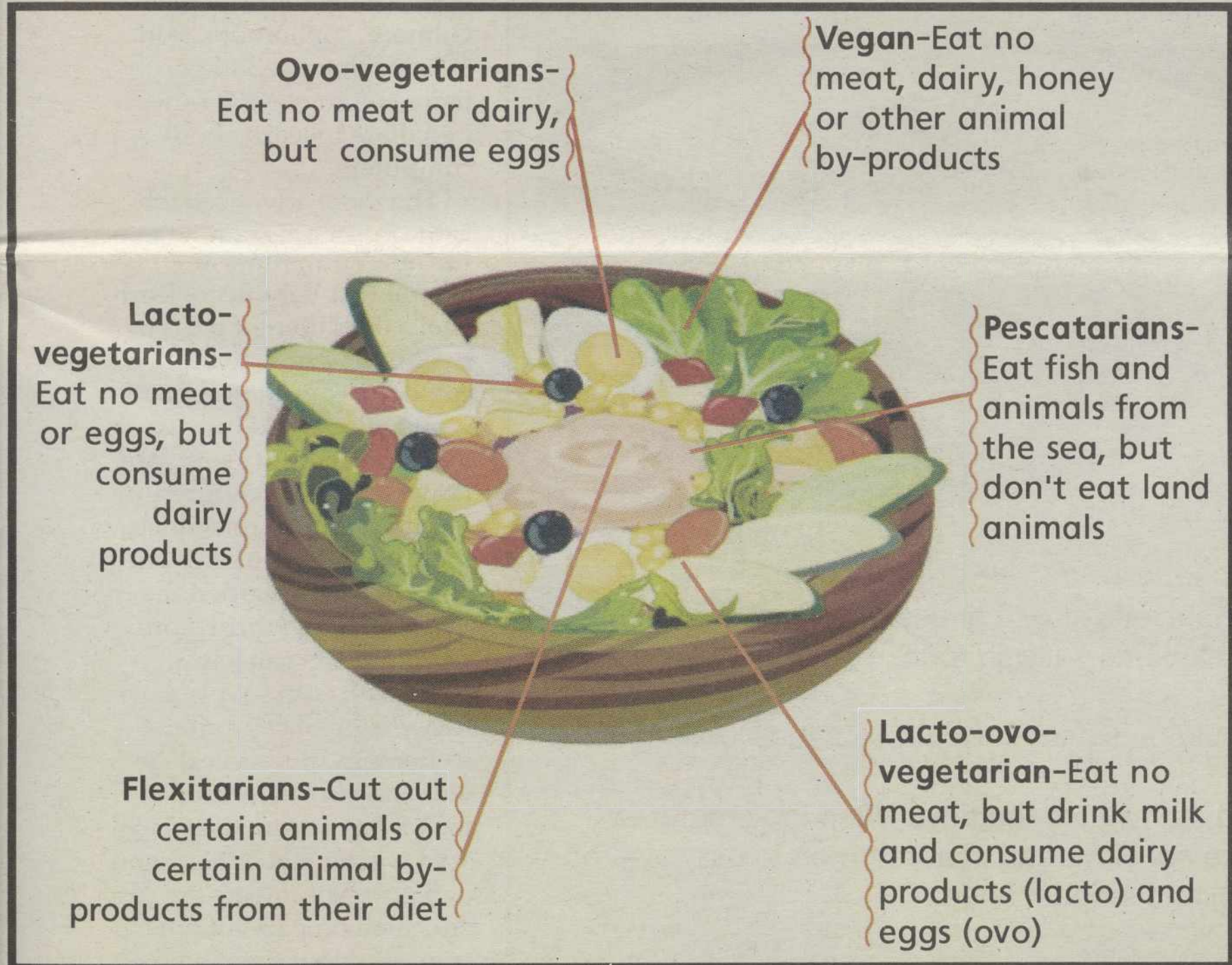
"It is healthier than a meat based diet as long as those following it are getting adequate nutrition from the plant based diet," Ellwood said. "This includes getting not only protein and iron but also calcium. A plant based diet is rich in fiber and antioxidants and a meat based diet tends to have more animal fat and cholesterol, so it can be healthier as long as it is well balanced."

To become a vegetarian, or eat fewer meat products, many people find the transition easier if they slowly stop eating meat. Others prefer to stop cold turkey.

"When making the transition, it is easier to cut foods out one at a time rather than all at the same time. For example, first stop eating beef, then pork, then chicken, etc," Hill said.

"Make sure to get the nutrients you need," Chelsea Ollar, senior, said. "For example, you need protein, iron and omega-3. Good things to eat include flax seed, spinach and eggs."

Becoming a vegetarian may seem like a tough feat, but when done right, it could prove more healthful and enjoyable.



vegetarians. Although these facts may be brushed over, there is still one fact that can't be shaken: vegetarians tend to have longer lives than meat eaters. Vegetarian men decrease their risk of early death by 50%, vegetarian women by 30%. Studies observing the length vegetarians live longer than meat eaters do conclude they live, on average, anywhere from one to seven years longer.

"My opinion on a vegetarian diet is that if it is well balanced and followed more as a diet that expands one's palate and not one that limits food, it can be very healthy," Marilyn Ellwood, school nurse, said.

All health facts aside, the top recorded reason

ranging from cattle to pigs are kept in unbelievably poor conditions, many of which the common population is completely unaware of. These animals are kept in overly crowded stalls, unable to move. Some animals go their entire lives without taking a single step. After being kept in these densely packed places, many animals will completely lose their muscles. Once let out, they won't be able to walk because their muscles are so weak, and many fall to the ground.

"I can't understand how people can continue eating meat and dairy after they've learned how the animals they eat are treated. It's unjustifiable," Hill said.

Resources for Vegetarians:

Books:

- "Vegetarian Beginner's Guide" by the editors of *Vegetarian Times*
- "Become a Vegetarian in Five Easy Steps" by Christine H. Beard
- "Complete Idiot's Guide to Vegetarianism" by Suzanne Havala and Robert Pritikin
- "The Perfectly Contented Meat-Eater's Guide to Vegetarianism" by Mark Warren Reinhardt
- "A Teen's Guide to Going Vegetarian" and "The Teen's Vegetarian Cookbook" by Judy Krizmanic

Restaurants/Food Stores:

- Sweet Lemon Vegetarian Bistro
- Vegetarian House
- Chili Pie Palace
- Green Wok
- Homegrown Smoker Natural Barbecue
- Food Fight
- Sweet Pea

Websites:

- allrecipes.com. (type "vegetarian" into search bar)
- vegetarianrecipes.org