

## New Study Supports Plant-Based Diets for Weight Loss, Overall Nutrition

From Dr. Barnard's Blog, June 14, 2011

Vegetarian diets are not just better for weight management, they are more nutritious than diets that include meat, according to a new study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. With two out of three Americans needing to lose weight, the message is more urgent than ever.

The new findings are based on a study including 13,292 participants in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Not only were vegetarians slimmer than their meat-eating counterparts, their fiber intake was 24 percent higher and calcium intake was 17 percent higher. Vegetarians also consumed more magnesium, potassium, iron, thiamin, riboflavin, folate, and vitamins A, C, and E, and less total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.

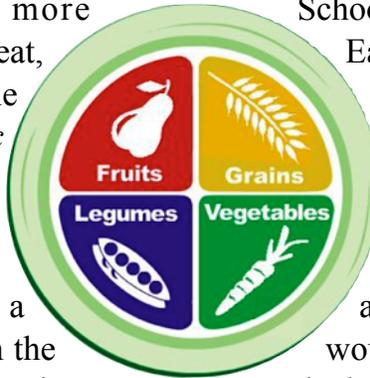
The study was accompanied by an editorial concluding that "the benefits of following a plant-based diet can be valuable beyond weight loss goals." Specifically, the editorial noted, vegetarians have lower cholesterol levels, lower blood pressure, and "lower risk for many disease states including heart disease, diabetes, cancer, and hypertension."

At PCRM, we have often used vegan diets to help people lose weight or improve diabetes or other health problems. In our 2006 review, 38 of 40 published studies comparing vegetarians and non-vegetarians showed that vegetarians weighed less. We also found that adopting a vegetarian or vegan diet brings a dramatic improvement in nutrition. Cholesterol and saturated fat intake plummet, while fiber, beta-carotene, and

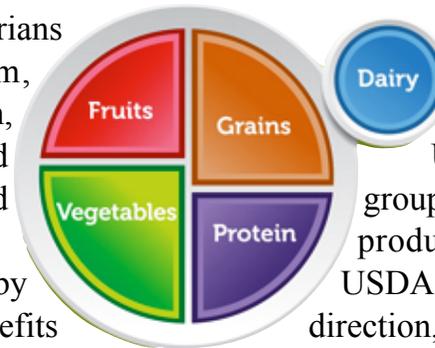
important vitamins increase. Using the Harvard School of Public Health's Alternate Healthy Eating Index (AHEI) score, we have found that vegan participants excel in every AHEI category.

So this raises the question: If meat tends to crowd out nutritious vegetables, beans, and whole grains, and increases the risk for disease, why would anyone recommend it? The answer is that they shouldn't.

When the USDA released its new MyPlate diagram on June 2, it looked very much like PCRM's Power Plate developed in 2009 in that it included no meat group. However, instead of PCRM's "legume group," USDA opted for a "protein" group that includes beans and soy products, as well as meat. While USDA is slowly moving in the right direction, there is no scientific reason to include meat at all. Avoiding animal products is a key step for maximizing good nutrition and good health.



PCRM's Power Plate



USDA's MyPlate

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