



# The Spinal Column

“It’s not that I dislike meat, I just really hate carrots...”

By Dr. Alfin Mitha, Hons. B.Sc., D.C.

**Vegetarianism is increasing in both** popularity and the level of public awareness. In 2003, over 1.25 million Canadians were vegetarians. Grocery stores are full of vegetarian selections, from veggie ground round to soy cheese, and the mainstream seems to be jumping on board to this growing trend. Slowly, vegetarians are thought less and less to be people who wear flowers in their hair and play folk music for a living. They are doctors, bankers, mechanics, sports figures, warehouse workers and a blend of any number of very different people.

The reasons why someone might decide to go veggie goes beyond that simple four-letter word: meat. I am what I consider a pseudo-vegetarian: I eat fish, eggs and dairy products. When I was 18, I stopped eating meat as a challenge to myself to see if I could do it. Afterwards, I wanted to be vegetarian for the health aspects, as vegetarians statistically enjoy better overall all health than those who consume meat products as little as twice a week.

As I learn more about the meat industry and as I continue to love my kids (my adorable puppy and birdy), my reasons are becoming more ethical in nature. I will be the first to admit that I love chicken, and still sigh when I see a plate of plump chicken fingers and know that I’ll never be able to eat them again. I think leather jackets are very stylish and that suede is wonderful to the touch. Still, soy products have come a long way, everyone thought my \$25 pleather **jacket was real leather, and I get** that wonderfully warm fuzzy feeling every time I do something based on what I believe and not just what I want at the moment. I am also a firm believer that people shouldn’t be bullied or guilted into doing anything. The wonderful thing about Canada is that we have the right to make decisions based on our own beliefs. Instead, I just wanted to offer a little information and insight into why people might chose to live a meat-free lifestyle.

Vegetarians can be divided into two categories: lacto-ovo vegetarians and vegans. Lacto-ovo vegetarians consume dairy products and eggs, but no flesh products. Vegans abstain from any animal products, including dairy, gelatin (which is made from the bones and connective tissue of

animals) and honey. They also avoid any animal products in their daily lives, from the clothes they buy to the soap they shower with.

There are four main reasons why a person generally adopts a vegetarian lifestyle: 1) to support their health and well-being; 2) to promote an overall reverence for life; 3) to protect the environment and 4) to uphold religious or philosophical principles.

## EAT YOUR VEGETABLES!

While “vegetarian” does not necessarily equal healthy (plenty of vegetarian recipes load on butter, cheese, salt and refined, starchy carbs), the vegetarian community does enjoy lower rates of obesity than their meat eating counterparts. There is also a reduced risk of heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and certain forms of cancer. Some studies have also indicated that vegetarian diets offer greater protection against renal disease, gallbladder disease and rheumatoid arthritis. There is also a lower chance of contracting foodborne diseases such as E. coli or salmonella poisoning. Levels of heavy metals, DDT, PCBs and other contaminants and pesticides accumulates as you move further up the food chain, stored in the adipose tissue and other cells of animals. Eating meat increases your chance of contracting any number of conditions from these contaminants.

Vegetarian elders tend to live longer and enjoy a better quality of life in their later years. Plantbased diets are also lower in saturated and trans fats and cholesterol and higher in Vitamins C and E, carotenoids, folate, fibre, magnesium and phytochemicals. The ratio of protein-to-fat-to-carbohydrates is generally closer to that of current health recommendations. Meateaters tend to eat higher than necessary quantities of meat in their diet, especially considering how inactive many people are today. Excess amounts of protein, particularly animal protein, can contribute to heart disease, colorectal cancer and osteoporosis.

Processing all that extra protein further stresses the kidneys and liver, which need to eliminate the **added wastes that are produced** when storing protein as fuel (as opposed to much cleaner burning carbohydrates). Many people often feel that eating meat is necessary to obtain protein and to be healthy; it is how our bodies have evolved. Keep in mind

that our bodies also evolved in conditions in which food (including meat) was not as available, and generally involved more effort than pushing a cart at the grocery store.

## IT'S NOT EASY BEING GREEN

An whopping 50% of the water consumed in the US is estimated to be used for the raising of livestock. It takes about 100 times more water to produce a pound of beef than a pound of wheat. The amount of water consumed to produce the diet of a vegan for one year is less than a meat eater requires for one month. For a resource that is rapidly on its way to becoming more valuable than oil, a resource that is necessary for our survival, we need to include our diets in the larger picture of conservation. Agriculture is responsible for about 70% of the pollution in our waterways, greater than that of sewage treatment plants, urban storm sewers, and pollution from contaminants in the air. As animals produce about 130 times more manure than we do, its addition to our ecosystem poisons life in the water and creates a breeding ground for dangerous pathogens such as E. coli.

With the increase in air pollution, our leafy ecosystems are even more important to help clean the air. However, almost two-thirds of the rainforests in Central America have been cleared for the purpose of supply cheap beef to North American fast food chains (now you know how a burger can only cost 99¢). **Overgrazing also leads to desertification.** Livestock compact the soil, decreasing its ability to absorb water, thus decreasing the amount of farmable topsoil available and reducing the amount of farmable soil. At the current rate, there may be as few as forty-five years of farmable soil left on the planet.

## WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS...

An increasing number of people are opting for the no-meat lifestyle to combat violence and cruelty toward animals. Almost 10 billion animals are slaughtered every year in North America. There are very few instances where animals are raised in any sort of humane manner. Animals tend to be either overcrowded or isolated, and instances of brutality by workers is commonplace. The transport and slaughter of animals are done in conditions that few people would ever want to know about (though I'm sure PETA has a few videos online for anyone interested...). Even if one does not believe that animals and people are equal, I'm sure many would still agree that the idea of a turkey being brought to the slaughter house by tying a rope around its neck and

dragging it behind the truck is, well... pretty unnecessary. The meat industry is a business, and like any business, the bottom line is money, which means that anything that increases cost is a simple no-no.

