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Child Obesity 2018: Pediatric vegetarian diets are healthy, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention of obesity- Joycelyn M Peterson- Oakwood University, USA

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Pediatric Vegetarian Diets: Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the lifecycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. Vegetarian Diets in Perspective: A vegetarian is a person who eats all plant foods, does not eat meat, including fowl or seafood, or products containing these foods. The eating patterns of vegetarians may vary considerably. There are basically three types of vegetarian diets: The lacto-ovovegetarian eating pattern, the most common type is based on grains, vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts, seeds, dairy products, and eggs, lacto-vegetarian diet includes milk with plant foods but excludes any other foods from animals such as eggs and total vegetarian or plant based diet is made of grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, excludes the use of all animal products. Vegan means no animal products excluding the wearing of leather products. Pediatric Vegetarian Diets: There are many reasons for the rising interest in vegetarian diets. Health, economic, ecological, ethical or religious reasons are at the top five. Scientific research continues to document the health advantages of the vegetarian diet with lower risk of heart related diseases, obesity, and cancer. Many are starting their children on a vegetarian lifestyle for the major reason to maintain good health and to prevent diet related diseases. The number of vegetarians in the United States and Canada is expected to increase during the next decade. Food and nutrition professionals can assist vegetarian clients by providing current, accurate information to parents about vegetarian nutrition, diet and resources.

Childhood obesity can persist through adulthood with adverse lifelong consequences. Prevention of unnecessary weight gain and overweight/obesity during childhood could mitigate the difficulty of treating adult obesity and its comorbidities. Exposing children to plant-based or vegetarian diets at a relatively young age is a judicious approach that may have long-term beneficial effects in maintaining a healthy weight. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics states that “appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases” for all life cycle stages. Vegetarian children are relatively leaner and less susceptible to cardio-metabolic risks compared to their non-vegetarian counterparts due to the nature of the foods that comprise their diet. Vegetarian diets are characteristically plant-based, allowing a synergy between nutrients and phytochemicals that confer health benefits. This chapter looks into how vegetarian diets can address pediatric obesity and how to ensure adequate nutrition for vegetarian children

The increased prevalence of childhood overweight and obesity is not unique to industrialized societies; dramatic increases are occurring in urbanized areas of developing countries. In light of the consensus that obesity is a significant public health concern and that many weight-loss interventions have been unsuccessful in the long term, an exploration of food patterns that are beneficial in the primary prevention of obesity is warranted. The focus of this article is to review the relation between vegetarian diets and obesity, particularly as they relate to childhood obesity.

Epidemiologic studies indicate that vegetarian diets are associated with a lower body mass index (BMI) and a lower prevalence of obesity in adults and children. A meta-analysis of adult vegetarian diet studies estimated a reduced weight difference of 7.6 kg for men and 3.3 kg for women, which resulted in a 2-point lower BMI (in kg/m2). Similarly, compared with nonvegetarians, vegetarian children are leaner, and their BMI difference becomes greater during adolescence.

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