
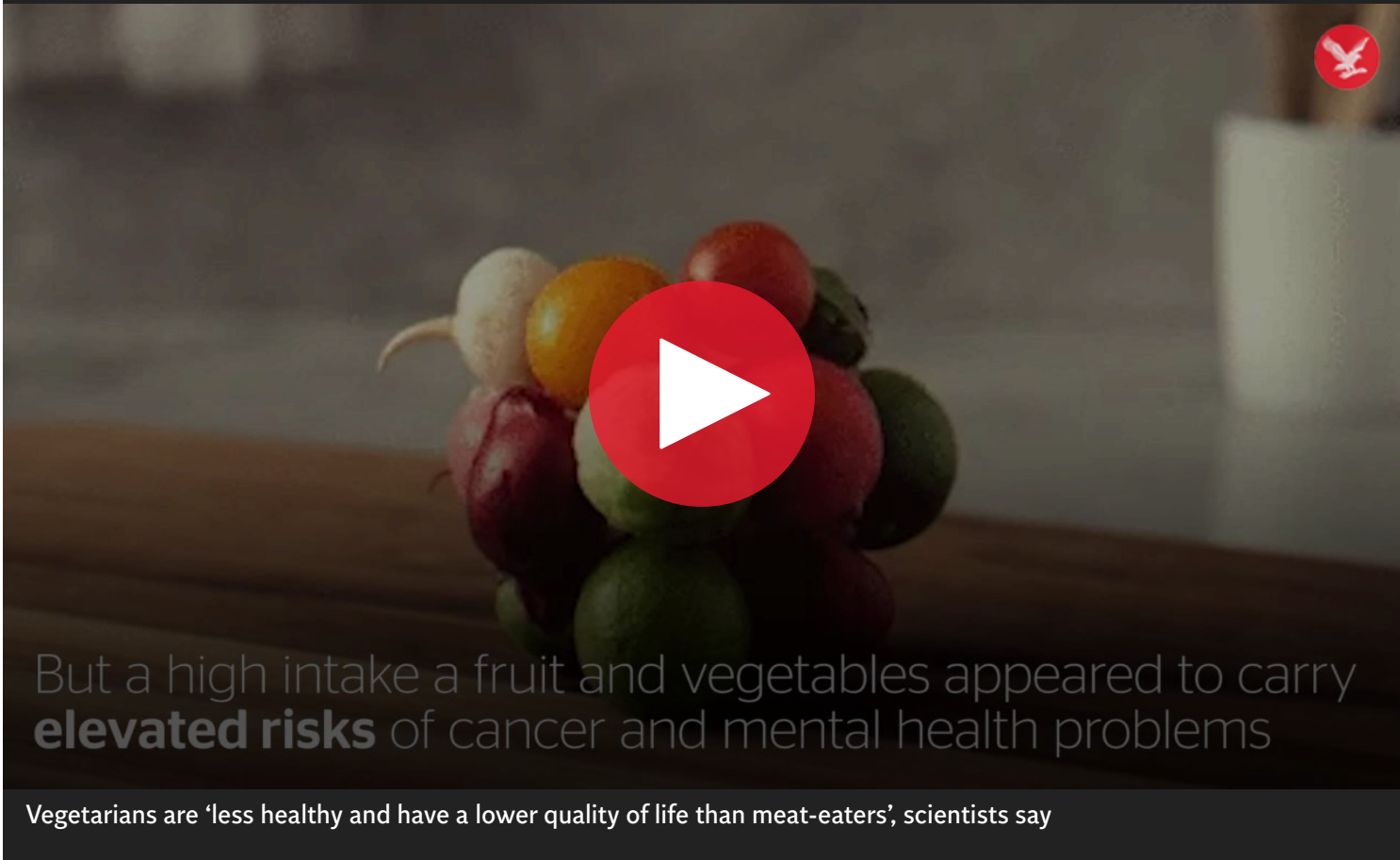


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Vegetarians are 'less healthy and have a lower quality of life than meat-eaters', scientists say

Controversial study suggests non-meat eaters are more at risk of physical and mental illness, despite leading healthier lifestyles

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Vegetarians are less healthy than meat-eaters, a controversial study has concluded, despite drinking less, smoking less and being more physically active than their carnivorous counterparts.

