

Three Benefits of a Plant Based Diet

(Adapted from http://www.happycow.net/why_vegetarian.html)

We humans enjoy eating. We spend a great deal of our time not only eating, but also thinking about eating and talking about eating. This brief essay suggests that we move our eating practices closer to a plant based diet for the benefits such a diet can bring in the areas of kindness to animals, protection of the environment and preservation of our own health.

Modern high pressure agriculture commonly keeps cows, calves, pigs, chickens, turkeys, ducks, and other animals in overcrowded conditions for all or most of their greatly shortened lives. Deprived of veterinary care, exercise, sunlight, and even the feel of grass beneath their feet, these living, breathing, thinking, feeling beings, whose senses are so much like our own, suffer and die at the rate of millions per day just so that we can have burgers, bah kut teh and nuggets. Deciding what we will eat means choosing between the horrors of factory farming and respect for animals.

A plant based diet is also better for the environment for two reasons. First, eating meat wastes food, because we have to feed many kgs of plant food to the animals to produce just one kg of meat. To understand this wastage better, think about human children. Do they gain one kg of weight for every kg of food they eat? Of course, not, and neither do cows, chickens, pigs or farmed marine animals. As a result of this inefficiency of meat production, we have to cut down many forests and use many other inputs to grow the unnecessary food to feed the animals whom we later eat. Second, due to the trees cut down to grow food to feed to animals and due to the gases, such as methane and nitrous oxide, produced by these animals, meat production results in more greenhouse gases than all the planes, lorries, cars and other motorised vehicles we use.

Moving towards a plant based diet not only shows kindness to our fellow animals and protects the environment, it also benefits our own health. The following quote is from a 2009 position paper by the American Dietetic Association:

Appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of life, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood and adolescence, and for athletes.

Among the health problems linked to the consumption of animal based foods are heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol certain cancers, obesity, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

Here in Singapore, we are fortunate to have access to a wide variety of plant based foods. Even better, the Bugis area, where our conference is being held, is one of the best places in Singapore for such food. Thus, I would like to invite you to join me after the conference to share a meal which shows kindness towards our fellow animals, safeguards the environment and boosts our own health.