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You Are What You Eat

Meat consumption versus nutritional value has become a controversial and even confusing topic over the years. In this day and age, meat can be a sensitive topic to bring up in everyday conversations. While the number of people converting their lifestyles to vegetarianism or veganism is increasing daily, there are still many others who are in complete opposition. A common argument amongst those who are pro-meat is that non-meat eaters will wither away due to their insufficient intake of proteins. Although it is true that proteins are a necessary building block in the fundamentals of muscle development, there are a plethora of other ways to supplement proteins aside from eating dead animals. Many assume that a meatless diet is an unhealthy one and can cause numerous health problems, but research shows that eating meat is essentially linked to several medical issues. People should not consume meat because doing so may lead to cancers, obesity, and even early death.

It can be easy to look at someone living by different lifestyle strategies and think that they are wrong for not following the same guidelines. Sometimes people just look at differences in others and assume that they cannot possibly both be right. One of the greatest differences between Americans is their diets and what each deem to be a healthy, nutrient-sufficient meal. There are always going to be pros and cons to everything, but the cons are sometimes only specified for vegetarians or vegans. Although there are multiple noted connections between obesity and red meat, they are repeatedly ignored out of oblivion or fear. It is rumored is that cancers are common among non-meat eaters due to their inferior diets. But it has been studied to prove that “people who avoided meat were much less likely to develop the disease.” (Frost) This is proof that people can be stuck in their ways of tradition, just because it is what they have always known, instead of looking into current statistics. Specific types of cancers have been directly linked to the consumption of meats. For example, the casecontrol and cohort studies noted a “significant association between red meat consumption and breast cancer risk (relative risk: 1.269; 95% confidence interval: 1.117, 1.441; P-value for heterogeneity=0.002)” (Abbas 5). With a 95% confidence level, it is hard to grasp that this is not something that is talked about more often or with more concern. The Shiraz University of Medical Sciences directed tests that resulted in the conclusion that premenopausal women who regularly ate red meat were more susceptible to an “increased risk of breast cancer” (Abbas 12). It has also been shown that “dietary exposure to HCAs [heterocyclic amines] has been a suspected risk factor for colorectal cancer since the 1970s” (Murtaugh). This has been proposed as a major health concern for more than 45 years, yet little to no changes have been made in the diets of many Americans. This information is alarming enough for people to want to inspect their diets more closely and therefore should be studied further and made more public.

Several vegetarians and vegans are stereotyped on a daily basis for being too skinny. This stereotype stems from the idea that meatless diets do not supply enough nutrients to nourish the body. Though it is true that many non-meat eaters are rather thin, that does not prove that they are malnourished. A lot of those who speak out against about meatless diets are those who consume various types of meat within every meal. Ignorance goes a long way in the typical American diet. As mentioned before, people often assume their way is the only right way. “Meats are high in energy and fat content, and thus may be associated with higher risk of obesity” (Wang 621)

With all of the proof linking meat consumption to higher risks in certain types of cancers and obesity, it is no shock that meat-eaters are more prone to premature death. Obesity is a massive problem in America and is becoming one of “the country’s leading cause(s) of preventable death” (Wilson). It has been confirmed that “frequently eating red and processed meats increases your risk of mortality by at least 33% (Popkin, “Eat Meat, Die Sooner: Red Meat Boosts Risk of Early Death). Researchers from the National Cancer Institute conducted experiments that indicated “participants who ate the most white meat (which included fish and tuna) had a slightly lower risk — about 10% to 15% — of death” (Popkin). While America’s next step does not have to be a complete elimination of meat consumption, these studies aid in the research that is necessary in pointing meat-lovers in the right direction. Strict meat-eaters would benefit largely from studying recent statistics and tailoring their diets towards a white-meat or fish-centered diet.

While vegetarianism and veganism vary in many ways such as the consumption of eggs, use of honey and even horseback riding, they are in agreeance that meat is not a necessary source of proteins for a healthy diet. The aforementioned studies regarding red meat being linked to breast and colorectal cancers illustrate a significant increase in the risk of premature death as well as developing lifelong illnesses. Whether the lifestyle change stems from moral sympathy for animals, religious restrictions or personal taste preference, health needs to start playing a bigger part in the American diet. The food pyramids and nutritional value guidelines have always been confusing and ever-changing, often causing people to lose interest. While revisions and changes are made regularly to support the newest evidence proving how healthy a new superfood is, people should know the truths about what they are putting in their bodies. People are only offered one body and it is too risky to believe guidelines that change so often. Americans need to conduct more credible research experiments to prove the health risks of meat consumption. After all, it has been said that people are what they eat and nobody should want to be confusing, cancer-causing or even life-threatening. This being said, people should not eat meat since it may lead to increased cancer risks, obesity, and premature death.

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