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Vegetarians less likely to die of cancer

LONDON (Reuters) – Vegetarians are 40 per cent less likely to die of cancer than meat-eaters, researchers in Britain and New Zealand reported Friday.

The report, which supports other studies, also finds vegetarians are less likely to die of heart disease.

"Non-meat eaters had significantly lower standardized mortality ratios for all causes, heart disease and cancer than meat eaters," the report in the *British Medical Journal* said.

Jim Mann at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand, studied 6,000 vegetarians and 5,000 of their meat-eating friends and relatives to try to make sure lifestyle, geographical and other factors did not affect the outcome.

He and colleagues compared death rates from cancer, heart disease and other causes

over 12 years. After allowing for the effects of smoking, weight and social class, they found death rates were significantly lower for the vegetarians.

They also said that while their findings supported dozens of earlier studies, their techniques were unique.

"Previous studies have reported lower mortality in vegetarians but they have used subjects who are members of religious or other groups or the data on confounding factors in the comparison group have been inadequate," Mann wrote.

Mann said he was unsure just why the vegetarians were more healthy, but said diet was the main factor. Those taking part in the survey included people who ate eggs and dairy products, people who avoid all animal products, and a few fish-eaters.

"Vegetarians have a high intake of vegetables, fruit, cereals, lentils and nuts and their diet is therefore low in saturated fat and relatively high in unsaturated fats, carbohydrate, and (dietary fibre)," he wrote.

Vegetarians eat more vitamins except for B-12 – especially those proved to protect from cancer – and less iron and zinc. They have lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

Mann said he would not recommend changing to a vegetarian diet.

But the Vegetarian Society of the United Kingdom, which recruited many volunteers for the study, said: "It confirms what we have known for a long time – that a vegetarian diet is a healthier diet not only for the planet but for human beings."

REFERENCE: Thorogood, M., Mann, J., Appleby, P and K. McPherson: Risk of death from cancer and ischaemic heart disease in meat and non-meat eaters. *British Med. J.* **308**(#6945): 1667-1670 (1994); see also the commentary on page 1671: Vandenbroucke, J.P.: Should you eat meat, or are you confounded by methodological debate? [DC Library call number: PER R31.B93]

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