Does an Indian vegan diet have side-effects?

Kriti Saraswat Dec 17, 2014 at 12:47 pm

According to recent reports, the trend of vegan diet in India could be a concern for the population, particularly pregnant women. Since vegans refrain from consuming meat and dairy, a vegan diet eliminates natural food sources of vitamin B12. This deficiency could have side-effects such as anemia, nerve damage, heart disease and pregnancy complications. We ask Dr Nandita Shah, a vegan, homeopath and founder of SHARAN, if this holds true.

'The concern for India is going too much vegan. This essentially means going without foods which are the sources of B12. Another concern for going the vegan way is the deprivation of omega-3 fatty acids from the diet, a micronutrient important for heart health,' says Michael Fenech, Scientist at Division of Animal, Food and Health Sciences, Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Australia. Also read – vegan diet – good or bad for health?

Highlighting the lack of studies in India on dietary patterns, Fenech said the focus should be on a holistic approach towards nutrition. 'While people are catching on to veganism, it is necessary to study what this holds for different communities in India, like pregnant women,' he said. Read – Is a vegan diet OK during pregnancy?

Is it safe for pregnant women to follow a vegan diet? If yes, what diet modifications do they have to make?

Just like a lion instinctually eats meat and a cow instinctually eats grass, we too should eat according to our instincts. Our body and especially our digestive system is designed according to our instincts as well.

Mothers condition their children by adding sugar or cocoa to the milk. In the same way we may be conditioned to eat dishes made from body parts or secretions of other animal but it's not our natural food since we are not instinctually drawn to it and nor do we have the correct anatomy to digest it. This is why so many people including pregnant women are sick these days.

A whole plant-based diet is close to our natural instincts and hence is the most suitable, even for pregnant women. A pregnant woman just needs to learn to eat according to her instinct as long as it's whole and plant-based food.

She will not even need iron and calcium supplements, which most gynaecologists give their patients if this is done correctly. No animal in nature needs supplements during pregnancy and nor should a woman if she follows an optimal diet.

How can vegans get their dose of vitamin B12?

B12 is made by bacteria. Today almost everyone is deficient in vitamin B12, not just vegans. This is because of our super hygienic lifestyle, alcohol and microwaves. Everyone, vegan or otherwise should check and supplement if necessary. The same is true for vitamin D3 which we get from the sun. Here are [10 natural sources of vitamin B12 you need in your diet](#).

How can vegans get their intake of omega-3 fatty acids?

Omega-3 fatty acids are made by plants. Fish have them because they eat plants and so can we. However refined oil, rich in omega-6 upsets the balance between omega-3 and 6 which is why some people need more. Since a whole plant-based diet is devoid of refined oils (or any oils for that matter since oils are not whole foods) deficiency of omega-3 is not an issue.

What tips should Indian people keep in mind before they turn vegan?

They should understand that eating healthy can be delicious, learn more about it and get enough information to overcome their conditionings and questions. In short, they should be confident that this is a healthier and better lifestyle. They should also understand that no animal in nature needs another animal's milk and nor do our children. Here are [10 reasons that will convince you to go vegan](#).

With inputs from IANS

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