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PRESS RELEASE

Appropriate Planned Vegetarian Diets Are Healthful, May Help in Disease Prevention and Treatment, Says American Dietetic Association

Wednesday, July 01, 2009

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CHICAGO – The American Dietetic Association has released an updated position paper on vegetarian diets that concludes such well-planned, are healthful and nutritious for adults, infants, children and adolescents and can help prevent and treat chronic diseases including heart disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes.

ADA's position, published in the July issue of the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, represents the Association's official stance on vegetarian diets:

It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegetarian 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 the life-cycle including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence and for athletes.

ADA's position and accompanying paper were written by Winston Craig, PhD, MPH, RD, professor and chair of the department of nutrition and wellness at Andrews University; and Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, nutrition advisor at the Vegetarian Resource Group, Baltimore.

The revised position paper incorporates new topics and additional information on key nutrients for vegetarians, vegetarian diets in pregnancy and the use of vegetarian diets in prevention and treatment of chronic diseases. "Vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle," according to ADA's position. "There are many reasons for the rising interest in vegetarian diets. The number of vegetarians in the United States is expected to increase over the next decade."

Vegetarian diets are often associated with health advantages including lower blood cholesterol levels, lower risk of heart disease, lower blood pressure levels and lower risk of hypertension and type 2 diabetes, according to ADA's position. "Vegetarians tend to have lower body mass index and lower overall cancer rates. Vegetarian diets tend to be lower in saturated fat and cholesterol and higher in higher levels of dietary fiber, magnesium and potassium, vitamins C and E, folate, carotenoids, flavonoids and other phytochemicals. These nutritional differences may explain some of the health advantages of those following a varied, balanced vegetarian diet."

The position paper draws on results from ADA's evidence analysis process and information from the ADA Evidence Analysis Library. It shows vegetarian diets can be nutritionally adequate in pregnancy and result in positive maternal and infant health outcomes. A recent evidence-based review showed a vegetarian diet is associated with a lower risk of death from ischemic heart disease.

A section in ADA's paper on vegetarian diets and cancer has been significantly expanded to provide details on cancer-protective nutrients in vegetarian diets. An expanded section on osteoporosis includes roles of fruits, vegetables, soy products, protein, calcium, vitamin D and potassium in bone health. "Registered dietitians can provide information about key nutrients, modify vegetarian diets to meet needs of those with dietary restrictions due to disease or allergies and supply guidelines to meet needs of clients in different life cycles," the authors said.

The American Dietetic Association is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy. Visit the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org.

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