A study conducted by the **Medical University of Graz** in Austria found that the vegetarian diet, as characterised by a low consumption of saturated fat and cholesterol, due to a higher intake of fruits, vegetables and whole-grain products, appeared to carry elevated risks of cancer, allergies and mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

The study used data from the Austrian Health Interview Survey to examine the dietary habits and lifestyle differences between meat-eaters and vegetarians.

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The 1320 subjects were matched according to their age, sex, and socioeconomic status and included 330 vegetarians, 330 that ate meat but still a lot of fruits and vegetables, 300 normal eaters but that ate less meat, and 330 on a more meat-heavy diet.

It found that vegetarians consumed less alcohol and had lower body mass indexes, but were still in a poorer state of physical and mental health overall.

Participants who ate less meat also had poorer health practices, such as avoiding attending doctors appointments for preventative check-ups and measures such as vaccines, the authors found.

Table 3. Differences in suffering from various chronic conditions between the different dietary habit groups.

Chronic condition	Vegetarian	Carnivorous diet rich in fruits and vegetables	Carnivorous diet less rich in meat	Carnivorous diet rich in meat	p-value (χ^2)
Asthma	4.8%	3.3%	3.9%	4.5%	.772
Allergies	30.6%	18.2%	20.3%	16.7%	.000
Diabetes	2.7%	4.2%	2.4%	2.4%	.455
Cataract	4.2%	3.0%	3.3%	1.8%	.348
Tinnitus	4.8%	4.8%	4.8%	3.6%	.840
Hypertension	11.5%	10.6%	12.4%	15.5%	.260
Cardiac infarction	1.5%	1.5%	0.9%	0.6%	.610
Apoplectic stroke	1.2%	1.8%	1.5%	1.8%	.610
Bronchitis	3.9%	3.6%	2.4%	3.0%	.701
Arthritis	8.5%	7.6%	8.8%	10.3%	.662
Sacrospinal complaints	26.7%	24.8%	18.2%	23.9%	.060
Osteoporosis	6.4%	4.8%	3.6%	5.8%	.415
Urinary incontinence	2.1%	3.9%	2.7%	6.4%	.023
Gastric or intestinal ulcer	4.2%	4.2%	1.5%	3.6%	.169
Cancer	4.8%	3.3%	1.2%	1.8%	.022
Migraine	15.8%	11.8%	9.1%	12.1%	.074
Mental illness (anxiety disorder or depression)	9.4%	4.8%	5.8%	4.5%	.036
Any other chronic conditions	8.8%	5.5%	5.8%	6.7%	.308

Note. Data source: Austrian Health Interview Survey (AT-HIS) 2006/07. Percentage of subjects suffering from the different chronic conditions. p (χ^2): probability value; Chi-Square-Test. Analyses were calculated with subjects matched according to their age, sex, and socio-economic status (N = 1320). doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0088278.t003



A table of results from the study carried out by the Institute for Social Medicine and Epidemiology (IFES) at the Medical University (Med-Uni) in Graz, Austria.

It concluded: “Our study has shown that Austrian adults who consume a vegetarian diet are less healthy (in terms of cancer, allergies, and mental health disorders), have a lower quality of life, and also require more medical treatment.”

The study’s authors have already defended the research against claims that their work is simply an advertisement for the meat industry.

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Study coordinator and epidemiologist Nathalie Burkert told **The Austrian Times**:
“We have already distanced ourselves from this claim as it is an incorrect interpretation of our data.

“We did find that vegetarians suffer more from certain conditions like asthma, cancer and mental illnesses than people that eat meat as well, but we cannot say what is the cause and what is the effect.

“There needs to be further study done before this question can be answered.”

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