

## PAGE FOR PATIENTS

### A Message from *Preventive Medicine* and Your Physician

#### Eat Less Flesh? Why Bother?

You probably know that eating fatty red meat isn't good for you. You might have met people who go without eating any kind of animal products for days at a time. Some, who call themselves vegetarians, go for years without eating animal flesh.

Why do they bother?

There are a number of health reasons for eating fewer animal foods:

- Vegetarians tend to weigh less.
- Vegetarians have fewer medical problems like heart disease, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and diabetes.
- Some studies have found that vegetarians are only half as likely to die in a given year as nonvegetarians.
- Vegetarians are especially less likely to die from heart disease and cancer of the bowel than nonvegetarians.

What does eating meat cost you? In this (November/December 1995) issue of *Preventive Medicine* we present an article called "The Medical Costs Attributable to Meat Consumption." The authors found that in 1992, U.S. meat consumption cost between 28.6 and 61.4 billion dollars in direct health care costs. Lowering meat consumption is a great way to lower insurance costs and cut taxes for Medicaid and Medicare! These costs included \$2.8–8.5 billion for treating high blood pressure, \$9.5 billion for heart disease, \$0–16.5 billion for cancer, \$14.0–17.1 billion for diabetes, \$0.2–2.4 billion for gallbladder disease, \$1.9 billion for arthritis, and \$0.2–\$5.5 billion for food-borne disease.

But don't vegetarians miss out on some nutrients? What about protein and essential vitamins

and minerals? According to the American Dietetic Association, people who eat only plant foods can meet all their nutritional needs with some simple knowledge and planning. People who want to start out by trying a few vegetarian meals a week should jump in! (A hint: Breakfasts and a few dinners a week are an easy way to start.)

So what can you eat instead of meat? Grains (like pasta, rice, or bread) and beans can be prepared many different ways and contain lots of fiber and protein. Vegetables and fruits taste delicious and are full of vitamins and minerals. Part of the reason vegetarians live longer is because they don't eat foods like meat or other high-fat animal products. And part of their longevity relates to the foods they do eat, many of which are packed with antioxidants and other healthy vitamins.

For more information, talk to a dietitian or look at the vegetarian cookbooks in libraries or bookstores. You could also contact the Vegetarian Resource Group (P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, Maryland 21203; phone (410) 366-8343).

In addition to your health, there's one more reason to bother eating less meat. You have to feed a cow about seven pounds of grain to make one pound of U.S. beef, about half that amount to make a pound of pork, and about a third that amount to make a pound of chicken. If people ate that grain directly, it would save oil (used for transportation and farm chemicals), land, topsoil, and money.

As you can see, eating less animal flesh is better for you, better for your pocketbook, and better for the environment.

So that's why you should bother!