The only thing is, the animals can't form a union or go on strike, or be protected by a charter like we can. So, if you're out shopping for meat, try to focus more on selections which are freerun and grain-fed (or even better, organic meats); there is a much better chance of animals being raised in more humane conditions. And, the meat will be healthier to consume without the higher risk of tainted meat that comes with animals fed the remains of other animals, hormones, antibiotics and stress hormones.

## SO WHAT'S THE STORY, MORNING GLORY?

As I said in the outset of the newsletter, I'm not hoping to guilt anyone into becoming vegetarian. I don't expect anyone to read this article and have a personal epiphany and change their entire lifestyle. Instead, I want to offer another perspective, a different understanding. Being vegetarian is far from easy; even believing what I do, I've gone back to eating meat several times since I first decided to go veggie. It takes a bit of planning to adopt a healthy vegetarian lifestyle. My first attempt had me eating a lot of processed carbs in the form of breads and pasta, and a limited selection of vegetables. Although restaurants and grocery stores have begun to cater more towards diets without meat, its not always easy to find something that is both healthy and meatless.

Being vegetarian requires some selfeducating to ensure that you are receiving the proper balance of protein and minerals. Anemia is likely the most common condition faced by vegetarians, especially women whose iron levels drop with each menstruation. A vegetarian diet can supply the required vitamins and minerals only when properly planned. Then again, in a world where food is so readily available, so many of us are malnourished (and no, taking a Centrum isn't enough to balance a bad diet). With such a rapid increase in pollution and climate change in the last few decades, our food is not as nutritional as it once was. And I would be remiss not to mention that soy companies are beginning to give the meat industry some competition when it comes to clearing out the Amazon for farming.

One thing we all must begin to realize is that the decisions we make everyday that seem small have much larger consequences. We are no longer speaking in terms of our children's futures, but our own.

## About the Author:



As a life-long resident of Brampton (34 years), Dr. Alfin Mitha endeavors to provide this city with reliable, informative Chiropractic care. He lives here with his 2 kids, Aura and Zen, and his wife Rupi. Having completed his Bachelor of Science degree in both Biology and Pharmacology at McMaster University, Dr. Mitha had the opportunity to work with Eli Lilly pharmaceuticals in their Research and Development of Non-Small Cell Lung Cancer and Prozac. Deciding that the private sector in medicine was not for him, Dr. Mitha then took one year off to work in Ixtapa, Mexico as a land sports G.O for Club Med. Having considered Chiropractic in the past, it was only confirmed while having the chance to meet many Chiropractors during his time in Ixtapa.

The next part of his journey took him to the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College in Toronto, Ontario. During his education, he still maintained an active physical lifestyle while working as a personal trainer. His internship year provided him the opportunity to work at 2 very different and unique places. The first part of his internship was at Anishnawbe Health and Native Wellness Center which serviced much of Toronto's aboriginal and homeless community. The second part of his internship allowed him the chance to treat players of the Canadian National Soccer Team, and other elite Canadian athletes. Both of these placements allowed Dr. Mitha to understand many aspects of illness, injury and health. A focus which remains in his clinic; In GoodHands.

Having returned back to Brampton (a resident of 34 years, he has since become an active member of the Rotary Club, Brampton Tennis Club, Brampton Volleyball League, Yoga instructor and more recently the Health Practitioner Advisory Committee for the city. Dr. Mitha wishes to become a more integral part of Brampton's community. "It is imperative that we take care of our body and mind, it is our most valuable asset. The first step is education and if anything else, we provide that for our patients".

## Main and Franchise Clinics:



### In GoodHands Rehabilitation & Wellness Centre

Bramalea City Centre – Inside GoodLife Fitness  
Unit 50A - 25 Peel Centre Drive, Brampton, ON L6T 3R5  
**Phone:** (905) 453-5858      **Fax:** (905) 453-8995  
**Email:** info@ingoodhandswellness.com

#### Services:

- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic Care
- Massage Therapy
- Naturopathic Medicine
- Orthotics
- Physiotherapy

#### Products:

- Athletic Braces & Splints
- Compression Stockings
- Memory Foam Pillows
- Custom Made Orthotics
- Health Supplements

#### Clinic Hours:

Mon. and Wed.: 9:30 am - 8:30 pm  
Tues. and Thurs.: 10:00 am - 9:00 pm  
Fri.: 9:30 am - 7:00 pm  
Sat.: 9:30 am - 2:30 pm  
Sun.: Closed

### In GreatHands Chiropractic & Wellness Centre

Inside Oshawa Centre Mall  
C/O Goodlife, 419 King Street West, Oshawa, ON L1J 2K5  
**Phone:** (905) 433-9520      **Fax:** (905) 433-8144  
**Email:** oshawa@ingreathands.com

#### Services:

- Chiropractic Care
- Dry Blood Analysis
- Hair Analysis
- Irridology
- Massage Therapy
- Nutritional Urinalysis
- Orthotics
- Psychology
- Reflexology
- Rehabilitation
- X-Rays

#### Products:

- Custom Made Orthotics
- Health Supplements

#### Clinic Hours:

Mon. - Thurs.: 9:00 am - 7:30 pm  
Fri.: 9:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Sat.: 9:00 am - 5:00 pm  
Sun.: Closed