

# Study: Vegetarians Live Longer

By Annie Hauser, Huffington Post

Some vegetarians can be awfully superior about the health benefits of their plant-based diet. What they might not know is they have the Adventist Health Study to thank.

In the '70s and '80s, a series of studies from Loma Linda University in California, which has tracked tens of thousands of Seventh-day Adventists since 1958, were the first to show that vegetarians live longer than meat eaters.

Not only that, the studies also indicated that the kinds of foods frequently consumed in vegetarian diets – fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes – can reduce a person's risk for diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes, control body mass index and waist size, and boost brain health.

In 2002, the National Institutes of Health gave Loma Linda a grant to continue the research on Seventh-day Adventists, branding this round of research Adventist Health Study 2.

The study, which is midway to completion and includes 96,000 people from the United States and Canada, presents findings just as dramatic, principal investigator Gary E. Fraser, MD, PhD, said at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' 2012 Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo. Vegetarian Adventist men live to an average of 83.3 years and vegetarian women 85.7 years – 9.5 and 6.1 years, respectively, longer than other Californians, Fraser explained.

Here are more findings from the Adventist Health Study 2:

- Vegans are, on average, 30 pounds lighter than meat eaters.

- Vegans are also five units lighter on the BMI scale than meat-eaters.
- Vegetarians and vegans are also less insulin resistant than meat-eaters.
- Lean people are also more likely to exercise regularly, eat plants, and avoid cigarettes than overweight people, suggesting that numerous factors are boosting the overall health of these participants.
- Pesco-vegetarians and semi-vegetarians who limit animal products, but still eat meat once a week or so, have "intermediate protection" against lifestyle diseases.

Perhaps the most staggering finding? Obesity cuts an African American's life span by 6.2 percent, and across races, the protective qualities of fat in seniors was not seen. (Previous studies have found past about age 85, people who are obese have a lower risk of dying than normal-weight peers.)

The study population is 25 percent African American and half vegetarian. The reason why researchers have such an interest in the Seventh-day Adventist population, they say, is that the religion promotes vegetarianism and discourages drinking, smoking, and drug use. For example, health pioneer and breakfast cereal inventor John Harvey Kellogg is one of the church's most famous founding members.