

Thank you to local vegan doctor, **Orestes Gutierrez, D.O.** for kindly answering two of the many questions that EVEN receives on a regular basis.



## 1. Can eating vegan food help with high blood pressure?



The short answer to your question is a resounding YES. A vegan diet will absolutely help with your blood pressure. It will also help reduce your risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes among many others. But before giving more details as to how a vegan diet will help lower your blood pressure you must first check with your doctor to make sure you do not have an underlying medical cause that is giving you high blood pressure.

Let's discuss some of the risk factors for high blood pressure that we know of from scientific data.

Genetics, nicotine, excess sodium intake, excess alcohol intake, obesity or overweight, physical inactivity, hostile and impatient attitudes, and vitamin D deficiency to name a few. (1)

Also, secondary high blood pressure should always be considered and ruled out by your doctor depending on your personal history and symptoms. Some of the causes of secondary high blood pressure include kidney disease, certain drugs such as oral contraceptives, nonsteroidal antiinflammatory agents such as motrin and naprosyn, herbal products like ephedra, diet pills, decongestants, chronic alcohol intake, some tumors of the adrenals named pheochromocytoma, primary aldosteronism, or cushings syndrome, hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism, hyperparathroidism, obstructive sleep apnea, or an abnormality of the aorta. (2)

We have evidence that a plant based diet lowers your risk of death form heart disease and cancer. Also, it lowers your blood pressure, cholesterol, risk of type 2 diabetes, stroke and lowers body mass index. Organic fruits and vegetables have many phytochemicals that may contribute to a reduced risk of chronic disease and at times reversal of chronic disease. (3,4,5,6,7) These healing compounds are very high in organic fruits and vegetable but are often devoid or negligible in animal foods include, but are not limited to, fiber, antioxidants, healthy omega 3s without harmful saturated

fat, healthy bioavailable protein, complex carbohydrates, and minerals.(8) Lastly, several large studies, one from the United Kingdom and one from U.S. And Canada Adventist showed that vegans have lower blood pressure. (8,9)

By Dr. Gutierrez, D.O.

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## 2. Can a vegan diet help prevent or reverse heart disease?



The short answer to your question is **YES**. Let us explore why.

In most developed countries the leading cause of death is cardiovascular disease. The prevalence of heart disease is also increasing in developing country.(5) As we have known for years, heart disease starts at a very early age as conclusively shown by the Korean Soldier study. (6) In this landmark study 300 American Soldier who died in the Korean war were autopsied. The

average age was 22 and an astounding 77.3% of hearts showed evidence of atherosclerosis. The Korean men's hearts were examined and the investigators noted a lack of blockage and attributed it to dietary factors.

Our knowledge over the past 60 years has advanced tremendously and today we can clearly identify risk factors for cardiovascular disease. Cigarette smoking, obesity, diabetes, lack of exercise and most importantly a link between diet is well established. We have a preponderance of data that suggest that eating fruits and vegetables prevent or decrease risk of heart disease. (7,8,9) We also have a plethora of data that shows that a low fat vegetarian diet can reverse heart disease. (10,11,12,13,14)

From the science we know that we can prevent heart disease and we can also reverse it once it is established. One flawed argument that is prevalent is that heart disease is an inevitable part of the aging process. In many cultures heart disease was rare until they adopted the unhealthy western diet. In the Kitava Study, Okinawa Study, Seven Day Adventist Health Study and the China Study it was shown that populations who eat a predominantly plant based diet and do not consume the highly processed western type diet had a very low incidence of heart disease and some actually had no heart disease!

Let us briefly explore this notion of a human being with no heart disease as we age. The reader may fancy this notion of no heart disease in an elder as a myth. We have data that shows one can grow to a ripe old age without heart disease! One of the last indigenous cultures in the world to live a lifestyle and have a strictly native diet not influenced by western culture is the Kitava people. This indigenous people who live in Papua New Guinea only eat yam, sweet potato, taro, tapioca, banana, papaya, pineapple, mango, guava, water melon, pumpkin, vegetables, fish and coconuts. (15,16,17)

In a study of 1,816 patients between the ages of 3 to 96 it was noted that there was no ischemic heart disease.(18) Now most of this data was gathered by interviews and EKG and physical exams of living people and it was reasonable to conclude that there was no heart disease. However, there is also an autopsy study of an Okinawan elder who was 100 years old and her coronary arteries did not show any evidence of atherosclerosis.(19) Let me repeat that again, no heart disease in a 100 year old! This is such a remarkable finding I shall quote that portion of the article,

“No arterial or ventricular dilatation or enlargement; no areas of infarction; no coronary artery calcification or atherosclerosis; no valvular calcification.”(19) As an aside the study goes on to mention that her kidneys, esophagus, stomach, liver, pancreas, gallbladder, and bladder were essentially normal. (19)

This is evidence that humans can live a long and healthy life and avoid heart disease all together is very reassuring. But since most disease process have a multifactorial component exercise should not be overlooked. Furthermore, the indigenous and rural populations with a low incidence of heart disease are extremely active burning lots of calories and virtually no one in those cultures are overweight let alone obese. There are many studies that have shown that exercise is an independent risk factor for heart disease.

In other words, those who don't exercise regularly are at higher risk. (20,21,22)

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## UPCOMING EVENT

**Back by popular demand!**

Dr. Gutierrez's previous presentation for EVEN (*Debunking the 10 Myths of Veganism*) in October 2011 was such a huge success, presenting to a standing-room-only crowd, that he has graciously agreed to an encore!

Please mark your calendars for ***Food for the Body, Mind, Soul: A Vegan Diet, Thursday, 7/26/12, 7pm, at the McNail-Riley House, 601 W. 13th Av. (@Jefferson) in Eugene.*** This educational presentation is **free** to the public but seating is limited, so arrive early. Park free in the fairgrounds across the street or your vehicle might be towed.



If you missed **Dr. Gutierrez** last fall, here's another opportunity to learn and be inspired. Hope to see you there!

**---EVEN - serving as a vegan resource since 2005---**

[www.eugeneveg.org](http://www.eugeneveg.org)  
<http://www.eugeneveg.org/NewsBlogMain.html>

The **Eugene Veg Education Network (EVEN)** is an **official 501(c)(3)** non-profit based in Eugene serving as a resource for those seeking information on a **healthful, vegan lifestyle**. EVEN's emphasis is one of **non-violence, compassion and sustainability**. Focus is on the **interconnectedness of all life** and how a plant-based diet benefits the earth, non-human animals, and the individual. EVEN's Mission Statement is **to inform, educate & encourage our members---** as well as the larger community ---by providing pertinent information on veganism and its positive impact on the health of the planet and all its inhabitants. [www.eugeneveg.org](http://www.eugeneveg.org) **Peace.**

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